

COLLEGE HILL HOMES
A Case Study
Tampa, Florida

The College Hill low-income housing complex is home to over 2600 residents occupying approximately 650 out of a total 710 apartments. The complex has long been considered a high crime area by the Tampa Police Department, particularly with regard to traffic in illicit narcotics. During 1988, 4.1% of all narcotics arrests city-wide were made at College Hill, which represents slightly under 1% of the city's population and less than 1% of its geographic area. *(added) This problem has grown worse in recent years.*

The drug most frequently seen in the complex is crack cocaine, which is sold throughout the complex. Marijuana and powder cocaine are also readily available in College Hill, as is Heroin. Sales of the latter, however, are usually conducted in only a few locations. Other drugs, including LSD, mescaline, amphetamines, and barbiturates, have been seized in drug arrests at College Hill, but are less common.

The high volume of the traffic of illicit drugs at College Hill has resulted in an increasing level of violence. Half of all 1988 narcotics related homicides in the city of Tampa were committed in the complex, as were ten percent of all non-narcotics related murders. The high prevalence of drug use by College Hill residents has taken a steep toll in other terms as well. The complex was found to have 36 times as many narcotics related deaths per capita as the remainder of the city (3.05 per thousand vs. .085 per thousand), representing over 25% of all 1988 cocaine related deaths in Tampa. College Hill also led the city in terms of drug related births, accounting for a full 4.8% of all Tampa infants born addicted to narcotics.

In June of 1988, the Tampa Police Department came to the conclusion that its current enforcement techniques were not succeeding in reducing the magnitude of the drug trade. A new strategy was needed. A team of six field officers, each trained in Problem-Oriented Policing, was consequently assembled under the supervision of Captain Bob Seal and Lieutenant K.C. Nevcomb. The unit, made up of Officers Bill Davidson, Fred Gennille, Hike Niemi, Julie Prouty, John Quicci, and Sergeant Phil Hickel, was assigned to patrol the College Hill area and work with the residents to root out the area's drug dealers.

A management team composed of representatives of the Mayor's office, the State Attorney's office, the Judiciary, the Tampa Housing Authority, and the Police Department, was formed to assist the field officers. The team was designed to help develop strategies to combat the drug problem at College Hill, and to facilitate the unit's dealings with government agencies, when necessary. The managers of College Hill and the Ponce de Leon apartments, the latter of which lies adjacent to the target complex, also served on the management team.

In implementing the project at College Hill, the Police Department, in conjunction with the management team, determined that it should strive to meet four goals In its efforts to address the drug problem:

- * To gain support from the community in the Police Department's efforts to combat the sale of illicit narcotics.
- * To educate and motivate the community to attack the problems of illicit narcotics and crime in their neighborhood.
- * To reduce the fear of violence associated with the sale and use of illicit narcotics.
- * To return control of the community to law abiding citizens of the community.

ANALYSIS

The first phase of the project was to collect data on the nature and scope of the drug problem. To that end, the officers conducted a Resident Survey during the months of July and August, 1988. The survey involved a questionnaire of seventy-one questions pertaining to the environment and crime problems in College Hill. A slightly modified random sample, in which every fourth address was selected to take part, was designed for the survey. Only adult, permanent residents were included.

The survey results confirmed police suspicions that fear of victimization plagued the residents. 88% reported that they stay in at night to protect themselves and 70% avoided certain areas altogether. The officers also learned that 92.7% of those surveyed believed drug dealing to be the community's most serious problem and 88% were concerned about their children becoming involved in drugs. Few of the respondents (25.8%), however, had called the police within the last year to report any type of illegal activity. Fewer still (19.2%) had done so in the last month. Officers who conducted the survey developed the impression that the tenants lacked a positive sense of community. Such lack of community concern, they believed, diminished their willingness to work with police in fighting drugs in the complex.

The officers next looked at the Department's arrest statistics and learned that 52% of those arrested on narcotics charges at College Hill resided outside the complex, although nearly half of those persons lived within 10 blocks of the complex.

Information was also collected by officers as they patrolled the area, either on foot or riding one of the several bicycles they had purchased. They quickly determined through observations the identities of many of the persons selling drugs in the complex and began to call them by their full names. The various dealers in the College Hill area are particularly well entrenched, many having become adept at obtaining apartments in the complex to use as work stations. In such cases, they either pay the lease holders to allow the apartment to be used to store or sell drugs or coerce the tenants with threats of violence. The standard recruits are black females who are single parents. As over 90% of the heads of households at College Hill are single, black females, the dealers have a large field to choose from. The dealers usually form a network of apartments in a particular location, always including several possible escape routes.

Aside from the unusually high volume of drug dealing taking place, one of the most striking aspects of the complex observed by the officers was its poor appearance. The complex sidewalks were lined with trash and debris as were the several courtyards and the solitary playground. The trash dumpsters serving the complex always overflowed with garbage before the city collectors came to empty them. In addition, the apartments sat adjacent to a large area of vacant land littered with broken bottles, old carpet, automotive parts, etcetera. The property had become a dumping ground for unwanted items. Team members believed that such conditions contributed to the poor sense of community among the residents.

The officers also observed that the drug trade generated a tremendous amount of vehicular traffic in the community. Many of the individuals who entered the complex by car drove at excessive speeds, making the streets unsafe for the numerous children who played in them or near by. The traffic also was believed to contribute to resident fears about the drug traffickers, as strangers were always entering and leaving the area.

Still another problem noted by the officers on patrol was the inadequate street lighting during the evening hours. Many areas in the complex are in total darkness after sundown. Such areas serve as havens for criminal activity, particularly drug dealing. The problem, they believed, was not so much the lack of street lights, but the fact that the light bulbs were not quickly replaced after burning out, or in many cases being shot out.

RESPONSE

Given the nature and extent of the problem at College Hill, it was obvious to the field unit that any response must necessarily involve some stepped up enforcement. Drug dealers operated freely throughout the complex. The officers intended to change that and demonstrate to the residents that the dealers were not untouchable. Consequently, members of the management team met with representatives from the Vice Control and Selective Enforcement Bureaus. It was agreed that those units would be available for special requests from the College Hill patrol, and as a result, several joint operations, such as buy-busts and reverse stings, were arranged to put pressure on the area dealers to leave the area. The patrol officers, in turn, worked with the management to evict those tenants they determined to be connected to the drug trade.

Increased police presence was also thought to be an important part of the project, and yet after several months in the complex, the patrol officers noticed that they had yet to see a single police cruiser on a routine patrol through the community. They notified the management team, which arranged for the area to be regularly patrolled by X-Ray squad, one of several vehicular patrol squads in the area. In addition to the patrols by X-Ray squad, Officers from the foot/bicycle patrol were in the complex every day, working to identify problem areas and tenants, and trying to forge a positive relationship with the law-abiding residents.

In December of 1988, after several months in the complex, the Problem-Oriented Policing officers went to work on the street lighting situation. Officer Quicci, assisted by Officers Gennille, Davidson, and

Info could also be
Reverse
S*, FPS

how did officer
facilitate
evictions?

Nleai, and a representative of the Taapa Electric Company, conducted a survey of the lighting conditions. Maps were used to plot the locations of every street light and pole in the area. Each light pole was recorded by its specific pole number as well as by its location. The lighting survey determined that the current vattage (100) of all existing lights was inadequate.

> I don't know how the determination was made? Know how determination was made?

Once the lighting survey was completed, Officer Quicci contacted the Taapa Electric Company to begin the process of addressing the lighting problems. During their discussions, Officer Quicci discovered that, while the electric company owns and operates all street lights within the City of Taapa, the Tampa Housing Authority pays for their use in its low-income housing developments. Quicci immediately contacted THA representatives and included them in the discussions. Working together, a proposal was drawn up to upgrade current light fixtures to 400 watts and to install an additional 50 light poles to the complex. On March 15, 1989, the proposal was approved by the City Council and the new and improved fixtures were quickly emplaced. Officer Quicci then secured an informal agreement from the electric company that any inoperative light would be replaced within 48 hours of notification by the police.

The Officers next turned their attention to the vehicular traffic. As indicated, much of the traffic in the community could be attributed to the illicit drug activity in the area. It was readily apparent from the appearances of the drivers that many of the individuals observed cruising the area did not reside in College Hill, and were most likely there for some illicit purpose such as making a drug purchase. These characters were frequently white and drove expensive cars. Officers noted that they just didn't "fit" in the environment. The individuals usually left very quickly after completing their business.

Officers Quicci and Nleai documented their observations about the excessive vehicular traffic in College Hill and suggested to the management team that "traffic diverters," or as they are more commonly called, "speed bumps," be installed throughout the community. Doing so, they argued, would deter excessive vehicular traffic and slow down existing traffic. The officers' suggestion was considered by the management team and approved on March 22, 1989.

Quicci and Nleai then contacted the city's Department of Transportation, Public Works Division, and arranged for a work order to be issued. Initial reluctance on the part of Public Works supervisors to quickly install the speed bumps was overcome with the help of the Mayor's office, which made the project a high priority. As a result, the work was completed within two weeks.

Parking at College Hill was another area the officers chose to address. In January of 1989, the community was overrun with vehicles. Cars could be seen parked on the grass, across traffic, and driven on sidewalks and lawns. Many vehicles were believed owned by non-residents who had come to the complex to buy drugs. Others were disabled or abandoned and served as drug storage places for local dealers. Still another problem stemmed from the fact that police could not distinguish between vehicles belonging to residents and those belonging to non-residents. Miami-Dade County decided to implement a parking decal program to limit parking to residents and their guests.

↓ Officers Niemi and Proity (added)

The program was designed to provide each person who could show legal residence in College Hill with a decal for his or her vehicle. Personal identification and valid Florida vehicle registration would have to be provided, and installation of the decal on the inside rear windshield would have to be conducted by a housing authority employee. Each apartment was entitled up to two parking decals.

Non-residents of College Hill would be issued either a three day visitor's permit/ which may be renewed, or could park in designated visitors spaces for up to four hours. Visitor's permits could be obtained once the visitor disclosed the name and address of the resident being visited, and information on the particular vehicle for which a permit was being requested.

The parking decals and visitor's permits were to remain the property of the Tampa Housing Authority following installation. It was necessary to file a report if the decal or permit were lost or stolen. The owner was held responsible for removing the decal in the event the registered vehicle was sold. Any person found to be in possession of a missing or stolen decal was to be prosecuted under Florida theft statutes. Finally, any vehicle found parked without proper decal or permit, or found parked in a visitor's space for more than four hours, was subject to having their vehicle impounded by the city at the owner's expense.

The next steps in implementing the parking program were to improve the parking facilities and designate the different parking areas. The Tampa Department of Transportation, Signs and Markings Division, was contacted->by Officer Prouty } Prouty to assist the College Hill officers in painting stripes designating the (added) various parking spaces within the parking area. City workers also installed "handicapped only" and "no parking" signs. Finally, Officer Niemi arranged for each space to be labeled either "Permit Only" or "visitor's only."

Residents of College Hill were informed of the new parking regulations through the use of special flyers which were distributed to each apartment. A copy of the flyer was also posted on the College Hill Homes Office. No complaints or grievances were aired by the residents during this time period. After the program went into effect in mid-April, approximately 150 permanent decals were issued to residents, confirming police suspicions that most of the complex tenants did not own cars.

Shortly after implementation of the parking program. College Hill patrol officers scheduled a neighborhood clean-up day. The event, planned and coordinated by Officers Prouty and Niemi, was intended to boost community involvement, enhance resident self-esteem and cooperation, and improve the physical appearance of the complex. The clean-up was held on April 29, 1989.

Prouty and Niemi contacted numerous organizations, both public and private, to solicit donations and participation in the clean up. Several local businesses agreed to donate food and beverages. Others donated items such as records, radios, sports equipment, to be given away as prizes. Mr. Audley Evans, Executive Director of the Tampa Housing Authority, and Mr. James Harrell, Manager of College Hill Homes, both

volunteered to take part. Mr. Harrell even provided rakes, brooms, shovels, hedge trimmers and a tractor, and assisted the officers in the selection of the areas to be cleaned. WTMP, a local radio station, provided a mobile disk jockey who played music throughout the days activities and gave away donated prizes. The event received favorable coverage from some of the local print and electronic media. More importantly, judging from the high turnout, which grew steadily as the day wore on, it was enjoyed by the residents who took part.

Several areas in college Hill were targeted during the cleanup. The playground and basketball courts were primary targets of the endeavor, to improve the recreational opportunities of the youths in the complex. The Nursery building and most common areas were also cleaned. Finally, litter in the large vacant field adjacent to the complex was also picked up and made safe.

The field was also the subject of an additional project of the College Hill team. Following the neighborhood clean-up. Officer Quicci contacted representatives of the Housing Authority and arranged for the grass and weeds growing on the land to be mowed by THA maintenance people. He next spoke with the Tampa Electric Company and obtained enough used telephone poles to completely enclose the property. Placement of the poles was accomplished by the borrowing a Garage Wrecker and a generator from the city. The poles were arranged to divide the property into two sections. The first was to provide additional parking for residents and the second was to serve as a recreational area for the complex residents. The patrol officers are currently soliciting contributions from local businesses to purchase and install a set of football goal posts and a baseball back-stop.

ASSESSMENT

After one year in the complex, College Hill patrol officers report that much has been accomplished there. While drug dealing continues to take place at the complex, it is less visible than in the past. Vice Control continues to attempt undercover operations in the complex, and both Vice Control and Special Operations have worked hard to assist the patrol officers when their help was needed.

The street light project has been very successful. 94% of the residents questioned in a follow-up survey reported being either satisfied or very satisfied with the brighter lights and the frequency with which inoperative lights are replaced. The six percent who reported being unhappy complained that they had difficulty sleeping because the lights were too bright. To date, only a few street lights have become inoperative, and in each case it was the direct result of someone shooting the light out. In such instances, the fixtures were replaced immediately.

Traffic in the complex has been slowed dramatically by the introduction of traffic diverters. The reduction in speed has made the area more safe for the residents, particularly children, and has allowed officers to record the licence plate numbers of frequent visitors to the complex, by checking plate numbers, they can verify whether the drivers live in the area or not, and determine whether they have criminal records. Such information might be useful for future operations in the complex. Officers also report that the height of the diverters has deterred some visitors from entering the complex. Results from the patrol's follow up survey indicated that 87% of the College Hill tenants were satisfied with the addition.

The parking strategy has also been favorably received by College Hill residents, although some problems have developed. While 99% of the residents surveyed felt the program had been a good idea, 39% indicated a need for improvement. Some tenants stated that the Tampa Police should be more vigorous in its parking enforcement. Others requested that the three day period for visitor's permits be lengthened. Nevertheless, the system has been very helpful to police in distinguishing between resident and non-resident vehicles and it has ridded the neighborhood of abandoned cars. The Patrol Officers are currently working to address specific resident complaints.

Perhaps the most successful action by the police department was the neighborhood clean-up. Officers described the event as the "turning point" in their relations with the tenants. Following the clean-up, neighborhood children began to follow patrolling officers through the complex, offering encouragement and seemingly looking upon them as a positive force in the community. Residents have been more willing to approach officers to relay information about criminal activity, or to identify suspected drug dealers. When dealers are arrested, witnesses applaud the police instead of berating them, as was known to happen in the past. The atmosphere has changed from distrust to gradually increasing levels of cooperation. Police even suspect that a spirit of community is growing.

All the goals of the project have not yet been met, but great strides have been achieved. Officers describe their relationship with the residents as being much improved than in the past, but they have not yet managed to obtain organized community support. Tenants are working harder to stop the flow of drugs into their community, and have showed an increasing willingness to inform the police about illegal activities they witness. Residents, always aware of the problems of the drug trade, are now much cognizant of what they can do to fight it. Fear remains a serious impediment to change, but better lighting, heightened police presence, and a reduction in the more blatant street dealing taking place have had their effect. Residents are less reluctant to leave their homes at night and tend to avoid only a few remaining problem areas. Violence, while still high relative to most parts of the city, has been greatly reduced. It will be some time before College Hill is free of drugs and drug dealers, but the journey toward that goal has begun.

1) Statistics are being collected by Joe T.
Presumably, the Assessment will be revamped following new findings/conclusions.