

Abstract

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In the same way that crime in public housing was initially targeted for the Neighborhood Policing Unit, and addressed, juvenile crime will now be targeted as a problem that needs resolution. With a new program slated for the fall, the expansion of this successful philosophy of community policing throughout the department, and a new Chief well-versed in this philosophy, NBPD will continue to be successful at promoting problem-oriented policing.

Scanning

New Bedford is the fourth largest city in Massachusetts with approximately 100,000 people, located 50 miles south of Boston. A historic city with a renowned whaling history, New Bedford was used as the setting for Melville's epic novel *Moby Dick*. New Bedford is often referred to as the gateway to Cape Cod with thousands of people traveling through our city each year. Over the past ten years however, New Bedford has suffered from a variety of conditions which has made its population (especially juveniles) susceptible to abuse, neglect, and high crime. There seems to be an inescapable gridlock of excessive drug use, lack of education, and a lack of jobs and productive activities that leads into criminal activity. Juveniles in New Bedford have been on both sides of the crime issue, as abusers and violent offenders and as victims of crime, abuse, neglect, and violence.

In 1991, New Bedford was deemed "*The Most Violent City in New England*" with 6 murders, 74 rapes, 377 robberies, and 880 aggravated assaults on its citizens. There were also 2,059 burglaries, 2,115 larcenies, and 1,361 motor vehicle thefts (*Uniform Crime Reports, FBI*). This dubious designation was an all-time low for the city. Since then, statistics have not gotten much better; in fact, juvenile crime seems to be on the rise. Illegal drugs exacerbate New Bedford's crime problem. Eighty percent of all crimes prosecuted by the Bristol County District Attorney's office are drug-related. New Bedford Narcotics officers average 1,000 drug arrests each year. New Bedford also has the second highest incidence of HTV/AIDS cases in the state; 67% of the infections are transmitted through intravenous drug use (*MA Dept. of Public Health*).

New Bedford is one of only two cities in Bristol County, Massachusetts which continues to have double-digit unemployment (12% in 1995). Since the 1980's, a multitude of businesses have laid off workers or closed down. Over 10,000 unskilled manufacturing and fishing industry jobs, once the mainstay of New Bedford's economy, have been lost. What's left of the New Bedford fishing industry is crippled by drug use. Many commercial fishermen abuse drugs and bring drugs into the city. Thirty percent of all drug overdoses in southeastern Massachusetts are fishermen (*New Bedford Standard-Times*).

The jobs that remain viable in New Bedford are skilled jobs, jobs which require technical education or training above and beyond a high school diploma. However, only 50% of city residents have a high school education. The dropout rate is 32%, one of the highest in the state, leaving New Bedford with one of the weakest potential labor pools in Massachusetts. This city also experiences a diverse cross-section of socioeconomic problems because of the increasing number of linguistically, culturally, and ethnically-isolated people who have recently immigrated to the area. Most come from Portugal, Cape Verde Island off the coast of Africa, and Latin America. The most recent influx of Spanish-speaking families suffer from extremely low literacy levels and high unemployment.

Analysis

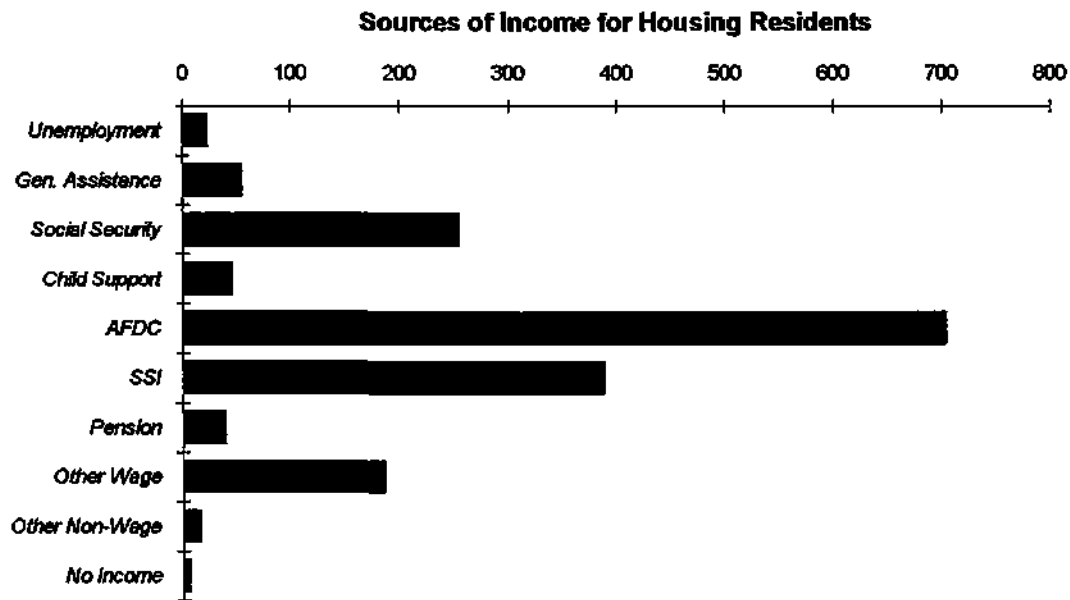
As a result of the rapid erosion of the city's manufacturing base, excessive drug activity, and high crime rate, people who could afford to move out of New Bedford did. Tax revenues plummeted. Budgetary restraints forced cutbacks of youth activities, educational programs, and social support systems, adding to the disenfranchisement of the city's youth. Frustrated by a non-existent job market, teenagers have become vulnerable to a host of negative influences. Teens as young as 15 have been arrested for Breaking and Entering, Possession of Firearms, Arson, and drug-related crimes. Current statistics show that the problem is still ongoing; **over 900 juveniles have been arrested by New Bedford police since January 1995.** The number of juvenile drug arrests is increasing, reflecting the national rise in teen drug use. The more serious crimes are detailed below.

Juvenile Offenders:	1995	1995
Murders/Manslaughters	0	3
Forcible Rapes	4	5
Robberies	11	17
Aggravated Assaults	206	106
Burglaries	44	26
Larceny Thefts	91	102
Auto Thefts	22	37
Vandalism	33	39
Drug Offenses	54	105
Referred to Court or Probation	580	653

The average income per capita reflect a city that is economically depressed and enveloped in poverty. In New Bedford, approximately 8,500 people live in 18 federally- and state-funded housing developments. The population consists mainly of single-parent households headed by women (88.3%); minorities account for 70.9% of these women.

Nine single mothers who live in these developments are teenagers themselves. Out of 1,885 children under 18 living in these developments, half are under the age of 7.

The vast majority of New Bedford Housing Authority residents rely on some form of public assistance. With limited skills, small children and an economy with double-digit unemployment, the future appears bleak for many of these families. For teenagers and young adults, drug dealing is viewed as a viable career option, in fact, it is sometimes their only option. In 1993, narcotics officers conducted 119 drug raids in public housing projects in an effort to eliminate this option.



Note: Drug dealing is not represented here, although many people do derive income from this illegal practice.

Housing residents represent a statistical microcosm of the city's population, a population which is at significant risk for family violence and juvenile delinquency. There

is a large immigrant and racially diverse population consisting of people of African-American, Portuguese, Hispanic, and Cape Verdean (mixed-race) descent. Although family violence knows no barriers, this particular combination of old-world cultures and poverty and hopelessness makes the area ripe for incidences of family violence. In each of the past three years, New Bedford police have responded to an average 3,000 calls per year for incidences of family violence. In just the 12-month period from July 1995 through June 1996, the New Bedford Department of Social Services reported 2,047 cases of abused or neglected children, completed 1,081 investigations of such, and conducted 1,082 assessments.

Clearly, something needed to be done to stem the growing tide of juvenile delinquency and other crimes in the city. Why were drug dealers in the projects the only role models, the only ones working? Tackling the specific problem of drug-oriented crime in the public housing developments seemed an excellent starting point for solving the more general problem of juvenile crime overall.

By using mapping software, the New Bedford Police Department and the housing Authority tracked these particular crimes, analyzed the calls for service, and pinpointed the exact locations of each type of problem. For example, Monty's Playground in the south end, near the Ben Rose Housing Development, is infamous for its illegal drug dealing. Another location was pinpointed as a place where teens loitered, perhaps to buy or sell drugs; yet another housing development had a problem with drug-oriented graffiti. This mapping software allowed neighborhood police, now expanded to four sub-stations in

different parts of the city, to focus their efforts on those problems inherent to their particular neighborhoods.

Response

In February of 1993, New Bedford's Mayor Rosemary Tierney and Joseph Finnerty, Executive Director of the New Bedford Housing Authority were exploring a new way for law enforcement to tackle the problem of crime, beginning with the drug-related crime in public housing in New Bedford. In an innovative move, the police department's Neighborhood Policing Unit opened their first decentralized sub-station in an elementary school. That's right; a police station within a school. The Mt. Pleasant Elementary School became the site because its district encompasses five public housing developments and nearly 17,000 residents. About 800 youngsters live in this neighborhood and attend this school. There is also a strong neighborhood association that is committed to making the area safer and more livable for its residents. Where better to start kids off on a positive relationship with police?

These neighborhood police officers would truly be on the front line as far as dealing with the community at large. Unlike traditional officers, their mobility would not stem from riding around in vehicles patrolling randomly and reacting to calls for service. These officers would patrol on foot and on bicycles. They would attend neighborhood organization meetings, walk their beats in the neighborhoods, and talk to the residents of the housing developments. All their activities would work to break down the barriers built up between the community and the police.

They also began a police residency program offered in cooperation with the Housing Authority. Officers would actually live in public housing units for a nominal rent, providing a 24-hour police presence to the residents there and the community in general. They would be positive role models for young adults and children, improving the relationship between the police and low-income citizens in the city. These officers participate in the housing development's resident groups and are a voice for those residents within the police department. This program has been very successful; currently, 10 officers reside in public housing developments and are generally viewed as good neighbors.

The Mayor established the New Bedford Neighborhood Policing Partnership as well, a 53-agency organization that meets monthly with members of the police department (from the Chief down to neighborhood patrol officers) to address issues involving the community's crime concerns. Agencies include the school department, 4-H Clubs, the Bristol County District Attorney's Office, Boys and Girls Clubs and Scouts, Department of Social Services, Probation department, Recreation department, and other social service and legal agencies (see appendix). The Partnership was founded on the concept that police and private citizens could work together in creative ways to help solve contemporary community problems. This philosophy is predicated on the belief that achievement of these goals requires the development of a new relationship between police officers and the people of our community. This initiative allows private citizens a greater voice in setting local police priorities and involves them in efforts to improve the overall quality of life in

their neighborhoods. This philosophy shifts the focus of police work from intervention to proactive prevention.

At first, neighborhood policing was not well-received in the police department. No one would volunteer for the unit; its first officers had to be assigned. They were termed "lollipop cops" by other officers and thought to do nothing but kiss babies and shake hands. The concept of community policing was thought to give away their authority and power. Officers rebelled against this idea.

As the unit's activities progressed and neighborhood officers did make arrests, chase criminals, serve warrants, and other "real" police work, the unit gained respect from within its own department. However, another problem surfaced. Community policing funds were plentiful and the unit was equipped with the best of everything: new police cruisers, radios, computers, and bicycle equipment. Now there seemed to be an envy factor from the rest of the department which was equipped with beat-up radios held together with rubber bands, cruisers with no air conditioning or heat, and 10-year old computer equipment. This led to more divisiveness within the department.

However, the unit did press on with its own community policing agenda. And through their work, the officers began to win over community members, residents, and fellow officers. They put their resources to work for them and began to make a difference in the individual neighborhoods they patrolled. More and more community members began to look to the Neighborhood Policing Unit and the Neighborhood Policing Partnership for

answers to their problems. Neighborhood Police officers were truly acting as problem-solvers in their community.

Over the last four years, some officers from the unit have left and returned to other divisions within the department. They take the philosophy of community policing with them to their new assignments and other officers take their place in the neighborhood policing unit, receiving training and implementing new initiatives in community policing. New initiatives include citizens on cell phone patrol with direct lines to the police department and a citizens police academy. In this manner, community policing has infiltrated the entire department and is still working its way through all the divisions. This is beneficial in that a detective who used to be a community police officer may have a new perspective on investigating an otherwise routine case. This officer's actions may positively affect others in the unit.

Assessment

The Neighborhood Policing Partnership has built from within to strengthen the social infrastructure of the city. Officers are more fully empowered to help the citizens they encounter, not only through support by management of the department, but from knowing key people in the community to which to refer these residents, through face-to-face contact with them at monthly meetings. For example, if a resident has a complaint about older kids hanging around a certain playground, not only can the police help resolve the problem with increased foot patrols, but the officer can inform the recreation department so that they may take some preventive action as well. The solution is not

always within the police department's jurisdiction, but police officers familiar with the community structures can be resources for residents in finding a solution.

Confidence in the city's approach to resolving its problems is evident in the degree of participation of court-related agencies and a variety of substance abuse treatment centers. Through their coordinated efforts probation officers from all three branches of the trial courts have regularly scheduled evening hours at the Mt. Pleasant School to meet with probationers. As part of the District Attorney's Alternative Sentencing Program, Project COACH (Community Organization for Alternative Court Help) coordinates Community Service work at the Mt. Pleasant School.

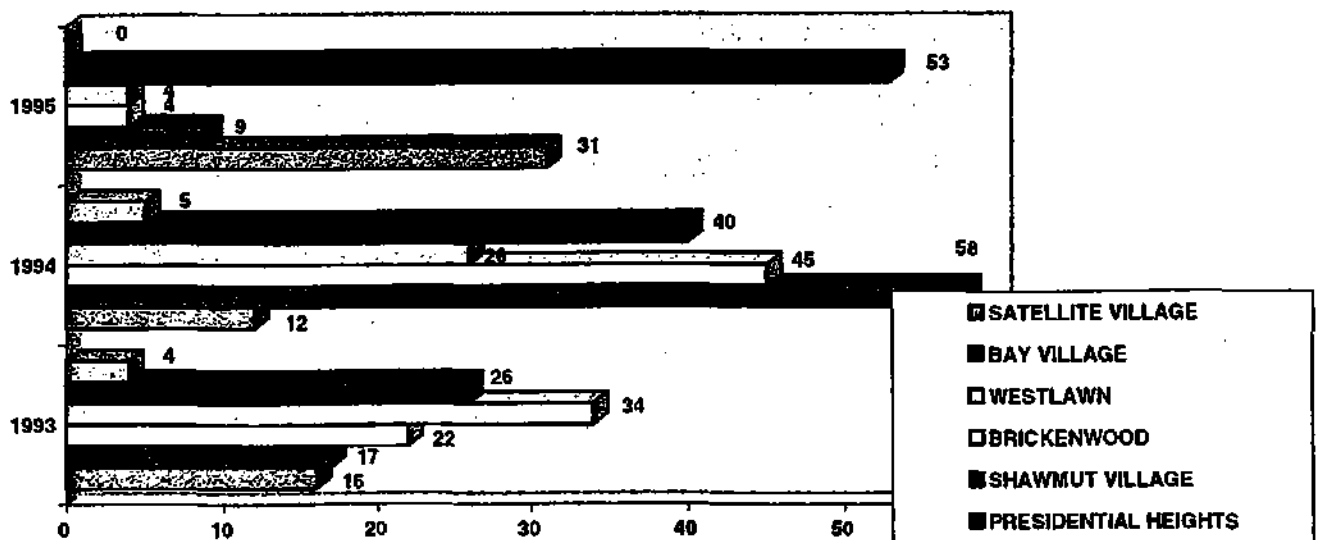
Neighborhood police monitor after-school activities at the elementary schools, not as security guards but as mentors, teachers, coaches, tutors, and friends. The schools become community centers at 2:30pm. Along with Probation Nights, there are Homework Nights, GED classes, English-as-a-Second-Language (ESL) classes, arts and crafts, basketball games and other sports, and a host of other activities. The period from 3-7 after school has long been recognized as a time when unsupervised youths get into trouble. So the positive activities provided at these neighborhood centers, schools youths are familiar with, allow youths to more positively channel their energies.

The fact that these officers are present in the schools and on the streets gives them a very powerful and trusted community presence. Youths who have gotten to know the officers in the schools will be much more likely to confide in these officers than in total

strangers. Recently, a child abuse victim who came forward would initially only discuss her situation with the neighborhood police officer assigned to her school. This is a perfect example of the trust neighborhood policing can build with members of the community.

As for the problem-solving aspect of neighborhood policing, the unit has had a significant impact on drug dealing in New Bedford Housing Authority developments. Drug arrests have decreased by 36% while charges have declined by 30%. Of 1,029 drug arrests throughout the city, 26% took place at targeted housing developments. The flexibility that neighborhood police officers have in setting their own hours (they can change them every week if necessary) is a very useful tool in dealing with the spontaneous drug activity in these developments. The element of surprise has been a highly effective deterrent to illegal drug activity. The table below describes the trend in different housing developments over three years.

Comparative analysis of drug arrests between 1993, 1994 and 1995



The Neighborhood Police Unit has been a very successful component of the New Bedford Police Department. Today, there are four sub-stations throughout the city, two in elementary schools, one in the business district, and one in an old school building in the previously under-served West End neighborhood of New Bedford. There are now 23 officers, one sergeant and a captain.

According to a recent in-depth study by the firm of William J. Bratton, former Commissioner of the Boston P.D. and New York City P.D., the neighborhood police unit is executing its mission of community outreach admirably by most accounts. Officers in the unit have devoted considerable energy on problem-solving with community representatives encouraging identification and prioritization of problems, development of plans, and assignment of tasks to resolve the problems in a cooperative community/police collaboration. Members of the unit display a strong sense of esprit de corps, stemming from a clear sense of mission and a strong commitment to its tenets.

Not one to rest on its laurels, the department is trying now to expand the philosophy and activities of community policing throughout the department. Because juvenile crime rate is on the increase, our department will focus on reducing this problem. The New Bedford Police Department is one of 20 departments in Massachusetts recently selected to pilot a new program called "Cops and Kids," starting this September. The program will allow officers in our juvenile unit to patrol neighborhoods during school hours to identify truants, and allow probation officers on patrol with police officers from 4-6pm identifying youths violating their probation.

This program will also allow the department to expand our after-school activities to include junior-high school students. Officers in the department will be empowered to develop and implement activities for these students and community members in general. Students may attend these activities in their school or in another school. The department will be providing the transportation.

In much the same way that crime in public housing was initially targeted for the Neighborhood Policing Unit, and addressed, juvenile crime will now be targeted as a problem that needs resolution. With a new program slated for the fall, and the expansion of this successful philosophy of community policing throughout the department, and a new Chief well-versed in this philosophy, the New Bedford Police Department will continue to be successful at promoting problem-oriented policing.