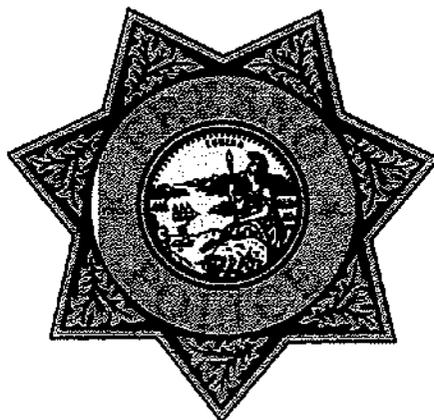


# WHISPERING APARTMENTS

DEVELOPING PARTNERSHIPS  
TO CREATE A SAFE COMMUNITY



PROJECT SUMMARY

A PROBLEM ORIENTED POLICING PROJECT

PRESENTED BY

THE FRESNO POLICE DEPARTMENT

# WHISPERING WOODS APARTMENTS

## PROJECT SUMMARY

By  
Officer Rob Beckwith

### Scanning:

The Whispering Woods Apartments are a 406 unit complex located in Northeast Fresno. In 1999, the Fresno Police Department responded to approximately 600 calls for Police service at this complex. The alarming issue, was that the complex was only half occupied. New owners had taken over and occupancy rates were rising rapidly. Calls for service included violent crimes that were seriously affecting the quality of life at this complex. Numerous complaints were received by the Northeast Problem Oriented Policing Unit regarding narcotic sales inside the complex as well as gang activity. Security was lacking and with the rising occupancy rates it was clear that calls for service for the year 2000 could easily exceed 1,000 while the quality of life and public safety issue continued to worsen.

### Analysis:

The owners/property management company were contacted immediately. Meetings were held and the following problem areas were identified:

1. Poor tenant screening was creating an **environment** that **allowed unruly** tenants and attracted a criminal element to the complex.

2. **The complex owners were pressuring the leasing agents to increase occupancy rapidly and offered a monetary bonus to the agent for each move in regardless of the tenants screening results.**

3. Lack of security attracted criminal element to the complex.

4. Lack of **communication between Police and the Property Management company**

5. Lack of uniformed Law Enforcement presence in the complex to deter the criminal element.

Response:

After identifying problem areas in the (Analysis) stage of the project, the following responses were put in effect:

1. Leasing agents were **educated on tenant screening and the move in bonus** policy was **stopped.**

2. Monthly meetings were held between myself and the Property Management staff.

3. A state of the art Police report writing room was established in the complex to increase Police presence in the complex.

4. Undercover narcotic buys were **conducted and search** warrants **executed to tackle the narcotic dealing problem in the complex.**
5. Meetings were **held** with **Security** company to develop better lines of **communication.**
6. A Kids Police Academy was formed to improve the relationship between juveniles, their parents, and the Police.

Assessment:

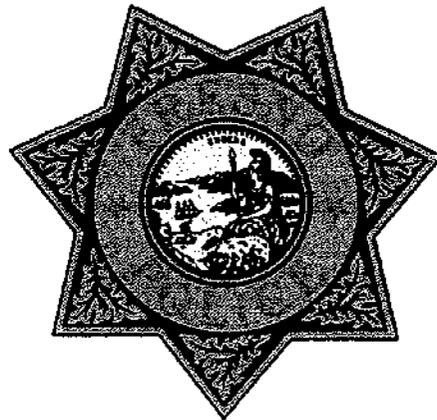
By the end of year 2000, occupancy at the complex had more than doubled to 97%.

**Although there** were two times as many citizens **living in** the complex, calls **for** service had not increased. Complaints regarding narcotic dealing were nearly non-existent, and violent crimes were sparse. Property management had successfully evicted problem tenants.

Gang activity was no longer present. Tenant screening was being done so good, that more applicants were denied than approved. Relationships between the tenants and the Police had **been** greatly **improved** and **residents expressed their** thanks and gratitude for the safe **environment** that **had been** created for **their children** and **themselves.**

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PROJECT REPORT

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## Scanning

In March of 2000, upon being assigned to the Fresno Police Department's Northeast Problem Oriented Policing Unit, I was given an area of responsibility that included the Whispering Woods Apartment complex. I was familiar with this complex through my experience in patrol and was aware that the complex was well known *for* excessive calls for service, violent crime, as well as narcotic and gang activity. Almost immediately, I began fielding complaints from patrol personnel who were dealing with excessive calls for service, and from citizens who were concerned about drug dealing and gang activity in the complex.

The complex itself is one of the largest apartment complexes in Northeast Fresno. It is a 406 unit complex with a very diverse **ethnic makeup**. In 1999 alone, **the Fresno Police** Department responded to almost 600 calls for service at this complex. The alarming factor in this amount of calls for service was the fact that the complex was less than 50% occupied for half of the year. The complex had new owners and the occupancy rate was climbing rapidly. This sharp increase in occupancy caused concern and it was projected that calls for service would easily exceed 1,000 in the year 2000. Patrol resources were being drained by the lack of attention given to this complex.

The latter portion of the Fresno Police Department's mission statement states that we will strive to protect and safeguard the *lives* and property **of citizens we serve while improving quality of life**. **In** order to **uphold** the integrity of this statement, something had to be done

to rid this apartment complex of the gangs, drug dealers, and violent crime that were plaguing the residents of this small community.

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## Analysis

In order to properly address the issues in this complex, I set up meetings with the property management company that was responsible for the complex. In this initial meeting, I learned that the complex had recently had an ownership change and that the complex was being converted to affordable housing units (section 8.) In order for this to occur, several long time tenants were moved out due to the fact that they did not qualify for the affordable **housing**. This accounted for the low occupancy rate. However, due to financial issues, the owners of the complex had instructed property management and leasing agents to increase occupancy rapidly in order to begin recovering financial costs. The downfall of this was that *poor* tenant screening procedures were implemented and just about anyone who submitted a rental application was approved regardless of their prior history. In addition to this, leasing agents were given a 525.00 bonus for each person that they moved in. Hence, leasing agents were concerned with quantity not quality.

After speaking with the management staff, it was apparent that there had been no effective communication between the Police and the management. I was not aware of certain problems the complex was experiencing, and the complex was not aware of some of the concerns we had.

Another area of concern was that the complex was seriously lacking in it's security. Security guards were not at their post when they were required to be and were failing to properly document situations. Without this documentation, the complex was unable to build a case to properly evict problem tenants.

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**I spoke with tenants individually and the common concern that was put forth was the lack of a uniformed presence in the complex to deter criminal behavior. The tenants explained to me that the lack of uniformed presence in the complex was actually promoting criminal behavior and it was steadily increasing. The stated that they were living in fear daily and were afraid to allow their children to play in the complex in the evening.**

**The tenants also expressed a desire to form some type of after school program for the youth in the complex. They felt that a productive positive program would benefit the youth and keep from falling in with the wrong element.**

Finally, using the department's crime analysis unit, I compared the complex occupancy rate to the monthly calls for service. What I found, was that calls for service were increasing rapidly along with the occupancy rate. (Refer to attached chart.)

Based on the analysis, it was apparent that in order to enhance public safety in the complex, a partnership had to be created between the Police Department, the complex management staff, and the residents.

## Response

During our first monthly meeting, I provided the complex manager and leasing agents with a pamphlet that included recommendations on effective tenant screening. (Refer to attachment.) This proved to be valuable in that the leasing agents were not aware of some of the tools available to them when processing an application. My purpose for providing the management with these recommendations was to educate them on tenant screening to assist them in weeding out problem tenants. The management staff was very receptive to this and immediately began implementing new tenant screening procedures.

We discussed the issue of providing leasing agents with a bonus for anyone that was move in. I made a recommendation that leasing agents be given the bonus only after it had been shown that the move in was productive and the tenant was not a nuisance to the Police or the complex. The management staff subsequently adopted this recommendation and created a new **bonus** policy with their leasing agents.

During our monthly meetings, communication lines were established. Myself, security personnel, and **management** were **included in the** meetings. We **shared information which** allowed everyone to become aware of certain problems with specific tenants. With these communication lines established, management was able to obtain proper **documentation** to evict unruly problematic tenants.

I addressed the issue of uniformed presence in the complex by creating a state of the art Police report writing room. The owners of the complex donated a two bedroom apartment

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in the middle of the complex. The apartment was equipped with office furniture, a computer for writing reports, telephones for dictating, and snacks and sodas. These were luxuries that Officers had not seen in other report writing rooms. Word spread quickly in the patrol ranks of the report writing room and Officers began using it 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. This created a strong uniformed presence in the complex due to Police patrol vehicles and Police motorcycles constantly being parked in the complex. Feedback from the tenants was very positive, with numerous people telling me that they had noticed a drop off in criminal activity due to their almost always being a patrol unit in the complex.

In addition to the report writing room, a crime prevention community service Officer was stationed at the report writing room. The crime prevention Officer was available to the tenants and helped organize neighborhood watch meetings as well as providing informative pamphlets on crime prevention tips.

I addressed the drug dealing issues by conducting undercover narcotic buys with informants. I authored search warrants and executed them on the suspected apartments in which the drugs were being dealt from. I followed this up by notifying management of my actions. This provided them with the documentation they needed to evict the drug dealing tenants.

Finally, I introduced a special program, Care Fresno, to the complex. Care Fresno is a community based organization, coordinated by the Fresno Police Department, that offers different types of programs to lower income areas. Working with Care Fresno, we began a

## Kids Police Academy (KPA).

The KPA is a 10 week program designed for children ages 10-15. This age group was chosen because we felt that this is a critical age in which children begin to make decisions that will seriously affect them for the rest of their lives. The KPA is designed to educate the children on different special units within the Fresno Police Department and allow them to interact with the Officers. The KPA was held every Tuesday for 10 weeks. The KPA is structured to teach the children respect, responsibility, leadership, and kindness. Children who successfully completed the program attend a graduation dinner with the Chief of Police. They are then rewarded with a trip to Magic Mountain. The children's parents are also encouraged to attend the classes and many did. This created positive interaction between the adults with the Officers as well.

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## Assessment

In 1999, with less than 50% occupancy rate, the Whispering Woods generated 600 calls for Police service. This project was opened in 2000, and occupancy rates were never below 80% for the entire year, and were as high as 97%. **Although** the occupancy rates have risen dramatically, the monthly call for service average has continued to drop.

From July-Dec 1999, the complex occupancy rate averaged 76% and calls for service averaged 70 per month. During the first six months that the project was opened, Jan-Jun 2000, the **occupancy** rate averaged 84%, **however** the call for service average **dropped** to 62. The following six months, July-Dec 2000, the occupancy rate again climbed to an average of 92%, however the calls for service continued to drop to an average of 49 per month.

This can be considered a success based on the fact that the complex has nearly doubled in size, however the monthly average for calls for service has continued to decrease.

Complaints regarding drug dealing and gang activity have also dropped way off. After the service of several narcotic search warrants, management advised me that other tenants that they had suspected of drug dealing, had heard about the crack down on drug dealing and **had voluntarily** moved out. They didn't want to be next.

This project is continually monitored, and the calls for service are still decreasing.

## Agency and Officer Information

Fresno Police Department Officer Rob Beckwith, along with his Supervisor, Sergeant Andrew Mercado, developed, **coordinated**, and worked this long term project. The project coordinators received no additional incentives in regard to this project. No special resources or guidelines were used in this project, other than following the SARA model. The only resource used in this project was the time and effort of the personnel involved. The project did not exceed the existing Department budget.

### Project Coordinators

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Summary of Calls for Service/Occupancy rate  
Whispering Woods Apartments  
1999 vs 2000



Month	Occupancy	Calls for service	Month	Occupancy	Calls for service
Jan 99	44%	19	Jan 00	88%	79
Feb 99	44%	19	Feb 00	83%	77
<b>Mar 99</b>	<b>46%</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>Mar 00</b>	<b>81%</b>	<b>49</b>
<b>Apr 99</b>	<b>53%</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>Apr 00</b>	<b>81%</b>	<b>47</b>
May 99	55%	35	May 00	84%	52
Jun 99	53%	33	Jun 00	83%	71
Jul99	63%	49	Jul00	84%	48
Aug 99	73%	78	Aug 00	88%	50
<b>Sep 99</b>	<b>73%</b>	<b>102</b>	<b>Sep 00</b>	<b>92%</b>	<b>54</b>
Oct 99	78%	68	Oct 00	96%	35
<b>Nov 99</b>	<b>86%</b>	<b>63</b>	<b>Nov 00</b>	<b>94%</b>	<b>45</b>
<b>Dec 99</b>	<b>88%</b>	<b>63</b>	<b>Dec 00</b>	<b>97%</b>	<b>67</b>

\*Bold print indicates when project was opened

Calls for Service/Occupancy rate Averages  
Six month breakdowns  
1999-2000



Period	Occup Avg	Call Avg
Jan-Jun 1999	49%	30
Jul-Dec 1999	76%	70
Jan-Jun 2000	84%	62
Jul-Dec 2000	92%	49