

Los Angeles Police Department's
Nomination for the
1997 Herman Goldstein Award
for
Excellence
in
Problem-Oriented Policing



Newton Area & FALCON'S
Hooper Block Project

Project Contact: Antoinette Vasquez
Management Assistant
Los Angeles Police Department
Community Policing Group
150 North Los Angeles Street-Room 724
Los Angeles, CA 90012
Phone:(213)847-4882
Fax:(213)237-0676
E-mail: antoinettev@msn.com

PROJECT ABSTRACT

Scanning

In November of 1995, Newton Area of the Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD) and the Focused Attack Linking Community Organizations and Neighborhoods (FALCON) multi-agency narcotics abatement unit, collaborated with City entities and community members in an operation known as the Hooper Block Project.

The Hooper Block Project is a federally-funded program under the direction of the LAPD. It was created to rejuvenate a 21-square block area of residences and small businesses that had been ravaged by gang activity, graffiti, shootings and chronic prostitution. Community members who resided or worked within the project area had become disillusioned and were virtually paralyzed by the scope of their situation, living in constant fear and intimidation. Despite the diligent efforts of Newton Area officers, the project area was overrun with narcotic trafficking and gangs. The officers' efforts were further frustrated by the community's mistrust and suspicions.

Analysis

Initially, the multi-agency program canvassed Hooper Block Project neighborhoods to determine the concerns and priorities of the community. The survey results helped to establish the focus of the program — to address quality of life issues. However, the project members quickly noted that these goals could not be accomplished without first dispelling negative perceptions about local government, and secondly, empowering the community members themselves to reclaim their neighborhoods.

Response

Through the introduction of Neighborhood Block Clubs, community members became familiar with police personnel, their local officials and agencies, and more importantly, their neighbors. They began to develop the skills necessary to address and manage their own community problems. Project area members began to communicate with one another and share their concerns with local authorities. The community became more comfortable with its new-found empowerment, thus making it more self-reliant and effective.

Simultaneously, law enforcement and other Los Angeles City and County agencies formed a coalition to respond to the project area's concerns. Specialized gang, vice, and narcotic enforcement details, targeted prosecution efforts, beautification and environmental maintenance projects were all implemented in an effort to reduce crime and eliminate urban blight.

Reclaiming the Central Recreation Center for use by neighborhood children rather than domination by local gangs was a primary focal point of the community. Through their courageous and dedicated actions, coupled with enforcement efforts by Newton Area and Department of Recreation and Parks personnel, project area children and their families now gather at the park's center to engage in holiday festivities, athletic programs, and community fellowship.

Assessment

Through the partnerships formed by Newton Area, FALCON, City and County service agencies and project area members, the quality of life in the community has markedly improved. A review of crime statistics from 1995 to 1996, reveals an impressive overall crime reduction of 37 percent. More importantly however, in a recent survey of community members, the majority of respondents not only noted a decrease in narcotics, gang and prostitution activity, they also noted a sense of increased pride, dignity, and empowerment.

LOS ANGELES POLICE DEPARTMENT
NEWTON AREA/FALCON
THE HOOPER BLOCK PROJECT
DESCRIPTION

SCANNING:

In November 1995, Newton Area of the Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD) and the elite Focused Attack Linking Community Organizations and Neighborhoods (FALCON) multi-agency narcotics abatement unit, launched a collaborative effort known as the "Hooper Block Project", with community members in the project area.

The FALCON narcotics abatement unit is a federally-funded program under the direction of the LAPD. The unit comprises personnel from the Department, the Los Angeles City Attorney's Office, and the Los Angeles City Department of Building and Safety. The FALCON unit utilizes innovative methods of enforcement to secure long-term solutions to narcotic and gang-related problems, integrating its efforts with those of the concerned police division and community. The FALCON unit seeks to revitalize neighborhoods and improve the quality of life for those who reside there.

Due to the severity of the problems in the project area, the Hooper Block Project was one of only two projects, of the 180 submitted, selected for funding by the Federal government in 1995. The Hooper Block Project was created to rejuvenate a 21-square block area ravaged by criminal gang activity, shootings and graffiti. The geographical boundaries of the project are Adams Boulevard on the south, Washington Boulevard on the north, Central Avenue on the west, and Compton Avenue on the east. Although the project area is mostly residential, the Central Avenue corridor is a business district. In addition to the residences and businesses, the area includes the

20th Street Elementary School and the Central Recreation Center. The neighborhoods are predominantly Hispanic, and English is the primary language of only 28 percent of the population.

The Central Recreation Center, located in the targeted area at 22nd Street and Naomi Avenue, was literally controlled by local gang members. Children who dared to use the park had to first pay an admission fee to the Loco Park gang. Such crimes were largely unreported due to a deep-rooted fear instilled in the neighborhood by Loco Park gang members. This gang had such a stranglehold on the community that it boldly rearranged the bedding plants at the park to form "LP", representing the gang's logo. Additionally, graffiti was sprayed, etched, or marked on every available space in the park. Needless to say, children rarely ventured onto the park's playgrounds.

The Central Avenue corridor was also plagued by prostitution activity. This area was a known haven for such activity for several years. Task forces had been frequently deployed to this corridor in an effort to combat the problem, but met with limited success. The offenders were often arrested one night, and back on the street corner the next.

ANALYSTS:

To identify community-recognized problems, a door-to-door survey of the area was conducted by representatives from the LAPD, FALCON, and the Ninth Council District. Concentrating on solving those concerns identified by the public was the focus of the project, rather than following

the more traditional LAPD approach. While crime problems would continue to be targeted, a primary emphasis would be on addressing quality of life issues. The needs assessments identified concerns such as abatement of graffiti, narcotic trafficking, and gang activity. As in most communities, Hooper Block Project community members wanted to feel more secure in their neighborhoods.

Contributing to the project area's problems was the lack of community involvement, coupled with the community's mistrust and skepticism toward law enforcement. The community believed that the duration of a police presence would be short-lived. After a few weeks, the police would redirect their efforts and the same problems would then return. The community wanted long-lasting change, but it had lost any hope that such change could endure. Therefore, community members were reluctant to become involved in the project. It was apparent to the Department that in order to effectively respond to community issues, it had to dispel these perceptions.

RESPONSE:

A number of strategies were implemented in response to the needs and concerns of the Hooper Block Project. For example, in an effort to cultivate the community's trust, the Department's Neighborhood Block Club program was introduced to each city block in the project area. Once again, representatives from Newton Area, FALCON, and the Ninth Council District canvassed the neighborhoods, inviting the residents to attend the meetings. Senior Lead Officers from Newton Area assigned to the project area, FALCON, and Ninth Council District representatives

and guest speakers attended the meetings in force. Their presence was a clear demonstration of their commitment to this endeavor. The purpose of these initial meetings was to create working partnerships with project participants to develop problem-solving strategies and to nurture self-governance. Block club members were instructed in the skills and resources necessary to conduct their own meetings and initiate their own requests and notifications for City services. Additionally, presentations regarding local laws and regulations, as well as police department functions, familiarized the project area community with its local law enforcement operations. This effort, in turn, freed police personnel to more fully concentrate on crime trends in the area.

As the community became more comfortable with the project's concept, their confidence in the Department and other City entities grew and attendance at community meetings soared to overflowing crowds. The public developed such a sense of solidarity that they held block club meetings in their front yards to illustrate their new-found resolve. Additionally, as their mistrust of the police faded, they began to share with law enforcement personnel, specific and reliable information regarding narcotic trafficking, and other criminal activity in the area. Eventually, the individual neighborhood block clubs assumed full responsibility for their operations and functions, including developing their own agendas, creating and distributing informational flyers, chairing meetings, and arranging guest speakers.

A Community Impact Team (CIT) was introduced to assist in coordinating the efforts of the project. The team consisted of members from more than 30 Los Angeles City entities, including the Department of Building and Safety, the City Attorney's Office, Department of Recreation and

Parks, Department of Public Works and Operation Clean Sweep. The team's primary focus was to efficiently work together to combat the problems that were identified in the survey.

Representatives from Newton Area and the Ninth Council District regularly attended these meetings to further emphasize the importance of the program. As the project progressed, community members were also invited to the meetings to underscore their concerns.

In addition to block club and CIT meetings, community involvement was also sought through enhancement and outreach meetings. The goals of these meetings were twofold: the enhancement segment was to assist in graffiti and debris removal efforts in the project area; and, the outreach segment focused on public education and awareness. At the enhancement meetings, community members and City entities joined together to coordinate clean-up efforts within the Hooper project neighborhoods. Outreach meetings offered educational presentations such as gang and drug awareness, personal safety tactics, local laws and regulations, and law enforcement operations. The outreach meetings were held at local schools and churches in an effort to draw those institutions into the process.

Obtaining the participation of the non-English speaking population at community meetings was a primary concern of the enhancement and outreach segments of the project. Many community members stated that they wished to attend "English as a Second Language" (ESL) classes to become more actively involved in the process. Based upon this request, ESL classes were held at the Central Recreation Center during the evening hours. The response to these classes was very positive, and attendance steadily increased.

Monthly enforcement meetings were held to discuss the implementation and effectiveness of crime reduction strategies. Representatives from Newton Area specialized units (Vice, Community Resources Against Street Hoodlums [CRASH], and Community Response Unit [CRU]), as well as, personnel from the City Attorney's Office, the Los Angeles County Probation Department, and the County Health Department, were in attendance. The meetings analyzed current crime trends in the area, and developed multi-agency tactical responses to these trends, including probation sweeps, directed patrols at the Central Recreation Center, and increased prostitution enforcement efforts. These meetings were very effective, due in part to the enthusiastic participation and cooperation of the various entities, and the helpful and encouraging feedback from the community. This collaborative effort ensured not only a swift and decisive response to developing crime patterns, but also minimized wasteful duplication of effort.

During this past year, the community planned and organized several activities within the project area. For example, in an effort to reduce urban blight, five neighborhood "block party clean-ups" were held, followed by a community potluck feast at the Central Recreation Center. Members of the Hooper Block Project area responded in force to remove graffiti and debris from their streets and alleys. These work parties encouraged new friendships, promoted camaraderie, and instilled a sense of pride and empowerment. In addition to these efforts, Newton Area deployed trash and debris removal details, consisting of community service workers, to the project area.

As part of the beautification process, the services of the Central Recovery Development Program were enlisted. This program provides a vehicle, outfitted with specialized equipment, to paint

THE HOOPER BLOCK PROJECT

Los Angeles Police Department

Page 7

over surfaces damaged by graffiti. A unique feature of this vehicle is its ability to paint over surfaces with paint that exactly matches the original surface color. While such a capability may seem insignificant, it is of particular importance since studies have shown that the "patch work" covering of graffiti is as detrimental to the community as the graffiti itself.

At the beginning of the project, Newton Area recognized the need to actively encourage the involvement of community members in the Area's enforcement and prevention efforts, while maintaining the member's anonymity. One program that has proven successful is the Community Action Network (CAN). The CAN concept allows community members to report problems or crime information to the Department in a confidential manner. Hooper Block Project residents were provided with postage-paid suspicious activity reporting forms, which are addressed to the Newton Area CAN coordinator. This form enables community members to provide critical information, such as descriptions of criminal activities and/or involved suspects. The reporting persons may provide their names and addresses or remain anonymous. The information is ultimately forwarded to the concerned detective for appropriate action.

Since the inception of CAN, this exchange of information has resulted in a significant reduction in narcotic trafficking. Several arrests have been made in the project area, and 12 search warrants were successfully served. Five locations were the subject of narcotic abatement efforts by the United States Marshal's Officer, United States Attorney General's Office, and the Drug Enforcement Agency. One location was seized by the Federal government as part of its enforcement process.

who responded to the survey, 77 percent stated that narcotic activity had declined, 57 percent indicated that gang activity had been reduced, and 71 percent reported that prostitution had dramatically decreased. Newton Area is especially proud of one survey statistic in particular. In response to the question, "Do you know any officers from Newton Area?", 68 percent of the respondents answered affirmatively, as compared with a mere 16 percent in the first survey. In general, the overwhelming consensus was that the Hooper Block Project was quite effective, and the community is hopeful it will continue. Clearly, community policing has taken root in the Hooper Block Project area.

November 19, 1996 was a milestone for the Hooper Block Project. The project area community was invited to a meeting at 20th Street Elementary School. The purpose of the meeting was to evaluate the efficacy of the project. Councilmember Rita Walters, City Attorney James Hahn, and Newton Area Captains Jim Tatreau and Thomas Maeweather were in attendance, as well as, more than 135 project area residents and business owners. This was an amazing metamorphosis when compared with the first Hooper Block Project meeting with its five attendees! During the meeting, a slide presentation was shown depicting the community before the project's inception, versus now. The assembly cheered and applauded in appreciation for the improvements they have brought to their neighborhoods.

The repressible crime statistics for the Hooper Block Project between 1995 and 1996 are equally impressive, reporting an overall crime reduction of 37 percent. When compared with repressible crime statistics for this same period throughout Newton Area and City wide (a 12 percent and 13 percent reduction respectively), this figure is even more noteworthy.

Perhaps even more impressive than the crime reduction figures, is the significant reduction in the fear of crime in the project area. In a recent survey, 65 percent of the project area members surveyed reported that they now permit their children to participate in activities at the Central Recreation Center. The park now schedules regular activities for neighborhood children including a Halloween festival, a circus and various sporting events. Many of the center's events are planned and organized from the direct input of community members. Now when driving past the park, one can observe children freely enjoying the park's amenities.

The success of this project is largely due to the proactive stance of the project area's residents and business owners. Once their faith in law enforcement was restored, community members themselves rose to the challenge of the project, and became more actively involved. Whether they were hosting block club meetings, clearing trash from their streets and alleys, persuading their neighbors to participate, or reporting criminal activity, the residents and business owners remained very dedicated and courageously supported this endeavor.

Despite the expiration of grant funding, the programs established by the project continue to thrive. Community residents have assumed more responsibility for these programs, and Newton Area continues to provide the police presence and responsiveness that the project area enjoyed during the special funding period.

The Hooper Block Project is the epitome of the Community Policing concept — the community and the Department working in partnership to reduce the fear and incidence of crime. The

project community was initially unorganized and disillusioned by the scope of their problems and the apparent non-responsiveness of their local government. However, within a very short time and with a little encouragement, this area has emerged as a model of community participation, leadership, and self-governance.

AGENCY AND OFFICER INFORMATION

The Hooper Block Project is a collaborative effort of members of Newton Area of the Los Angeles Police Department, and Focused Attack Linking Community Organizations and Neighborhoods (FALCON), a multi-agency narcotics abatement unit, as well as the City Attorney's Office, the Ninth Council District, and several other City entities. Newton Area officers assigned to the geographic district within which the Hooper Avenue neighborhood lies, are the primary law enforcement presence, and are directly involved in the project's endeavors.

All Newton Area personnel, including its administrators, have been trained in the SARA (Scanning, Analysis, Response and Assessment) model of problem-oriented policing, and are aware and familiar with the project. The Department's Community Policing Group training cadre teaches a mandatory eight-hour course to all officers and supervisors. Additionally, all Newton personnel are expected to regularly develop SARA problem solving models for crime-related and quality of life issues that they observe within their patrol area. The officers' problem solving efforts are identified and evaluated in their annual evaluations, and are considered when they compete for a paygrade advancement position or specialized assignment.

Quality of life issues are the main focus of this project rather than the traditional crime-related perspective. The needs assessments identified such issues as graffiti abatement, narcotic trafficking, and gang activity as the primary concerns of the residents of the project area.

A Federal grant was awarded for this project and thus, provided funding for a one year period. However, following its first year, Newton Area personnel have assumed primary responsibility for the project's continuance. The commitment of Newton officers, FALCON personnel, and the City Attorney's Office, was all encompassing. These entities worked, as well as, donated several hours of their time and talents to the success of this project. Their efforts included the continual rallying of neighborhood participants, encouraging and facilitating regularly scheduled neighborhood block club meetings, as well as providing leadership training and guidance to each block club captain. The officers were also responsible for coordinating other community enhancement and outreach programs to further the project, and they met monthly with related law enforcement entities to discuss crime reduction strategies.

PROJECT CONTACT PERSON

Name: Antoinette Vasquez
Position/Rank: Management Assistant (Community Policing Group)
Address: 150 North Los Angeles Street-Room 724
City/State: Los Angeles, CA 90012
Telephone: (213) 847-4882
Fax: (213)237-0776
E-mail: www.antoINETTEV@msn.com

**COMMUNITY SURVEY RESULTS
NOVEMBER 1996**

1. WHAT ARE THE THREE MOST URGENT PROBLEMS IN YOUR AREA?

	<u>NOVEMBER 1996</u>	<u>NOVEMBER 1995</u>
DRUG ACTIVITY	24%	20%
GANG ACTIVITY	20%	17%
SHOOTINGS	17%	15%
TRASH	17%	11%

2. WHAT DO YOU THINK ARE THE THREE MOST IMPORTANT NEEDS OF YOUR COMMUNITY?

	<u>NOVEMBER 1996</u>	<u>NOVEMBER 1995</u>
JOB OPPORTUNITIES	30%	18%
JOB TRAINING	20%	16%
HEALTH CARE	14%	7%

**3. DO YOU KNOW OF A NEIGHBORHOOD ORGANIZATION IN YOUR AREA?
(BLOCK CLUB, CHURCH ORGANIZATION.....)**

	<u>NOVEMBER 1996</u>	<u>NOVEMBER 1995</u>
YES	83%	21%
NO	17%	77%

4. DO YOU ATTEND YOUR LAPD BLOCK CLUB MEETINGS?

YES	69%
NO	31%

5. DURING THE PAST YEAR, HAVE YOU OR YOUR FAMILY BEEN A VICTIM OF A CRIME?

	<u>NOVEMBER 1996</u>	<u>NOVEMBER 1995</u>
YES	4%	10%
NO	96%	90%

6. COMPARED TO ONE YEAR AGO, DO YOU THINK DRUG ACTIVITY IN YOUR NEIGHBORHOOD HAS.....

DECLINED	77%
STAYED THE SAME	21%
INCREASED	2%

**PAGE TWO
COMMUNITY SURVEY RESULTS NOVEMBER 1996**

7. COMPARED TO ONE YEAR AGO, DO YOU THINK THE GANG ACTIVITY HAS.....

DECLINED	57%
STAYED THE SAME	35%
INCREASED	8%

8. COMPARED TO ONE YEAR AGO, PROSTITUTION ON CENTRAL HAS.....

DECLINED	71%
STAYED THE SAME	18%
INCREASED	11%

9. COMPARED TO ONE YEAR AGO, GRAFFITI HAS.....

DECLINED	68%
STAYED THE SAME	29%
INCREASED	3%

10. HAVE YOUR CHILDREN UTILIZED CENTRAL REC CENTER IN THE PAST YEAR?

	<u>NOVEMBER 1996</u>	<u>NOVEMBER 1995</u>
YES	65%	15%
NO	35%	85%

11. HOW WOULD YOU RATE THE JOB OF LAPD? (SCALE OF 1-10) 7.23 AVG

12. HOW WOULD YOU RATE THE JOB OF CD-9? (SCALE OF 1-10) 8.16 AVG

13. DO YOU KNOW THE NAMES OF ANY OFFICERS FROM NEWTON?

YES	68%
NO	32%