

HERMAN GOLDSTEIN AWARD

**P. A. L. BOXING PROGRAM OFFERING
ALTERNATIVES FOR O.N.Y.X. WEED &
SEED AREA YOUTH**

**TOLEDO POLICE DEPARTMENT
TOLEDO, OHIO**

SCOTT PARK DISTRICT STATION

SUMMARY

SCANNING: In Toledo, Ohio, residents living in a "Weed & Seed" designated area were afraid to leave their homes because juveniles were fighting and littering in their neighborhoods. They also complained of loud music, loitering, drug sales, and basketball playing in parks after dark in surveys conducted by Toledo Police officers. Officers collecting the information had observed some of the types of complaints themselves. The residents expressed a desire to have activities and job training made available to juveniles living in their area. It was decided, therefore, to implement some type of program for juveniles that would occupy their time year round that would be beneficial to them both physically and scholastically. The program is considered to be an alternative to gang involvement and illegal activities.

ANALYSIS: During the year 2000, officers assigned to a designated "Weed & Seed" area visited residents door to door several times a month. It was their desire to get acquainted with the people in the area and to find out what concerned them about their neighborhoods. They further identified the problem with juveniles based on the number of juveniles that they or fellow officers arrested or cited. Area educators, youth organizations and religious groups also helped to identify the problem. As far as anyone can remember the juveniles have caused problems in this area for years.

RESPONSE: Beginning in 2001, the officers assigned to the "Weed & Seed" area worked with the Police Athletic League (P.A.L.) officer to establish a year round program for boxing and tutorial assistance. This program was established for juveniles living not only in their "Weed & Seed" area, but also the surrounding community. It is located in the Army R.O.T.C. building on the campus of the University of Toledo. In this setting, the program is able to obtain the services of college students, who assist in the tutoring program. To join the program, the participants must grant permission for program supervisors to speak with their teachers and to obtain their academic records. They must also sign contracts to remain drug-free.

ASSESSMENT: The plan was implemented in February, 2001. The assessment will be an on-going process. Over 200 participants have registered for the program. Early on officers and coaches noticed the positive affect the program has had on most the participants.

DESCRIPTION

SCANNING

in Toledo, Ohio, several police officers began working during 1999, in the city's first designated "Weed and Seed" area administered by the Organized Neighbors Yielding Excellence (O.N.Y.X.) Community Development Corporation. The "Weed and Seed" beat they were to patrol is bounded by Don Street on the north, Brown Avenue on the west, Swan Creek on the south, and interstate-75 and the Anthony Wayne Trail on the east. It encompasses 2.5 square miles. Approximately 10,000 people live in the area. This area has been plagued with drug trafficking, illegal gang activity, prostitution, burglaries, street robberies, and public disorder crimes that hurt the quality-of-life for the area's residents. Many of these crimes were committed by juveniles.

Early in 2000, the officers decided to go door to door in order to discuss with residents what problems were occurring in their neighborhoods that concerned them most. Many of the complaints involved juveniles fighting, loitering, littering, and conducting drug sales on their street corners. Residents were also upset with juveniles playing music too loud and basketball in parks after dark. They felt that there was a need for activities and job training to be made available to the juveniles living in the area. The officers were also aware of these problems and had seen an increase in the number of arrests of juveniles.

in the city of Toledo, anyone observing any type of problem is invited to utilize the "Call City Hall" program by calling in their complaint. Residents of the "Weed and Seed" area used this service to report numerous problems with juveniles ranging from loitering and drug sales to trespassing in vacant houses. Working with the Department of Neighborhoods, the officers were successful in some cases in having numerous houses demolished. This helped, but it was obvious

to the officers that they needed to *work* on finding some type of activity to constructively occupy the free time of juveniles as alternatives to gangs and other criminal activity.

The O.N.Y.X. "Weed & Seed" community leaders as well as Toledo Police officers were in agreement that a positive outlet was necessary for the area's juveniles in order to reduce the number of crimes they were committing in the neighborhoods. As a young man, one of the officers, Ronald Wilcox, had participated in a boxing program sponsored by the police department in his Indiana hometown. He was grateful for the profound effect it had on his life. After selling his partners, Penelope Halcomb and Michael Marotta on the idea, they approached the Toledo-Lucas County Police Athletic League (P.A.L.) director, Officer Mary Beth Stachura, to explore the possibility of implementing a boxing program for juveniles living not only in the "Weed and Seed" area, but also the greater Toledo area.

ANALYSIS

For the door to door contacts, the officers devised a survey that recorded the addresses of the homes they visited and the complaints voiced by every person at each address. The visits were conducted on a monthly basis and a list of complaints was compiled. The officers and members of the Gang Unit conducted surveillance in the area and observed the types of activities described by the complaints. They also talked to area educators and leaders of religious groups who concurred about the juvenile problem in the "Weed and Seed" area. The "Call City Hall" complaints and analysis compiled by the Crime Analysis Unit were also used in analyzing the problem, which has been ongoing for as long as anyone can remember.

The problem involved numerous groups of people--victims, offenders, community leaders and law enforcement officers. Victims, of course, suffered the most. They lost, among other things, material items, their privacy, and sense of security. If apprehended, offenders lost

their freedom. Offenders involved with drugs jeopardized their lives by continuing to feed their habits with the money they acquired from their illegal activities. Both community leaders and law enforcement officers lost the respect of residents for not doing more to protect them.

One of the goals of the "Weed and Seed" program is to improve the quality-of-life for the residents of the area. Some residents felt intimidated by the troublemakers. These people are victims almost as much as those residents who are directly affected by the illegal activities of the area's juveniles. Some juveniles have caused the quality-of-life of these residents to suffer. For years there have been a number of activities available for at-risk youth in the Weed & Seed area, usually provided through the schools in the form of after-school activities. Unfortunately, whenever the schools were closed these activities were not available. Churches in the area have sponsored programs for youth, but young people not attending these churches are unaware of what is available to them. A few community centers in the area have "safe havens", though some of the activities offered there were not very attractive to the at-risk youth. One of the centers had a youth basketball league, but had to request the presence of officers due to the unruliness of some of the young players and spectators during the games.

The P.A.L. office is located in the "Weed & Seed" area. It offers basketball and baseball programs. The baseball games are even played at a park near the office. These sports are only available, however, on a seasonal basis. Some of these traditional sporting activities do not necessarily attract some juveniles.

Many of the youth involved in gangs or other illegal activities needed an outlet to expel nervous energy. The youth did not have many positive role models to help them make positive choices about their lives or to stress the importance of education. The vacant houses in their neighborhoods and the inadequate street lighting provided gathering places for conducting illegal

activities. Many of the youth had never gone far from their neighborhoods. There was a desperate need for them to gain exposure to life outside their immediate community.

Several years ago, O.N.Y.X. held community forums to discuss quality-of-life issues. Area residents, community leaders, youth organization leaders, and members of the clergy attended the forums. Many of the senior citizens in attendance complained that they were afraid to leave their homes because of the juvenile problem. Everyone in attendance agreed that the youth in the area were causing problems and needed some type of positive activity to better occupy their time.

RESPONSE

One of the obvious solutions to the problem would be to convince the at-risk youth to begin attending school and/or some type of church sponsored youth activity. As stated earlier, however, many of the programs for youth available in the area were only offered on a seasonal basis. School activities are not conducted during the summer months. The activities for youth at the "safe havens" did not attract many of the at-risk youth.

The goal of the "Weed and Seed" officers was to establish a program that would be conducted year-round for a target group of at-risk youth who would be challenged not only physically, but also cognitively. The P.A.L. boxing program could achieve both because in addition to the physical demands of the boxing activity, tutorial assistance would be provided where needed.

Planning for the boxing program began in late 2000. Officer Stachura utilized contacts and was able to secure a site for the gym. It is located in the drill room of the Army Reserve Officer Training Corps (A.R.O.T.C.) building on the campus of the University of Toledo. Not only was a site obtained, but valuable coaching and support assistance from the A.R.O.T.C.

command Lieutenant Colonel Richard Wiles, his staff, as well as the A.R.O.T.C. students. University of Toledo Police officers and other university personnel have also become involved in the program to some capacity.

Dr. Vinny Reccardi, director of a Toledo charter school, Aurora Academy, was contacted to handle the tutorial assistance program. Teachers from the Toledo Public School system, as well as university students, have offered their services to the tutoring program. To join the program, participants must grant permission for program supervisors to speak with their teachers and to obtain their academic records. They must also sign contracts to remain drug-free.

The doors opened for the first time in February, 2001. Since its inception, the program has been available on weekday nights from 4:30 - 7:00 p.m. Weekends are spent travelling to various sites for boxing matches.

In addition to the fitness aspect of the program, there are goals to reduce the amount of juvenile crime in the area and eliminate the open-air drug markets that operate throughout the "Weed & Seed" community. It was hoped that the program would give the participants an alternative to gang involvement, allow them to observe life outside their neighborhoods, and aid the participants in becoming responsible and successful young adults by focusing on their personal conduct and academic achievement.

There have been a number of difficulties encountered with the program: advertising, funding, staffing, and transportation. Advertising the availability of the program to the target community was an initial hurdle. Local newspapers cooperated in providing stories about the program, but the primary initial method of notification was by word-of-mouth.

Funding was another major obstacle. Equipment for boxing is very expensive and much of it is needed. Numerous fund-raisers were conducted by the P.A.L. organization, the officers

involved, and community volunteers. A group of police retirees even donated money to the cause. The University of Toledo, fortunately, has provided the facility at no cost.

Staffing the program has been a headache. The "Weed & Seed" officers are not assigned on a full-time basis to this project. They have been able to work at the program only when there are no other pressing needs in their area. The full-time P.A.L. officer has other duties as well that prevents her from spending a lot of time at the gym. The program has been dependent on the coaches and tutors to keep it going. There is a future plan to allow one of the "Weed & Seed" officers to spend part of his shift handling the administrative duties that the program demands.

Transportation has been somewhat of a problem. Bus service is available to the gym, however, many of the participants are hesitant to take advantage of it. Officers, parents and some of the volunteers have helped to alleviate this problem, but some of the youth are not always able to secure rides to the facility. A van is being purchased through a Juvenile Accountability Incentive Block Grant (J.A.L.B.G.) to provide transportation to the university as well as to other P.A.L. activities.

ASSESSMENT

Since the inception of the program there has been a significant decrease in the number of open-air drug markets in the O.N.Y.X. area. Complaints concerning juveniles loitering have decreased. Evidence of gang activity is not as obvious as it was before as several former gang members are now involved in the program. In fact, rival gang members are now working together in the program.

The assessment will be an on-going process. Over 200 participants are registered for the program. Officers, coaches, teachers, and O.N.Y.X. leaders have noticed the positive affect the

program has had on some of the participants. Parents have made favorable comments to the officers, coaches, and tutors in regard to the attitudes displayed by their children.

Dr. Reccardi is in the process of collecting school performance data. A baseline for comparison, therefore, will not be available until the next school year. He has received positive feedback from a number of teachers on the improvement they have noted in the classwork of students involved in the program. As an example of the tutorial assistance, one participant brings his weekly spelling list every Monday. He is drilled by a staff member and is ready to be tested by the middle of the week.

Proficiency testing is done throughout the state. Tutorial assistance for the 2002 proficiencies was made available to boxing participants. In the future, Dr. Reccardi is going to attempt to track data looking for improvement in the proficiency test results.

Respect for others is a must for participants of the program. Participants are taught that there are consequences for inappropriate behavior. As an example, several boxers who have been either arrested or found to have served school suspensions, have been temporarily suspended from the program. One boxer was dropped from a weekend fight card due to a school suspension.

AGENCY AND OFFICER INFORMATION

The P.A.L. boxing program began with a few patrol officers. The upper echelon of the department and the P.A.L. board became involved to give the go-ahead for the program to proceed. The officers who initiated the program had received training in problem-oriented policing and had been involved in several P.O.P. projects prior to this endeavor. The primary officers involved were not given any incentives for this project. In fact, they have spent numerous hours of their off-duty time to devote to the boxing program.

The P.A.L. board, as well as O.N.Y.X., committed funds to this program. Other community sources have also contributed money to the program. Toledo City Council has helped fund the P.A.L. organization, which in turn helps to support the boxing program. The project contact person is Lieutenant Cynthia Bobash. Her address is 2301 Nebraska Avenue, Toledo, OH 43607. Her telephone is number 419-936-3444. Her fax number is 419-936-3696. Her e-mail address is: tpd1546@noris.org.