

**NOMINATION FOR THE
1997 HERMAN GOLDSTEIN
EXCELLENCE IN PROBLEM SOLVING AWARD**



**QUALITY NEIGHBORHOODS
PROGRAM**

Fairfield Police Department

1000 Webster Street

Fairfield, California 94533

ABSTRACT:

Quality Neighborhoods Program

During the past ten years, the city of Fairfield experienced a general deterioration in the quality of some of its multi-family housing, particularly four-plex apartment buildings. During the economic downturn of the late 1980s, the value of these buildings decreased and the ability to make a profit through inflation disappeared. The buildings were in very poor condition, affecting the surrounding neighborhoods as well as the rest of the city.

Over the last ten years, the Fairfield Police Department attempted to address the resulting crime problems and substandard housing conditions through traditional enforcement approaches.

In 1995, the Economic Development Department and the Police Department developed a program to address these neighborhoods in a way that had not been attempted previously. This program was called Quality Neighborhoods. Its comprehensive components necessitated bringing together people with several diverse educational and professional backgrounds.

After eighteen months of developing the program strategies, all areas have experienced significant reductions in crime activity. One neighborhood went from a 64% vacancy rate to only a 15 % vacancy rate. Nearly all buildings have been brought into compliance with state codes. The owners and surrounding neighbors are very pleased with the results of the program.

Fairfield Police Department's

QUALITY NEIGHBORHOODS TEAM

SCANNING

During the past ten years, the city of Fairfield, California (population 89,000) has experienced a general deterioration in the quality of its multi-family housing particularly, four-plex apartment buildings. Most of these buildings, circa 1960, were intended as large projects owned by a single entity. They have since been sold and re-sold individually, as investments, to private persons who typically overpaid, basing their purchase on future speculative income. During the economic downturn of the late 1980s and early 1990s, the value of these buildings decreased and the ability of the owners to make a profit through inflation vanished. By 1995, the majority of the owners did not have the economic resources to maintain their buildings. Furthermore, they were unable to sell the properties, because of very high loan-to-value ratios and the depressed real estate market.

This resulted in buildings that were in very poor condition and which negatively impacted the quality of life in the surrounding neighborhoods. Compounding the problem was a pattern whereby apartments were rented without proper tenant screening, property maintenance was poor or deferred, and property management was lacking. This led to increasing crime and social problems in these neighborhoods and surrounding areas.

As the amount of crime continued to escalate, gunshots, loud fights, high speed traffic, loud music and intoxicated people became everyday occurrences. Soon, even

the surrounding neighbors were unwilling to drive through the neighborhood to get to their homes and some began to avoid the area completely. Whenever they were home, they were hesitant to venture outside.

This cycle continued as the buildings became infested with cockroaches, rats, mice and other pests. The landscaping deteriorated into nonexistence. Children destroyed areas of the neighborhood with their play activities. As the criminal element moved into the neighborhood, so did the gangs. The neighborhood's blight was complete with the addition of gang-related graffiti. This downward spiral would have continued unless something occurred to change its direction.

ANALYSIS

These neighborhoods were put under close scrutiny by members of the Fairfield Police Department, Building Department, Planning Department, Health Department and Fire Department. It was decided that conditions such as sub-standard buildings, poor tenant screening, lack of tenant education and absence of on-site management contributed to the crime problem. Because the property owners had no cash reserves for ongoing maintenance, the deteriorating conditions limited the number of prospective renters. Owners raised rents and began renting to virtually anyone, without any tenant screening, just to keep their buildings occupied so they could pay their mortgages. The lack of screening and high rents caused overcrowding in the individual units. Additionally, people who were not accepted for tenancy in other properties where their conduct was more closely monitored, tended to take up residence in these neighborhoods. For similar reasons, persons with a penchant for crime found these neighborhoods to be safe havens.

Prior to 1995, the Fairfield Police Department dedicated one police officer to exclusively address problem neighborhoods. Uniformed patrol officers also used Priority Policing (Problem Oriented Policing) in these areas as time permitted. Unfortunately, there were far more problems within these areas than could be handled on a part-time basis. In an effort to make more progress in the targeted neighborhoods, the Police Department attempted to gain the assistance of the Building Division, Fire Department and Health Department. This effort did show some results; however, all of the staff involved were only able to participate on a minimal basis.

One tool used to identify the crime problems was to measure and analyze the calls for police service in these neighborhoods. (Attachment A). Over the previous ten years, the Fairfield Police Department had attempted to address these neighborhood crime problems from a traditional enforcement perspective. In comparing the neighborhoods, the Police Department discovered that a much higher percentage of its time was spent in these problem neighborhoods, as compared to most other neighborhoods in the city. Only through a constant police presence and ongoing enforcement actions against the tenants, visitors and loiterers could crime be controlled. Crime, and the criminal element, that flourished in these neighborhoods spilled into the adjoining neighborhoods and into other areas of the city.

In 1995, the Fairfield Police Department and Economic Development Department began to discuss potential solutions for the problems in these neighborhoods. Analysis of the long-term picture of crime statistics and police calls led the participants to conclude that the traditional law enforcement approach had done little to improve the conditions. This "Band-Aid" approach was only effective while

police officers were constantly in the area. The Fairfield Police Department needed to develop a comprehensive plan and take an innovative approach to solving these neighborhood problems.

RESPONSE

The resulting program brought together employees from several different City departments and included a diversity of educational backgrounds and professional experiences. The QUALITY NEIGHBORHOODS program was born and still continues today. Quality Neighborhoods' mission is "*to provide the community a means to enhance the quality of life through a comprehensive neighborhood-based approach.*" The Quality Neighborhoods Development Committee, comprised of representatives from all city departments, as well as a representative from the County Health Department, identified potential members of a QUALITY NEIGHBORHOODS TEAM (QNT). The QNT was then formed to address these problem neighborhoods.

The Quality Neighborhoods Team consisted of four full-time employees and one part-time employee. From specific areas of expertise, each person worked on a component of the program. Team members included a Police Officer who enforced all criminal cases, a Building Inspector who enforced city and state, building and housing codes, a Code Enforcement Specialist who enforced the City Code, a Finance Specialist who arranged loans and managed all financial and property owner agreements, and a half-time Tenant Services Coordinator who provided tenant services and programs, and formed tenant associations. Clerical support was provided by the Police Department. QNT worked as a team housed in the Police Department under the

functional direction of the Assistant Police Chief. The Team was co-managed by the Assistant Police Chief and the Director of Planning and Development.

With all of the budgetary restraints, the cost of funding such a program was a major concern. After evaluation of the city budget, it was determined that the salary and benefits for the QNT would be paid from Economic Development funds which are, in part, obtained from the Redevelopment Agency's Housing Set-Aside funds. The yearly budget totals \$500,000.00 and is divided into two parts. There is \$250,000.00 for personnel & equipment and \$250,000.00 for economic incentives, loan programs and other assistance.

Initially, there were many goals for the project. The main goals were to lower the calls for service and to have all of the buildings in the Quality Neighborhood areas meet current State and local housing codes. Another important goal was to provide safe, affordable, clean, and well-managed environments for the citizens of Fairfield.

Using a windshield survey and past reports from the Planning, Police, Health and Fire Departments, the QNT began to identify and document the inadequacies that contributed to these problem neighborhoods. Five problems common to the neighborhoods were identified:

1. Insufficient property management
2. Lack of adequate property and landscape maintenance
3. Poor coordination of tenant assistance
4. Lack of financial ability to adequately address rehabilitation needs
5. High incidence of crime

Having identified the common problems, each neighborhood was also assessed and approached individually. Potential strategies varied depending upon the particular circumstances of the neighborhood. Team members developed four major program components to address the identified problems and work toward long-term solutions. The four core components of the program were Property Management, Tenant Education, Financial and Non-Financial Incentives, and Enforcement.

Property Management. It was the goal of the team to educate property managers and owners on applicable city and state codes and to educate them in appropriate rental procedures. They were asked to follow the rental standards of the California Apartment Association.

Additionally, the team provided training to property managers in the area of on-site management practices, tenant screening, ongoing property maintenance and landlord rights and responsibilities. Property owners were encouraged to form property owners associations for the purpose of hiring on-site property management. If the owners decided to utilize city Redevelopment Agency financing, then the loan agreement that they signed mandated that they would join the owners association for the purpose of hiring on-site management. On-site management was crucial to the long-term success of the project.

Tenant Education. Without properly educating tenants about their rights and responsibilities, they could not appropriately hold the owner accountable for the necessary management of their buildings. They are generally not aware of standards that apply to the buildings by state law and, therefore, they allow the owners to let the buildings deteriorate without any effective complaints.

The tenants were trained in their own responsibilities; how to maintain their property, how to prevent insect infestation, how not to be a victim of crime, as well as how to prevent crime in their neighborhood. They were also taught about gang and drug awareness.

In each neighborhood, one of the primary goals was to form a tenant association. The QNT Tenant Coordinator's responsibility was to organize the tenants and determine their needs. A neighborhood newsletter was developed allowing tenants to write articles and giving the QNT a method of keeping tenants informed (Attachment B). Tenants were recruited to write the newsletter themselves. Training classes were also developed for the tenants to prepare them for career opportunities that may occur, how to access social programs and other needs that were identified through a tenant survey instrument (Attachment c).

Many of the tenants in these neighborhoods were of a diverse ethnic background and, therefore, there were many languages that were spoken in these neighborhoods. The QNT Tenant Coordinator in this program was bilingual, speaking both English and Spanish. A group of volunteers with other bilingual abilities was formed to assist QNT in communicating in a variety of different languages including Spanish and many Asian languages. QNT has also developed an *English as a Second Language* class in each of our project neighborhoods.

Many other training classes and seminars were held for the tenants including, how to start a business, how to market individual skills, how to complete a resume and how to conduct oneself in a job interview. Also taught were food storage techniques, health and hygiene tips, etc.

Financial and Non-Financial Incentives. These were coordinated by the QNT Housing Finance Specialist, whose job is mainly to develop the resources and manage the different available methods by which QNT projects are financed. In addition to Redevelopment funds, QNT also utilizes H.O.M.E. funds and Community Development Block Grant funds from the federal Housing and Urban Development Department, as well as a variety of financing options through banks and other federal and state agencies.

When the project was started and inspections of the properties began, the Housing Finance Specialist contacted the owners. With prior knowledge of the approximate condition of the buildings, he began to speak with the owners about the possibility of a low interest loan which might help them to complete the necessary rehabilitation. The Housing Finance Specialist explained to the owners the conditions of the loan. He explained the pertinent agreements that needed to be signed for loan eligibility. If owners chose to use the program's financing methods, they were required to participate in a property owner's association. This allowed QNT to develop conditions, covenants, and restrictions (CC&R's) that would ensure both the long-term stability of the neighborhood, and that the owners would continue to manage the buildings appropriately, maintaining them to state standards.

Because the loans were made with public funds, there were affordability covenants with each loan. The owners must agree to maintain the rents at affordable levels for low and moderate income persons for fifteen years. The Housing Finance Specialist also developed a program to directly acquire properties for resale, or find buyers for targeted properties.

Enforcement. Though traditional law enforcement operations were not effective as the sole tool for cleaning up the neighborhoods, enforcement remained an important component of the program to be used in the absence of voluntary compliance. Patrol officers began working in the identified project areas using aggressive law enforcement before the QNT moved in. Patrol officers also identified problem tenants and other undesirable people who might loiter in the neighborhood to cause problems. Once the project areas received selective enforcement from Patrol, the first step for the QNT was to establish a Temporary Operating Center (T.O.C.) (Attachment E) in the areas. Patrol officers continued their enforcement strategies as long as crime problems persisted, while the QNT began to implement their plan.

When a target area was identified, QNT began the process by holding a team brainstorming session about the possible outcomes of the project. Included were discussions as to what would be the best method of approach, the final vision of the neighborhood's appearance, the key problems to be addressed, how to identify key stakeholders, and what were the available resources. A series of neighborhood meetings within the project areas helped crystallize the vision.

One of the first tasks was to organize meetings with the affected people in the area. This included the owners, tenants and area residents. In the initial meeting, the Quality Neighborhoods program was explained and the participants were asked for input regarding the present condition of the neighborhood and the improvements that were needed. After surveying the tenants to get their valuable information (Attachment c), QNT met with the owners and asked for their cooperation in improving the neighborhood. QNT explained that the neighborhood had to be improved and, in many

cases, the buildings did not meet state building and housing code standards. The owners were given the opportunity to receive low interest loans for the rehabilitation. Another incentive to gain cooperation from the owners was for the QNT to provide other financial incentives to the neighborhood. This- could include painting building exteriors, landscaping, and street/sidewalk repairs. QNT also assisted in identifying problem tenants. It then became the owners responsibility to evict the problem tenants. It was determined that the problem tenants were the ones causing crime problems in the neighborhood, trashing the individual apartment units, and bringing down the overall quality of life in the neighborhood.

QNT then discussed with the group their vision for the neighborhood. What should this neighborhood and surrounding area look like when the project was completed? What improvements were needed? Who should pay for them? Who should do the work and what would be the costs?

When the owners initially agreed to inspections of their properties, they were informed that the inspections would take place under the provisions of the Uniform Housing and Building Codes , as well as applicable city codes. They were also told that their failure to comply to the inspections would result in various types of enforcement actions. When deficiencies were noted, an inspection list was given to the owners by the QNT. Included was an explanation of the deadlines under which repairs must be made based upon the Fairfield City Code. If the repairs were not done within those specified times, owners could receive citations for violations of the city code. A court appearance would be required for any owner receiving a citation. Additionally, if any violations were found upon completion of the initial inspections that were

hazardous to the lives or safety of the tenants, the Uniform Housing Code provided for immediate evacuation of those apartments or buildings until such time as the violations were corrected.

The QNT always attempted to find a cooperative solution with the owners. Many times, if the owners were working diligently toward correction of inspection issues, they were given time extensions in order to complete those repairs. If the owner refused to make repairs, the city code allowed for abatement of the property. The violations could be corrected as a result of the abatement process. If that occurred, the Code Enforcement Specialist would ask for bids for the rehabilitation of the property. A contractor would be selected, repairs would be made, and the cost of the abatement would be recorded as a lien against the property owner as a part of his/her property taxes. This would be accomplished by order of the City Council. If the rehabilitation costs exceeded the value of the property, the abatement process also allowed for demolition.

As the Quality Neighborhoods program evolved, it became apparent that a combination of enforcement and incentives was more effective in gaining compliance than enforcement alone. When incentives were given, the owners realized the economic benefits of making improvements, beyond merely avoiding citations. However, enforcement was still necessary in order to maintain the property owners' diligence about improving their properties.

Initially, QNT met with optimism from the owners. They saw the opportunity to increase the values of their properties. The owners also recognized the potential to get rid of some of the neighborhood problems by improving their buildings and the quality

of their tenants. However, after receiving initial QNT inspection reports, owners were usually surprised by the inspectors' findings. This led to resistance from many of the owners once they found out work had to be done. Some owners complained about not having enough cash on hand to correct the violations. Other owners believed they should not have to borrow money in order to get the repairs done. Many owners wanted to do makeshift repairs themselves, often causing further code violations. QNT explained that the completed repairs had to meet all applicable codes within established deadlines or the property would be abated.

As the owners began making repairs, the City's commitment to the neighborhood grew stronger. No limits were set regarding the City's participation or the improvements that could be made in the neighborhoods. Part of the incentive was to landscape and paint 16 four-plexes. This was done in response to complaints from owners who felt as though the run-down condition of the neighborhood prevented prospective tenants from visiting the area. QNT also had community mailboxes installed because tenants were complaining of mail thefts from the existing mailboxes. Besides physical improvements, the Quality Neighborhoods program also facilitated other innovations. The neighborhood was tacking in quality child care and recreational facilities for children. The Federal Head Start Program was contacted by QNT to place a Head Start Center in one of the apartment buildings in this project area. A lease was negotiated between the building owner and Head Start which allowed the Center to have an assured location for five years. The Head Start program, at its expense, remodeled two street-level apartments into one large classroom and recreation area. Additionally, a portion of the parking lot of the adjacent shopping center property was

donated by its owner to be a play area that would serve the Head Start Center. This play area was also available for use by the project area neighborhood children. Playground equipment was obtained and a group of volunteers from the area and community installed it. The Head Start office was used for meetings of the tenants association, various public meetings and other community groups in the project area. Head Start is presently providing child care and learning opportunities for about 20-25 pre-school age children from the project area.

Another example of QNT's focus on tenant needs was the December 1996 tenant meeting. QNT facilitated the arrival of Fairfield's Mayor in his sleigh (fire truck). The Mayor gave out toys and greetings to each child living in the neighborhood. Each child's name was written on a wrapped present provided by the local Toys for Tots Program.

Another positive outcome was that the occupancy rate in the first project area rose dramatically. When QNT first started in the Fillmore Street area there was a 64% vacancy rate. After the project was completed, it dropped to 15%! Similar results were seen with the turnover rate. Another positive impact of the Quality Neighborhood Program was that recently three 4-plexes sold for \$170,000.00 each. Prior to QNT's involvement in this area, a typical building was only selling for \$130,000.00. The success of these strategies has caused two of the target areas to be removed from the "high risk" list at the housing referral office at Travis Air Force Base. This was a significant event in the rebirth of these neighborhoods.

ASSESSMENT

One of the results of the Quality Neighborhoods program was lower calls for service and lower vacancy rates and the majority of the buildings are now up to code. QNT remains an active member of owner associations that have been formed. Because of the affordability covenants on the properties that QNT has provided loans for, the owners must continue to provide affordable housing. Since the CC&R's run with the land, this will require all owners, both current and future, to maintain the buildings. Also, each of the Quality Neighborhood areas will be inspected on a regular basis so that progress can be monitored. After completing the first neighborhood, QNT discovered that the inspection process needed to be streamlined. The inspection process was too time-consuming and this was slowing the progress of the program.

From the beginning of the project, displacement of tenants was always a concern. The team addressed the potential problem of displacing some of the problem tenants. During the course of developing the program, QNT has made numerous contacts with local property management companies. QNT has advised them of the Quality Neighborhood Program and has been working in a cooperative effort to see that problem tenants don't bounce from property to property. It is the hope of the QNT that through tenant services some problem or borderline tenants, that prior to the Quality Neighborhood program would have been evicted, will become productive tenants.

There are no limitations to the nature of the solutions to these neighborhood problems. In its first 18 months, the Quality Neighborhoods program has received significant praise from the community as an excellent method for improving neighborhoods in the city. Numerous newspaper articles (attached) demonstrating the

community's positive response to the program have been published. Both business leaders and elected officials have shown vigorous support for the program. The Quality Neighborhoods program has also received positive comments from tenants and area residents surrounding the projects. Even property owners in the target areas have expressed gratitude for the neighborhood's revitalization (Attachment o). In fact, one property owner asked his city of residence to initiate a similar program.

Internal reaction to the program was that Quality Neighborhoods had established a track record for success. Police officers who were constantly patrolling the Quality Neighborhoods target areas could see the results firsthand.

By diversifying strategies, forging new partnerships and finding innovative solutions, the Quality Neighborhoods Program has changed forever the dynamics of downward spiraling neighborhoods in the City of Fairfield. Where there was ruin, now there is renovation; blight has been replaced by prosperity, and disenchantment transformed into opportunity.

The Quality Neighborhoods Program continues to operate today. It allows us to revitalize a neighborhood through a comprehensive approach of investing in both the owners and the tenants in a way that does things for them and not to them. It has allowed the Police Department and the City of Fairfield to build strong partnerships using the SARA model to solve problems to create better neighborhoods.

Attachment A

**1995-1997
CALLS FOR SERVICE
FILLMORE STREET**

	1995	1996	1997
JAN	23	7	5
FEB	12	10	6
MAR	17	12	8
APR	19	7	7
MAY	8	6	4
JUN	9	6	**
JUL	10	17	**
AUG	34	2	**
SEP	5	8	**
OCT	28	8	**
NOV	40	4	**
DEC	11	6	**
TOTALS	216	93	30

(18 properties)

The Quality Neighborhood Team started the Quality Neighborhood Program on Fillmore Street in August 1995. The initial increase in Calls For Service appears to be a result of QNT encouraging tenants to call the police. In the past the tenants were reluctant to have any contact with the police.

**1995-1997
CALLS FOR SERVICE
SAN MARCO STREET**

	1995	1996	1997
JAN	16	17	35
FEB	10	24	28
MAR	15	17	45
APR	29	20	57
MAY	23	27	46
JUN	22	30	**
JUL	20	28	**
AUG	14	47	**
SEP	19	39	**
OCT	22	27	**
NOV	10	18	**
DEC	16	37	**
TOTALS	216	331	211

(20 properties)

The Quality Neighborhood Team started the Quality Neighborhood Program on San Marco Street in January 1997. The initial increase in Calls For Service appears to be a result of QNT encouraging tenants to call the police. In the past the tenants were reluctant to have any contact with the police.

Agency Information

In the Fairfield Police Department, law enforcement operations are managed using the philosophy of prioritizing crime problems. Priority Policing as it is called, has numerous elements that are common with community based policing and problem oriented policing. One of the initial components of Priority Policing was the Quality Neighborhood Program. It began at the patrol level by one patrol officer and part-time assistance of other city staff. Due to the initial positive strides of these individuals, the program was expanded. Since Priority Policing is the enforcement philosophy for the Fairfield Police Department, no incentives were given to the officers for participation.

Prior to embarking on the Quality Neighborhood Program, Officers attended the Problem Oriented Policing for supervisors classes well as the Problem Oriented Policing Conference. Training gained from the POP classes and seminars as well training gained from classes on Crime Prevention by Environmental design were one of the resource tools used in this problem solving initiative.

The Quality Neighborhood Team also developed the Quality Neighborhood Manual. The manual was distributed to City employees as a reference guide. The guide was also used to provide training to police officers in advanced officer and roll call training.

The Quality Neighborhood Program is funded using \$500,000.00 from the City of Fairfield's Redevelopment Agency. The Quality Neighborhood Program is funded through the next 8 years from this fund. In addition to Redevelopment funds, grants and other State and Federal funds are also used.

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