

WICHITA POLICE DEPARTMENT
HILLTOP COMMUNITY PROJECT

PROJECT ABSTRACT

Hilltop is an area of residential housing built in the 1940's to accommodate the Wichita aircraft industry during World War II. During the early years, Hilltop was a thriving residential community. A community center was in the heart of the neighborhood and was a catalyst for community activities. The center was good for young and old alike, providing activities and services for all.

When analysis was done it was observed that the Hilltop area was in the later stages of deterioration and decay. Investors owned many of the homes in the area. Long time residents had moved out of the area. Crime had gained a foothold and criminal activity became prevalent in Hilltop. Residents of the area felt as though the City had written them off and the sense of community, that was once strong, was gone.

When the Wichita Police Department transitioned to Community Oriented Policing in late 1993, a new hope was realized for the Hilltop area. In response to the growing problems in the area, local clergy, police, and citizens met to discuss neighborhood problems, police actions and the City's response to the area.

Businesses, organizations and agencies around Hilltop responded by helping to work on solutions to the problems in the area. St. Joseph Hospital, Sedgwick County Extension Office, First Evangelical Church, Wichita Independent Neighborhoods, South-Oliver Business Association, Wichita Police Department and others became partners to resolve the problems plaguing Hilltop.

Some solutions, to deal with the neighborhood problems, were geared toward enforcement, while others were structured to help build a sense of community and

address quality of life issues. The community policing officer assigned to Hilltop helped coordinate community activities with citizens and police officers. The police officers worked to repair the relationship between the police and the citizens and to resolve large and small problems as a way to rebuild a bridge with members of the community.

In time, trust was reestablished between the police, the community, and the City. The foundation of trust allowed the police and the community to continue working on special projects in an effort to build the "glue" (sense of community) that Hilltop needed.

Today's assessment is that the Hilltop Community Project has been a success. There has been a ground breaking for a new \$375,000 Hilltop Neighborhood Center. City services are being delivered more quickly than they had been in the past. Crime in the area has been reduce and youth programs have helped build bridges between Hilltop youth and the police department. We are certain that the future holds more success for the Hilltop area.

The achievement in the Hilltop area can be attributed to the dedication of the primary partners involved in the project. Those partners are; the Wichita Neighborhood Initiative, Wichita Independent Neighborhoods, South Oliver Business Association, Via-Christi Medical Center, Hilltop-Jefferson Neighborhood Association, the City of Wichita, the Wichita Police Department, and others. Each group and individual should be commended for the time and effort they invested in improving the quality of life in the Hilltop area.

WICHITA POLICE DEPARTMENT

HILLTOP COMMUNITY PROJECT

Hilltop is an area of residential housing built in the 1940's. The housing was designed to be temporary. The residences were provided for persons working in Wichita to support the war effort. The area is located near Boeing Aircraft and McConnell Air Force Base. During the forties, fifties, and sixties, Hilltop was a thriving residential community with a government recreation center. The center created a sense of community and acted as a catalyst for community activities. As the urbanization of Wichita took place, the residences in Hilltop were purchased by investors who leased the residences. Over time some landlords let their property fall into disrepair and decay. The Broken Window Phenomenon took hold. In the late 1980's gangs and crack cocaine gained a foothold in the area. The area suffered further physical decay, and crimes associated with gangs and drugs became prevalent. Due to a slow response to the problems of the area by City government, many of the residents in the area had a feeling of disenfranchisement from the community.

Scanning

Although just a few activists in the Hilltop area identified the problem there were several groups of people that were involved in the creation of the problems in the Hilltop area. There was a combination of working/unemployed/underemployed citizens in the area and over time there was a feeling of separation from the rest of the City. As the neighborhood grew older, decay was apparent and the Broken Window Theory took hold. Gangs, drug houses, criminals, good citizens, and the police were all able to see the problem but there was no coordinated effort to find solutions and implement a plan of action. The environment was prime for gangs and other criminals who wanted to live in an area where there was little or no feelings of attachment or community. They could make money by selling illicit drugs and involvement in other criminal enterprises. All sorts of criminal activities were prevalent in the Hilltop area. Statistics indicated that crime, both major and

minor, was at an all time high.

Anecdotal evidence indicated that the citizens in the Hilltop area wanted to reverse the stranglehold the Broken Windows Phenomenon had on their community, but there was little trust in the police or government by neighborhood activists or the citizens. The people of the area felt as though they had been excised from receiving governmental services. The police were motivated to deal with problems in a traditional style where arrest statistics were used to judge the quality of an officer. The bad guys were taken to jail, but the police failed to focus on the real problem. When the Wichita Police Department transitioned to Community Oriented Policing in late 1993, a new hope was realized for the Hilltop area.

Analysis

The Hilltop area suffered from high levels of crime for decades. Drive-by shootings, homicides, rapes, robberies, burglaries, larcenies, and auto thefts were prevalent. Landlords owning property in the area did not take an active interest in their rental properties and a great many of the properties in the area fell into disrepair. There was a feeling that landlords only wanted to collect rent but not do repairs which would keep the homes livable. In addition to poor living and economic conditions in the area tensions between the police and residents were high. Officers were always on their guard and tended to distrust the people in the Hilltop area. This caused the good citizens to feel as though the police were unapproachable. As incidents of crime increased, citizens were beginning to feel as if they were being treated as second class citizens. The situation got so bad that people in the area were making death threats on officers who worked the Hilltop area.

Crime problems in the Hilltop area were handled by traditional policing methods. Traditional methods included; probable cause stops of individuals, watching drug houses and gang members, and generally reacting to crime instead of finding the root problems that gave rise to the crime. An "arrest as many as you can" mentality was prevalent among the officers assigned to work

the Hilltop area. An "us against them" attitude was fostered by both the citizens and the police which fueled the mistrust. (Exhibit 1)

The S.C.A.T. (Special Community Action Team) teams, the enforcement arm of the community policing units, took a pro-active approach towards gangs, gang houses and drug interdiction. The result was that gang houses were closed down in one part of Hilltop. The unintended result was displacement. The problem people would simply move to nearby locations, reopen their drug houses and continue their criminal activities. It was a cyclical process that was fueled by the traditional policing approach and therefore, gave little or no motivation for officers to find solutions to the underlying problems of the area.

Another problem which was recognized was the urbanization of the city of Wichita. As older residents moved out of the area, their homes in Hilltop were sold off. The homes had depreciated in value because of general neighborhood decay and were purchased by investors. The homes then became rental properties. It was revealed in a survey conducted by St. Joseph Hospital that the renters had little or no stake in the property, and that the investors were often absent from the community. Most tenants didn't even know how to get a hold of their landlords if there were problems with their property. This gave way to the Broken Windows Phenomenon. With each passing year, more decay occurred in the area and any attachment the citizens had to the community disintegrated.

A survey was conducted by the St. Joseph Hospital group. The hospital is located just west of the Hilltop neighborhood and sees many of the Hilltop residents as patients. It was determined by the survey that the median income for the residents in the area was approximately \$15,000. The poverty in the area helped fuel the crime problem and contributed to a lost sense of community. In addition, the old recreation center located the heart of the Hilltop area was abandoned. The city took ownership of the building and boarded up the property due to the cost of operation, maintenance and

repair. Those residents in Hilltop who still had a sense of community soon believed as though they were without a place to meet and felt as though the local government did not care.

The problems of the Hilltop area were many and solutions were few. Several long-term projects would have to be implemented to resolve multiple large problems which were contributing to the overall grand problem of Hilltop.

Many of the Hilltop problems were the result of poor environmental design. Hilltop has 557 family dwellings with only six streets running through them. The residences, which are primarily duplexes, run back in a row from the street. In most situations, the dwellings are three deep with a fourth house capping the end of an alley type entrance point. In one area there are as many as 120 residences bounded by four streets. Most of the residences in the Hilltop community are landlocked, and there is limited direct access. Additionally, only a few of the dwellings in the area have addresses posted, and lighting in the area is poor. As a result emergency response to the area is difficult.

In response to the problems in the area, local clergy, police, and citizens met to discuss neighborhood problems, police actions and the City's response to the area. A neighborhood association was created from those meetings and partnerships were formed. Businesses, organizations and agencies around Hilltop helped to work on solutions. The Via Christi - St. Joseph Hospital, Sedgwick County Extension Office, First Evangelical Church, Wichita Independent Neighborhoods, South-Oliver Business Association, The Wichita Police Department and others all became partners to resolve the problems plaguing Hilltop.

Response

The range of possible alternatives to deal with the problems in the Hilltop area was broad. Not only was attention given to larger "macro" needs of the area but also to the smaller "micro" needs of the citizens in the Hilltop area. Many projects were considered and implemented. Some of

the Problem Oriented Policing projects started by the police department were geared towards enforcement, and some were structured to help build a sense of community and to address quality of life issues. It was clear that a crucial first step should be taken to build a positive relationship with the local government in Wichita. In addition, building a relationship with the police, who now had access to the resources to combat many of the "Broken Window" problems in the area, was also necessary.

A community policing officer had been assigned to the Hilltop area and was responsible for coordinating community activities with his beat team and the neighborhood. His responsibility was to work with the Hilltop neighborhood and the Hilltop-Jefferson Neighborhood Association to get the area physically cleaned up and to identify projects which would improve the area. Several clean-ups were conducted to remove many years worth of accumulated trash, and large numbers of abandon vehicles were impounded. The community policing officer and the beat team officers worked to repair the relationship between the police and the citizens in the area. The community policing officer worked to resolve large and small problems as a way to rebuild a bridge with members of the community. Mutual trust was being developed.

As the S.C.A.T. Team members continued to focus on gangs and drug houses in traditional police fashion the community police officer and beat officers contacted the landlords and persuaded them to evict the drug dealers and other people involved in criminal activity. The landlords were told about the activity their renters were involved in and they were asked to be part of the solution to the crime problems. The landlords were responsive to the requests.

The community police officer and the beat officers attended regular meetings of the Hilltop-Jefferson Neighborhood Association. They listened to their concerns and acted to resolve problems. In time, trust was reestablished between the police and the community and city responsiveness was again realized. The citizens now trusted the police much more than they had in the past and were not

afraid to call or pass on their complaints. The foundation of trust allowed the police and the community to continue working on special projects in an effort to build the "glue" (sense of community) that Hilltop needed.

The response plan was initiated with the partners in the project so that community problems could be collectively worked on. The goal of the partnership was to unite the citizens in accomplishing common goals to improve their quality of life. This is commonly called "community glue" which was desperately needed in Hilltop. The response plan called for acquiring a much needed community building where important services for the area could be based. There was also a need to reduce crime in the area, and improve the delivery of city and agency services. It was also recognized that it would be essential to find activities for the youth of the area and to build relationships between them and responsible adults. Additionally, there was a day-to-day necessity to work on the individual needs of the citizens in the Hilltop area.

Building Community Glue

Hilltop Community Building

To reiterate, Hilltop is a poor community in the City of Wichita with it's citizens having a median income of \$15,000.00 a year per family. The average family size is four and is comprised of citizens of all ages and races as indicated by the St. Joseph community survey. For many years there were no youth related activities in the area and the community center where the youth activities had been held had been closed. (Exhibit 2) Friendship Park is centrally located in Hilltop and was home to the old abandon recreation center building. The building was demolished in late 1998. The recreation center was in poor shape, boarded up, and added to neighborhood decay. At one time day-care was provided in the old recreation building. When the recreation building closed there were no day-care facilities in the area, which prevented many of the citizens from obtaining full-time work. The citizens were under-employed and would work full time, if day care job

opportunities were available.

It was determined that a community building in Hilltop would serve several purposes. It would be a place where the youth in Hilltop would have access to developmental and recreational activities. It would be used for literacy programs, seniors programs, parenting classes, and much needed childcare. A resource center in Friendship Park would act as a foundation on which a new sense of community could be built.

Several key people in the community, and city officials, were contacted early in the planning stage in an effort to get the old recreation center demolished and a new resource center built. A City Councilman was contacted and taken on a tour of the area. He asked that the Community Policing Officer give a speech before the city council requesting that the old recreation center be demolished and a new resource center be built in its place. The Community Policing Officer helped put together a partnership between key people in the community and the city to accomplish this task. Over a one and a half year period, several "brain-storming" sessions and planning meetings took place to ensure a building would be built, and that the end result would meet the needs of the Hilltop community.

As a result of the efforts of the partnership a ground breaking ceremony took place on March 23, 1999, for the new \$375,000 Hilltop Neighborhood Center. (Exhibit 3) The new resource center will house a Head Start Program with two classrooms, a large multi-purpose room, Community Policing office, Neighborhood Association office, and will sponsor youth related activities. The Community Policing Officer also obtained a private \$10,000.00 donation from a local businessman who grew up in the Hilltop area which will be used to buy sports equipment for the youth activities.

It was recognized by the partners in the project that there was a need to establish a "sense of community" in the children in the Hilltop area. The youth are considered the future of the community and it was the desire of the partners early on that opportunities be provided for the children. The Hilltop Neighborhood Center will bring realization to the goals of the partners in the

project and hope for the children in the area. As there is more involvement and training of parents in the area it is expected that the various crimes that have been prevalent in the past will wither away. It is hoped that the opportunities provided the youth will help them earn a place as respected, contributing members of the Wichita community.

Improved Services

Residential Map

City service departments and emergency personnel had difficulty finding addresses when responding to calls for service. Consequently, citizens in the area felt as though their services were not being delivered as efficiently or effectively as in other areas of the City. Some remedy needed to be identified to improve services to the area.

Residents of the Hilltop area had made attempts in the past to remedy the situation. There were efforts to paint addresses on curbs and to place signs at the ends of driveways, but lack of citizen participation ended the projects. The community policing officer created a detailed residential, color-coded, map of the area so that first responders would know where they're going when responding to calls for service.

This project was started by walking the neighborhood one residence at a time and hand drawing a map. The Wichita Police Department Air Section flew over the area, and the Community Policing Officer took aerial photos. The photos were pieced together, and residences were traced onto a map. The Community Policing Officer scanned the images into a computer and color coded the residences and streets. The color of a residence was determined by the color of street it was on. For example; Terrace street was blue, so all residences for Terrace street were colored blue. (Exhibit 6) The area was walked one residence at a time, and the accuracy of the addresses were verified and documented on the map. Because not all residences had address on them, the U.S. Postal Service helped determine the correct address for some residences. Copies of the finished

product were provide to ambulance and fue crews who respond to the area as well as the beat officers. This project was eagerly accepted by emergency response personnel and the maps were made part of each groups map books.

Feedback from beat officers, fire and ambulance personnel has been positive. All have said the map has been an asset when making calls and had reduced response times. The Community Policing Officer was also contacted by Meals-on-Wheels (home food delivery for the elderly and home-bound) who requested copies of the map. Their volunteers had quit delivering to the Hilltop area because they could not fnd the addresses they were supposed to deliver to. Meals-on-Wheels began delivering to the Hilltop area once again.

Crime Problems

Auto Theft

There were a large number of auto thefts and auto theft recoveries occurring in and around the Hilltop area. Crime analysis information was used to determine if a pattern existed with regards to the auto thefts. Once crime analysis data regarding dates, times, and location of these auto thefts and recoveries was obtained, a plan was developed that included an auto theft suppression team. The team was sent into the Hilltop area with the goal of developing intelligence on known offenders and to develop a list of possible suspects. The Community Policing Officer held a beat team meeting with officers assigned to the Hilltop beat to pass on information about possible suspects. The meetings were held during second shift hours and first and third shift officers attended. The plan for the officers included targeting known offenders, using a lab on all recovered stolen vehicles to obtain trace evidence, and to actively look for and recover stolen autos.

The officers soon found that there was just a small group of individuals responsible for the auto thefts and for dumping stolen cars in the Hilltop area. Over a three month period, three out of the four known offenders were arrested, booked, and charged with auto theft. All of them were also

charged with parole violations for previous violations of the law. Auto thefts were reduced nearly 80% through this concentrated effort.

Youth Programs

Soft T-Ball Program for Youth

The youth in the Hilltop area had limited access to youth developmental and recreational activities. The closest city activity center is Boston Park located four miles away from the Hilltop neighborhood. It was virtually inaccessible to the youth of Hilltop which presented a problem for many years. In the short-run, until the Hilltop Neighborhood Center is constructed, a soft T-Ball program was started to engage youth in the area in recreational activities. The goal was to expose the youth to recreational activities, build relationships with adults outside their own families, and to reduce the types of crimes some of the youth were involved in. It was hoped that the team involvement and personal relationships would act as an alternative for gang and criminal involvement.

The Wichita Police Department and Via Christi Sports Medicine gathered information on the number of children in the area from local churches and school board data. It was determined that a number of the youth who wanted to be involved in the T-Ball program would be unable to pay for the gloves, hats and t-shirts. It was also apparent that many would not be able to afford the sign-up fee. The Community Police Officer visited local businesses and accepted donations of baseball gloves, balls and money for the program. It was also discovered that there were several children who wanted to play who did not have shoes to wear. Officers from the Patrol East Bureau - all shifts - donated money and shoes to give to the children of the area.

Two T-Ball teams were needed and would have to be registered to play in the city league. At-risk teens from the Hilltop area were used to help coach these teams. An incentive program for the teen coaches was developed. Each would receive a membership to a health club and each

youth volunteer was teamed with a police officers in a mentor relationship.

Four at risk teens were identified and volunteered to be coaches for the players. Two Patrol East beat officers donated their off-duty time to coach and mentor the teen coaches. Volunteers from Via-Christi Sports Medicine donated time to coach the teams. An ambulance from Via-Christi was used to go around Hilltop and sign up players and neighborhood volunteers came out to the baseball field and cleaned it up, painted the backstop, and cut a baseball diamond into the grass. Entrance fees for the city league, mitts, bats, gloves, tennis shoes, and other equipment were all donated by private donors. The Wichita Police Department helicopter was flown into the park before the first game to draw attention to the park and bring neighbors from all around the area to watch.

The season was a great success. Police officers, employees of Via-Christi, parents of the children, the players and teen coaches were able to interact in a structured environment. (Exhibit 4) Lasting friendships were made, and citizen trust of the police was as high as it had ever been. Many of the children who had been involved in the first year of the program have expressed interest in playing again. Other children who did not play the first year have also expressed interest in playing. Overall, the program has been well received and will continue as a long-term program.

Individual Citizen Response

Family Move

In the spring of 1998 the Community Policing Officer was notified by the pastor of a Hilltop Church that a family was living in the Hilltop area in a house that didn't have electricity or running water. Upon visiting the residence the community police officer discovered that the house the family was renting wasn't fit to be inhabited. The residence had numerous code

violations, and was infested by roaches. (Exhibit 5) To complicate matters, the adult female in the family had costly medical problems. The family had lost their home to the bank due to the medical bills for the adult female. The woman was required to be hooked up to a breathing machine at night and to be constantly monitored. The breathing machine was very costly and its consumption of electricity was high. The local electric company had shut off the families service because of an overdue \$2000.00 bill.

The community policing officer visited the family and was able to convince the family to let a housing inspector, from the Office of Central Inspection (OC1), come into their residence and document the code violations. They didn't want this done because they were afraid their landlord would evict them. The family was assured that situation would work out and a new place for them to live would be found. The housing inspector was able to document the code violations and the property was condemned.

Once the property was condemned the family was eligible for assistance. The adult male has been employed by the City for 19 years and was eligible for cost free financial counseling through the Employee Assistance Program (EAP). A payment plan was worked out with the electric utility so service could be started at their home. Mennonite housing, helped to get the family a suitable house in which they could live and the City's Friendship Fund, a fund operated by the city to assist employees, was contacted. The Friendship Fund paid the family's overdue electric bill, and the family was able to maintain electric service at their new residence. The family had to file bankruptcy to get their medical bills forgiven. The property owner of the condemned house will not be able to rent it out until it is brought up to code.

Assessment:

Response to the problems in the Hilltop area have been dictated by the needs of the

community. A multi-level approach to problem solving was taken by the partnership to rebuild a sense of community and improve the quality of life for Hilltop residents.

It was necessary for the partnership of groups, agencies and organizations to develop a method for the area to regain its sense of community. This was accomplished through the neighborhood association networking with the business community in the area and building a working relationship between the police and the community. Other groups such as the South Oliver Business Association and Via-Christi. The Neighborhood Initiative Office and Wichita Independent Neighborhoods offered their support and participated as part of the partnership group. The partnership rallied behind the call for a new Neighborhood Resource Center as a foundation upon which to build a renewed sense of community. The Hilltop Neighborhood Center should be completed in 1999.

There were concerns that the initial cost of the community center, around \$235,000, might be a stumbling block, but in the end the cost concerns were overcome and additional monies were allocated to fund the building. The community center is vitally important to creating the sense of community. With the community center, there will be a meeting place where community issues can be dealt with and the residents of the area will have a location to meet for community gatherings and social programs. The effectiveness of the community center will be measured over the years to come, however, youth programs, the neighborhood association, and the reduction in crime have already begun to unite the community.

Crime problems in the Hilltop area were a concern. Many illegal activities; drugs, burglary, vandalism, were attacked. One illegal activity which received considerable focus was auto thefts. Much of the crime committed in the area was the work of a small group of individuals. The auto theft project involved four to five criminals who were responsible for

nearly all of the auto thefts in the area and once arrested auto thefts in the area fell dramatically. The police department's traditional response to this specific crime problem proved effective.

Youth intervention is a key to the success of crime prevention in the Hilltop area, and all the partners supported that effort. It was recognized early on that the handling of the youth in the area would be a determining factor in how the area developed in the coming years. The soft T-Ball project developed relationships between the community and the police and the benefits are expected to improve communication and effectiveness in the future.

Individual citizen response was and continues to be important to the success of the project in Hilltop. Due to the makeup of the area, many homes are owned by landlords who are often remiss in their responsibilities of keeping their properties in livable condition. Families move into homes that are neglected and then have problems getting relief from the landlords. As part of the improvement of the area the police department has taken an active roll in mediating disputes with landlords and helping those who have received no help from property owners.

Conclusion

To date, there is evidence the Hilltop Community Project has been a success. There has been a ground breaking for a new \$375,000 Hilltop Neighborhood Center, City services are being delivered more quickly than they had been in the past, crime in the area has been reduce - not only auto thefts but other crimes as well and youth programs have helped build bridges between Hilltop youth, and the police department. Individuals in the Hilltop area continue to be the recipients of assistance to improve quality of life issues.

Several resources were used to accomplish the goals of the partnership. The police department, the business community, governmental agencies, not-for-profit organizations, community block grant funds, and private donations were all used.

Although there were some small roadblocks encountered along the path, none was so large as not to be overcome. Officer buy-in, on the part of the police department, has been achieved and many attend the neighborhood association meetings on their own time without compensation because they feel an ownership in the neighborhood. The officers have also donated their personal time to coach the T-Ball program and mentor other youth in the area. Citizen buy-in was a small problem in the beginning because of a distrust of the police but that problem has now subsided.

The primary partners involved in the response were the Neighborhood Initiative Office, Wichita Independent Neighborhoods, South Oliver Business Association, Via-Christi Medical Center, Hilltop-Jefferson Neighborhood Association, the City of Wichita, the Wichita Police Department, and private donors, are to be commended for their time and effort. Their investment has improved the quality of life in the Hilltop area.

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