

## **SUMMARY:**

The nature of this problem was initially highlighted by high incidences of Police attention within a defined suburb in Blenheim, New Zealand.

Associated with this low socio-economic area (known locally as "The Hood" or "The Bronx"), were a variety of community safety and criminal offending issues.

Housing New Zealand reported that filling vacant residences in this area was problematic due to perceptions (and realities) of criminal activity and undesirable occupants in adjacent premises.

Police incidence reporting data was the primary material used to analyse the problems in the area.

Data from the territorial local authority (Marlborough District Council) was used - in particular escalating costs for the removal of graffiti vandalism.

Secondary to a data analysis, a person to person forum with residents of the area was held with the intention of determining how occupants perceived the area and the apparent dysfunction.

Thirdly a forum with leading social agencies in the Blenheim area was undertaken identify any additional social issues.

Results showed that residents in the area were not only subject to victimization of crime but were, in many instances, perpetrators of offending.

Prior to this intervention being applied, there was no consistent or integrated problem solving approach for the neighbourhood – in fact it would be fair to say the only attention the area received was reactive in dealing with things that were going wrong with no attention being paid to assisting things to go right.

Once data was gathered, consideration was given to the possible responses that could be made to address the identified issues.

The most appropriate intervention appeared to be a Crime Prevention Through Environment Design (CPTED) Street Intensive Project which would offer the potential to address all of the social, environmental, physical and other issues identified during the analysis process.

The assessment of this project was undertaken at a variety of levels, both anecdotal and statistical.

Quantitative analysis involved an assessment of police incident reporting for the three years prior to the intervention checked against the initial 12 months of the project.

**This analysis showed a 41% reduction in reported incidents during the year of the intervention.**

Qualitative analysis included speaking directly with residents, both one to one and in a forum situation; surveying representatives of social agencies and; anecdotal feedback from frontline policing staff.

Without exception, all of these evaluation processes produced positive results.

### **Description:**

The nature of the problem in this residential neighbourhood of Blenheim, New Zealand, was a variety of criminal and social dysfunction – all of which is atypical of a low socioeconomic area with a high percentage of state housing.

In addition to a series of on-going criminal related problems, the area lies immediately adjacent to a gang headquarters, which in the six months prior to the commencement of this intervention, was the site of a street homicide.

Subsequent to this homicide, the premise was razed to the ground and the section of land cleared and left vacant.

In the wake of this homicide, there was considerable stress within the population of residents as to not only the impact of a street murder but also the future of their neighbourhood given the vacancy of the gang-owned property.

Aside from the location of the gang headquarters, the area attracted a disproportionate amount of police attention.

The site is geographically defined by two intersections, in between which, the target street takes a dog leg aspect.

A cul-de-sac lays approximately one third of the way along the target street.

The defined area contains 48 individual households which during the calendar years 2005, 2006 and 2007 attracted an average of 78 incidents that came to Police attention.

Further analysis revealed that the vast majority of these incidences were located either in the cul-de-sac (Dix Crescent) or within three properties either side of the cul-de-sac entrance.



Not only was this problem identified through police offending data but the dysfunction attached to this area had become noted by the Marlborough District Council (MDC).

This was due to the high incidences of graffiti vandalism, in particular, on the boundary walls of a connecting walkway and the increasing issue of un-disposed rubbish and debris much of which was accumulating in the roadside gutters or on footpaths.

As part of the scanning process for this project and in addition to the analysis of offending and council data, two forums were undertaken.

The first was a forum with representatives from key social agencies within the Blenheim community.

The purpose of this forum was to introduce the proposed intervention concept, but primarily, to scope with these representatives their perception and experiences within the target area and to assist in further identifying existing social issues.

The second forum was with residents in the target area itself and held inside the Dix Cres / Lucas St intersection.

This was marketed to residents as a "Mayoral Forum" with individually addressed invitations being delivered to each household. These invitations included a personal invite from the mayor to attend and partake in a shared meal.

The objective of the meeting overall was to:

- ask people what they felt was good about their neighbourhood
- ask people what could be done to improve things

To facilitate this, a number of key people were invited to the meeting. They had been briefed beforehand on their role which was to circulate amongst residents and chat about the above objectives.

|                       |   |                    |            |
|-----------------------|---|--------------------|------------|
| Youth Health Advocate | - | Public Health Unit | (teens)    |
| Youth Aid officer     | - | Blenheim Police    | (teens)    |
| Social service worker | - | Te Rapoura Health  | (children) |
| Community constable   | - | Blenheim Police    | (adults)   |
| Mayor                 | - | MDC                | (adults)   |
| Council manager       | - | MDC                | (adults)   |

These conversations with small groups of two or three residents over a shared meal produced a variety of responses with a number of commonalities running across the different age ranges.

Summaries of the responses received follow.

## SUMMARY FROM STREET MEETING

### Children Input

RED denotes more than one person raising same issue.

- Don't like stairs (in houses)
- Don't like fast cars (speeding)
- Walk with adult (safety)
- Hitting houses with basketballs
- Bikes and scooters get stolen from properties
- Too many cats
- Mow the grass more often
- Clean up all the glass off the street so not as dangerous for children when playing
- Don't like the rubbish on the road
- Hate when people spit on the ground
- Kids don't wear helmets
- Teenage Bullies in area
- Noise at night-time – stereos
- Like the school bus
- The walkway is scary
- Pollution in river

## SUMMARY FROM STREET MEETING

### Teenagers input

- General tidy up of houses, inside and out
- Make a skate park at Four Square like Kaikoura
- Clean up pollution at foot bridge
- New tar seal on road
- Clean up the playground at Four Square
- Clean up Lone Legion Pad (maybe a park)
- BMX track at park
- Basketball court at park
- To much glass in area
- Dogs running loose
- Rugby/soccer posts at park

## SUMMARY FROM STREET MEETING

### Residents input

- Speed/dangerous driving
- Parking on street corners
- People use this area as a dumping ground e.g. wrecked cars etc
- Numbers on posts at intersection
- A neighbourhood where everyone knows each other + + + + +
- Stain the timber fences
- Emergency housing/accommodation for people in need
- Noise at night from stereos and loud vehicles stereos
- People loitering on street at night being loud
- Pollution in the river (foot bridge)
- Footpaths need fixing
- Speed sign zones
- Parking – yellow lines on corners
- Kids playing on the road
- People throwing rubbish over fences
- Lighting on the street
- Road sweeping more often
- Lack of information e.g. Saturday express, leaflets, pamphlets
- Visitors driving fast, especially on the corners
- Area well established (people) + + + + +
- Gangs (not good)
- Everything looks the same (Dix Cres)
- Long term residents + + + + +
- Mental Health House
- More frequent rubbish pick up
- Houses are drafty in the winter (Housing NZ)
- Neighbours not looking after their yards
- Social Services Agencies needed
- Housing NZ not fixing things
- Accommodation too expensive

Research also noted that people who lived in the area were victims of offending, perpetrators, has a poor sense of "community" as felt trapped in their homes due to low market values for those who owned their properties and an unwillingness on the part of Housing New Zealand to move residents out of the area due to significant problems getting homes re-tenanted.

For some residents this was a positive as over time they had come to know a select few of their neighbours. For others it was a major issue.

Harms resulting from the problems included victimization through being a direct victim of offending but also, secondary victimization such as people fearing to leave their homes after dark and feeling scared most of the time.

Other harms were more immediate and easy to fix such as children feeling uneasy on streets due to broken glass, high speed traffic, wandering animals and the presence of rotting rubbish.

When this data was given consideration, it became apparent that a holistic intervention could address a significant number of the problems identified not only as a result of police offending data, but also those issues raised by residents.

The history of issues in this area dated back for as long as anyone could remember and certainly for at least 20 years.

Police felt that tensions in the neighbourhood had reached breaking point with the recent homicide and that now an uneasy void existed. The choice was fill the void with an intervention that helped things to do right or leave the void for re-colonisation by undesirable elements and then spend our time reacting to things that were going wrong.

Prior to this intervention being applied, there was no consistent or integrated problem solving approach for the neighbourhood – in fact it would be fair to say the only attention the area received was 'reactive' in dealing with things that were 'going wrong' with no attention being paid to assisting things to 'go right'.

This had developed prejudices and stigmatization amongst not only the agencies who dealt with the things that were going wrong (police in particular) and the community as a whole (as reflected in property values etc), but amongst the residents themselves.

Not only did they view themselves in a poor light due to the way in which their community was viewed, but they tended to see police in particular in a negative light with the only interactions being those when police responded to calls, took family members into custody or executed search warrants.

The impact of this negative interaction on children was of major concern.

In summary, research showed us that:

- there were (relatively)high levels of criminal activity and police attention in this area
- the area was viewed by residents and the community as a whole in a negative light
- the area was considered one where criminal activity would be tolerated
- many of the problems raised by residents would be easily addressed
- issues within the community were longitudinal
- a holistic intervention was required

Given the extent of the issues raised and the scope of underlying issues that research showed to be present in the majority of communities with a demographic profile similar to this community, a holistic intervention was required.

This intervention needed to address situational crime prevention, social dysfunction, environmental conditions, community interactions, relationship deficits (internal and external) and public, resident & stakeholder perceptions.

It was felt that a holistic second generation CPTED project would address these areas and specifically:

- apply CPTED principles to the built environment;
- provide residents with the opportunities to improve their physical living conditions both inside and outside;
- afford the opportunity to residents to seek social service support as they wished through a regime of agency door to door visits;
- open the door for cultural and spiritual connections through the presence of representatives of agencies and churches who would interact with residents;
- upgrade infrastructure to produce a higher quality of public space;
- address logistical matters (animals, rubbish etc) by the provision of no-cost removal

The development of this response was structured around two areas.

The first were the matters raised by the residents.

It was important for people to see their concerns being addressed even if we, as police and social service workers, may have felt that too many cats on the streets (for example) was a minor matter when violent offending was taking place!

Secondly, we wanted to provide a forum where people could have social services brought to their doorstep in an effort to address underlying issues.

Finally, we believed that relationships between police, council and residents could be improved by appropriate staff working alongside residents to undertake physical tasks that they wished to have done in an attempt to improve their physical environment.

With our response plan, we also aimed to reduce offending and victimisation in the area, to build social capital and enhance interpersonal interactions at a community level.

Resourcing for the intervention was forthcoming from the New Zealand Ministry of Justice via its Crime Prevention Unit which held a contract with council.

Police committed personnel, vehicles and expertise.

Council committed personnel, vehicles, equipment, financial resources and political support along with roading services, animal control, street sign replacement etc.

Housing New Zealand committed personnel, advanced their upgrade schedule to coincide with the project and assisted with rubbish removal costs.

A further 16 social service organisations committed to have staff on site for the duration of the eight day intervention so that there was a blanket coverage of the area during operational hours.

With all these people on board, the intervention was confirmed and material distributed to residents advising of times, dates, what equipment was available for them to use and what assistance could be expected.

Difficulties in implementing the project were virtually non-existent. The concept seemed to capture the imagination of all those involved.

Underlying this was an unspoken sense that the area had previously been considered in the "too hard" basket and had been in some instances neglected.

The intervention took place over an eight day period – half of which was in the school holidays.

This was deliberately planned to engage children.

Residents - dumped over 150 cubic metres of rubbish; mowed their lawns; established gardens; cleaned their homes and sections; disposed of old cars, caravans and trailers; trimmed trees; worked alongside police and council staff at a person to person level and on an equal footing; interacted with social service agency representatives; handed over their unwanted pets; trapped stray animals; had broken windows replaced; had their locks, latches and gates repaired; cleaned glass off their footpaths; took part in education sessions on animal care; received complimentary health packs and information; engaged in stop-smoking programmes; established enduring therapeutic relationships; got to know police, council and Housing New Zealand staff as "people" who were just the same as them and; painted a colourful mural on the alleyway which had been a hot-spot for taggers.

At the end of the intervention, a street meal attracted over 100 attendees from within the area.

Once again the mayor officiated and thanked residents for their efforts to change their neighbourhood.

The day after the meal, all the children who had helped with the project were taken on a day trip to an indoor climbing wall in an adjoining urban area.

After the initial eight day intervention, police and council staff returned for a further two days about three weeks later and then again for three days six months later.

Neighbourhood Support groups were established with every household becoming a member.

The results from this intervention were both immediate and longer-term.

Immediate results included the improvement in the relationship between police, council and the residents.

Not only did the main police representative on site (Community Constable) begin to receive intelligence from residents, but front line staff reported a noticeable difference in the attitudes of people when they were called to the area.

Co-operation rather than resistance was the new way of dealing with police!

Email from community constable on reports received from target area after the initial eight day period follows:

## Email from Senior Constable Russell Smith (28.12.2008)

*I have had a look through my records and since the inception of the CPTED Project in Lucas Street/Dix Crescent I have had 13 calls from various residents, all of which would not have previously been made as the residents expectations were that they would not get a response unless the call related to a serious incident.*

*Six of the calls came from Dix Crescent residents and 4 were information from residents about illegal or suspicious activity on the part of other residents or visitors to the street. The other 2 were related to requests for referral to other agencies.*

*One of the calls was from a Shirtliffe Street resident to tell me about the small amount of graffiti that had been penned on a mural butterfly near their end of the Shirtliffe/Lucas alleyway.*

*Two of the calls were from Lucas Street residents, both involving thanks for the 'no-parking' and 'centre-line' road marking that had resulted from the project, with comments about how the centre-line on the bend had led to safer driving practices by most drivers in the area and how the no-park lines at Dix Crescent entrance had also removed a road hazard, improving visibility and safety when drivers were turning in and out of Dix Crescent into Lucas Street traffic. Both also questioned when the no-park lines for both sides of the curve in Lucas Street north of Dix Crescent would be added as suggested in residents wish-list. They felt this was necessary as vehicles parked regularly on the southern approach to this bend in the road and this caused vehicles travelling around the bend to cross the centre-line to avoid clipping parked vehicles.*

*Two more calls came from residents in Lucas Street, both of which reported vehicles driving in an unacceptable manner, both of which were followed up by police.*

*A Lucas Street resident bounding the old bikie property asked me for advice about ensuring that a reasonable fence was erected on their boundary by the new owner of the property when it was developed. Advice was given.*

*A last Lucas Street call was from an elderly resident complaining historically about some children 'egging' her house. I have dealt with this and the children concerned.*

*I haven't recorded any other calls or approaches I've had, but I know I've also dealt with a number of requests for information about other agency help, use of the mower, hedge-trimmer and other community equipment we made available to residents, and lots of approaches asking about what they can do about a raft of things like youth-related trouble, people using properties as thoroughfares, aged fencing issues and parked vehicles partially blocking driveways etc. Many of the project area residents and residents from outside have asked about when we will be returning with the big bins or when we'll be doing a project like this in another specified area (Elizabeth St, Gardiner St, Girling Av, etc)*

*All in all, I would say that from my view-point alone, the project has given many residents in the area the confidence to approach agencies like police with problems in the expectation that we will endeavour to help them.*

*Russell Smith*

Council noted no incidences of tagging for eight months and then one small tag with felt pen was reported by three different residents within a few hours of it appearing.

When a motor vehicle was abandoned in the crescent (as was typically the case) two residents rang police and another rang council to ask for it to be removed.

Prior to this, abandoned vehicles just sat there unreported.

Housing New Zealand reported that they had fewer problems tenanting houses in the area and those residents who were there, did not seem so keen to move out.

The objective of improving relationships had been successful as had the concept of changing perceptions of the community and the residents.

Residents were surveyed as to how they found the intervention and whether or not their views on their neighbourhood had changed.

A summary of these results follows.

*Where appropriate, results are summarised below with responses averaged (figures in bold font). Scores are rated between one and nine with nine being the most positive and one, the least positive.*

1. What were the best things about the CPTED project?

- removed stray animals (2)
- tidied up area
- new mural (2)
- helping elderly tidy their sections
- removal of rubbish (3)
- a tidier, cleaner street (3)
- the neighbourhood working and coming together
- "just what the hood needed"
- provision of resources for those who could not afford them
- lifter morale and pride in households and sections
- cheerful, friendly people (2) (police and council staff)

2. Before the project started, how would you rate your understanding of what was planned? **7.00**

3. Was the information that was circulated to your household helpful in keeping you informed of the project? **9.25**

4. How helpful was it for you having access to tools and machinery? **7.67**

5. How helpful was it to you being able to dispose of your rubbish in the skips? **7.63**

6. Overall, how did you feel about your neighbourhood and property before the project started? **3.00**
7. Overall, how did you feel about your neighbourhood and property before the project started? **7.56**
8. Any suggestions on how we could improve the project
  - come 2 times a year
  - door to door inspections of properties
  - more road markings to slow down vehicles
  - info on dog care and restrictions
  - recycling

The most significant results from this survey was the improvement in resident perception of their neighbourhood raising from an average score of just 3.00 to over twice that at 7.56.

Police incident / offending reports were analysed as was the intention at the start of the intervention.

In the three years prior to the intervention, there had been an average of 78 police interventions in the area per annum. This meant on average, each household had been visited 1.66 times.

This is a relatively high rate of police interaction for the policing district.

When data from the calendar year of the intervention (2008) was reviewed, a significant reduction in offending / incidents was forthcoming.

In 2008, police were involved in a total of 46 incidents.

This represents a 41% reduction on the average for the previous three years.

Significant variances within this were:

|                   |         |
|-------------------|---------|
| Burglaries        | + 10.5% |
| Willful damage    | + 17.2% |
| Drugs / Alcohol   | - 11.5% |
| Vehicle           | - 5.0%  |
| Domestic Violence | - 5.0%  |

These significant variables, suggest that people have a greater level of confidence in police to deal with offences that are reported and increases in reported burglaries and willful damage, suggests a greater sense of proprietary for the area amongst occupants.

Reductions in other types of offending suggest that the enduring therapeutic relationships established by a number of social service agencies has resulted in improved social functioning amongst families.

A cost-benefit analysis was then undertaken.

The intervention cost in the vicinity of \$ (NZ) 40 000.00 including an estimate of the time spent by staff and social service agency representatives.

Using figures supplied by the New Zealand Treasury which outline the cost of crime in the community for the 2003/4 fiscal years (the most recent data available) and applying these costings to the reduced level of offending in each offence category during the 2008 calendar year as opposed to the three year average prior to the intervention, a saving of \$ (NZ) 200 000.00 was made.

After deducting the cost of the intervention, it is concluded that a net return of \$ (NZ) 160 00.00 in savings has been made.

To date, there is no suggestion of a displacement effect – which was not expected given that the offending was linked directly to the residences and the physical area of the target project.

Maintenance of the results are an important aspect of this intervention.

Police and council staff will visit the area twice a year for two years and then once a year thereafter for one more year.

On-going maintenance is gradually handed over to the residents who, through their neighbourhood support group structure, develop a self-management approach.

This is already in place and is functioning particularly well.