An Experiment in Community Policing
Delray Beach, Florida

Introduction to Community Policing

In recent years there has been an emergence of interest in a perspective in law enforcement called "Community Policing" (Trojanowicz and Carter, 1988; Alpert and Dunham, 1986; Kelling, 1988). The perspective argues for the placement of the police officer into direct contact with the community^^eing policed to strengthen the ability of the community to respond to its crime problem. Communities which are more able to become orderly and provide for the needs of the residents, inherently have lower incidences of disorder and criminal behavior (Suttles, 1972; Greenberg, Rohe, and Williams, 1985).

The perspective reflects an evolution in law enforcement philosophy about how to maintain order in the community (Kelling and Moore, 1988). The perspective is also a reaction to the perceived difficulty with the traditional crime control model of law enforcement (Packer, 1968) which stresses that order is external to the community and should be maintained by the police. It could be argued that there is an inherent contradiction in the "Crime Control Model". Simply stated, the perspective would appear to be most effective in communities which are inherently orderly, those with good schools, effective government, social institutions which intervene to prevent problems from rending the fabric of the community. In communities with endemic social problems, the application of the crime control model results the limitations of the perspective becoming apparent. The police then become responsible for maintaining order in a society which

has lost the ability to function as a society (Wilson and Kelling, 1982; Kelling and Stewart, 1989). The attempts by the police to restore order to disorderly societies are manifested in ways which are inherently counterproductive. The use of force as represented by the police as a means of maintaining order is basically an ineffective substitute for the naturally occurring, order maintaining mechanisms in the community. The philosophical and empirical question then becomes one of determining how to supplement these mechanisms in the community which enables the community to function as a community.

There is an equally important inherent difficulty in the implementation of community policing models of law enforcement. In any organization, the transition from one organizational style to another is especially difficult, particularly when there are identifiable benefits to be associated with the status quo (Sparrow, 1988). In the traditional model of law enforcement, the police maintain great control over the identification of their role in both government and the community (Goldstein, 1977) and engage in behavioral roles which are rewarded. The autonomy results in little risk due to change, because change is not mandated ^ffiichaels, 197jEJ^ On the other hand, there are some indications that change may be necessary. There is a realization that there is a finite amount of resources available in the community for education, recreation, health, and municipal services. The is also some evidence that even dramatic expansions in the amount of law enforcement services can only have marginal impacts on the levels of crime in the community

2

(Pate, Bowers and Parks, 1976). Consequently, in some areas, the police have become frustrated enough with the difficulty of maintaining order that they have experimented with some new approaches to old problems based on the emerging body of research in the field of community policing (Goldstein, 1979).

The following research is primarily a case study of an experiment in the field of community policing in the city of Delray Beach Florida. The research was directed at the design and implementation of a community policing program in a police department which had extensively utilized the traditional crime control model of policing.

Background

Delray Beach is a suburban oceanfront community located in Palm Beach County, Florida approximately 20 miles south of West Palm Beach, Florida. Over the past twenty five years a racially segregated area in the western part of the city has evolved into an area of twenty blocks with a significant crime problem. Furthermore, the area is located along the avenue which is the major entrance to the city. The result is that instead of being an aesthetically pleasing tree-lined boulevard which serves to draw people into the city, the area is generally viewed in less pleasant terms. The vacant lots, haphazard commercial development, disorderly congregations of people on Friday and Saturday nights, and generally deteriorated conditions are viewed as a gauntlet to be run by those seeking to enter and exit the city.

The problem area is not one which has been newly created.

It is a function of the historically segregated neighborhoods which many cities in Florida developed. Located on the outskirts of the city in the early part of this century, the area at one time was isolated from the white community, and in effect functioned as a community with its own churches, schools and small businesses. In the 1960s the expansion of the city to the west, and the completion of the interstate highway system with an exit onto Atlantic avenue, the thoroughfare which bisects the community began to have deleterious effects. The interstate served as the western boundary of the black community. The interstate also opened up the western part of Delray Beach to development. The black community was now isolated, and became an area to be transited as expeditiously as possible without having to stop. Inconsistent zoning practices, the lack of planning, and uneven development along West Atlantic resulted in the creation of an area which was both blighted and ignored.

The incidence of public disorder developed into a problem of si jnifleant proportions which was of concern to the residents of the area. Individuals congregated along the street and in the numerous vacant lots along the West Atlantic area. In the evening, starting at approximately 6pm, cars began to pull into the vacant lots and individuals began to gather. As the evening progressed, there were instances of loud music, solicitations for prostitution, public drinking and intoxication, and drug sales. Many of these individuals were not residents of the area but came because they perceived they had the freedom to violate community standards.

In recent years as the city has expanded to the west, and as traffic has increased, the residents of the city have been presented with an area which has been transformed from one which is visibly, distasteful to one which is now threatening and potentially dangerous. Individuals traveling through the area have been threatened, and robbed as they have wa ited at stop lights while they transit the area. Public drinking, and drug sales and prostitution are visible.

The impact on the residents of the West Atlantic area is also visible. Historically, the area had functioned as a community which had a relatively low crime rate. While the segregation of the i area cannot be condoned, the residents did have institutions which enabled them to function as a community. The growth of the incidences of public incivilities (Wilson and Kelling, 1982) such as those described above are frightening to the residents from outside the area. For those from the community who do not have the option of driving away, the impact is serious. The actions of the city also contributed to the loss of control of the residents of the area. The failure to enforce building and city code standards resulted in the visual impression of neglect and decay. In the early part of the 1980s immigrants from the Caribbean, particularly Haiti .oegan to crowd into the rental properties of the area. Not infrequently, more than one family would move into a rental unit with the result being 10 to 12 individuals living where not more than 3 or 4 were intended by the housing code. Along the streets, the lack of recreational areas resulted in lawns and landscaping being

destroyed.   Furthermore, again through inconsistent code

enforcement, the appearance of trash piles, boarded up houses and

abandoned cars presents an image of abandonment, neglect and

decay.   Not infrequently, the abandoned houses were turned into

"crack cocaine houses" and the anonymity of the new intruders who

do not abide by community values provide opportunities for the

sale of drugs and prostitution.

The incursions of the intruders, and the loss of control by

the long time residents of the area created a situation where

they were basically intimidated by the threats of those who did

not respect the values of the community.   Because of the

pervasiveness of the crime problem, and the disorganized and

powerless state of the community, the residents perceived that

there was 1 ittle that they could do to regain control of their

community.   Local community leaders represented the community's

dissatisfaction with the disorder, but were relatively powerless

to enforce community standards on the intruders, or to enforce

public laws designed to create c: der in the community.   The

problem of the perceived fear of crime had come to significantly

alter the behaviors of the residents and became a reason to

intervene (Moore and Trojanowicz, 1988; Conklin, 1975).

A pattern of interaction occurred which relates to the

actions of those congregating on the street, and the residents of

the area.   The dissolution of informal patterns of social control

in the neighborhood and community disapproval has resulted in a

situation where concerted efforts were required to improve the

image of the area and improve the qual ity of 1 if e for the

residents.

The Traditional Police Response

The previous efforts of the Delray Police Department to confront the crime problem in the West Atlantic Avenue area were characterized by the crime control approach. Previously they had attempted on several occasions to use law numbers of officers in tactical deployments to sweep the area to remove those who were viewed by the police as illegally congregating and threatening the public. Since the judicial system was not prepared to process several hundred arrestees, and the arrests were typically without "probable cause", the vast majority of the individuals were released because congregating on the street represents no violation of the law. It could be argued that these actions were counterproductive because they presented law enforcement as ineffective in dealing with problems which are deeply embedded in the community. Therefore, the perception that the problem is simply one which can be resolved by law enforcement is erroneous and its failure has been empirically documented. *Where?*

An Experiment in Community Policing

Several factors were responsible for a new approach to the problem of disorder in the West Atlantic area. First, there was the recognition that the problem was not primarily an enforcement problem, but a community problem. In effect, the community was no longer capable of functioning as a community with the ability to create a situation where it could informally sanction those who did not abide by community standards. Second, there was a recognition by the leadership of the Delray Beach Police

7

Department that the police should work to strengthen the order producing mechanisms of the community. Thirdly, there was the recognition that the community would have to become stronger if community controls were to be strengthened. Each of these issues were not addressed individually. Instead, it was recognized that they were interconnected. The perspective which was developed was that short and medium term interventions had to be developed. The short term interventions involved the police working with the community to regain_control_j>ver the community. The medium term interventions involved strengthening the infrastructure of the community.

A task force was established to assess the nature of the problem in the West Atlantic area. The task force consisted of the police leadership, the city manager, community business and religious leaders, representatives from the j udiciary and the state attorneys office, as well as the authors, from Florida Atlantic University and Florida International University . The task force represented the first broad based community response to the problem. The result was that there was a consensus that the community disorder was having a corrosive effect on the residents of the area. Furthermore, it was recognized that any efforts by the police to simply cordon off an area and to remove the offenders would do little do increase the support of the local citizens. The police agreed that their role should be one of both helping the residents to preserve the standards of the community and that of enforcing the law. This was a movement away from the traditional crime control model and an experiment

by the department in the area of community policing.

The Strategy

The research initially focused on the short term problem of restoring order and strengthening the community's ability to control disorderly behavior. The strategy involved controlling public drinking, the loud music, the congregations of outsiders in the vacant lots and the threats to those transiting through the West Atlantic Area. First, access to the vacant lots was blocked. This simple application of crime prevention through environmental design principles controlled access of outsiders to the area. This was accomplished by altering the environment through the placement of old utility poles along the boarders of the lots. The poles were then sprayed with a creosote compound to prevent their deterioration and use of the barrier as seats.

The police recognized that their interaction with the public in support of this project would also be critical. They established a tactical zone for the West Atlantic area in which the project would be implemented. They recognized that in addition to their traditional law enforcement functions, they would be responsible for supporting the community efforts to become more orderly. A special task force of selected officers was formed. The officers were selected to insure that they were committed to the goals of the project. They received an orientation on the philosophy of the project which was conducted by their supervisors and community leaders. One element of this was to increase the number of interactions between the police and the community to reduce the level of stress. It was recognized

that if the police could interact with the community on a normal or non-incident related basis, the levels of cooperation between the police and the community could be increased.

The community leaders consulted with the police and a Community Support Agreement was developed and disseminated to business, property and community leaders in the West Atlantic area stressing the need for a partnership between the community and the police. The partnership was further reinforced by the increased contact between the police and the community. The police officers were encouraged to leave their cars and to meet with business owners and residents. The result was to increase the confidence of the public that the police supported their goal of having an orderly community. While this was not the first time that the police have had these types of contacts with the public, it is the first time that the efforts were embedded in a philosophy of community policing.

Police Contacts With the Disorderly Element

It had bc?n recognized that there would be some confrontation between the police and the individuals who threatened the integrity of the community. The focus by the police, this time, in contrast with earlier situations was one of prevention, rather than confrontation. The intention to prevent the congregations of unruly individuals and to block their access to the areas to^bo restrict®! along West "Atlantic" Avenue was announced in the madia in advance of its implementation. Since the businesses and residents of the area supported the efforts to eliminate those who were harming the quality of life in the area.

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the police were strongly supported.

The police emphasis on prevention rather than arrest was effected through the creation of a citation form which basically warned the individual that they were trespassing and that their behavior was in violation of the community standards. The intent was to create a situation where arrest was not the preferred disposition of the case. The plan was implemented through the use of coordinated vehicle and foot patrols. Since the intent of the program had been announced in the media, and through the use of fliers, the police efforts were not viewed as confrontational.

This theme of prevention rather than confrontation was also well received by the judicial system. In the past the coordination between the police and the judiciary was evidence of the "Criminal Justice Nonsystem". The previous police sweep simply resulted in the jail system being swamped with more cases than could be handled, but also with the judicial system dismissing the vast majority of the cases. The police interpreted this as evidence of a lack of support for their work, rather than of the poor quality and inappropriate nature of the arrests. With arrest being used only as a last resort, there has been a dramatic improvement in the quality of the arrests which were presented to the judicial system. Friction between the two elements of the criminal justice system has been significantly reduced.

The Outcome of the Police Intervention

The incidence of public disorder was substantially reduced through the implementation of the project. The first week, the

Delray Beach Police officers assigned to the project issued sixty-four warnings. The next week, this number dropped to thirty-six, and in the following weeks the numbers have been reduced to eighteen and then eight on the final week that the data were collected. Approximately 75 percent of the citations were for loitering, twenty percent for public consumption of alcohol, and 5 percent for trespassing. The public response was favorable and in marked contrast to earlier instances of confrontations with the police. By approaching this problem through consultation with the public, the police viewed their efforts as being strongly supported by the public. This stood in marked contrast to the historical patterns of interaction between the Delray police and the public which they served.

The Public Response to the Police Intervention

The research on community crime prevention supports the thesis that public disorder has a highly corrosive impact on the integrity of the community. In effect, communities are much easier to destroy than created. Along West Atlantic avenue, some residents and merchants have responded to the police initiative through painting, cleaning up around their businesses, and installing landscaping at their own expense. One important outgrowth of these efforts was the creation of a neighborhood development association by merchants in the area. Others have hired persons to clean streets and sidewalks in front of their businesses on a regular basis. Visually, these efforts represent a small but remarkable effort to create some elements of a desirable community and environment and to support the efforts of

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the police.   These efforts support the contention that community controls can be developed and supported by the efforts of the criminal justice system to assist the community in maintaining order in the community.   It demonstrates that when the police reconceptualize their role, that both the community and the police benefit.

In   reviewing   the   development   of   the   plan,   and   its implementation, and the outcome of the efforts of the police and the community, several points should be emphasized. First, this represents a new type of cooperation between the police and the community.   The efforts go beyond the public relations by which most police-community relations efforts are characterized.   The efforts represent a type of cooperation which attempts to preserve community values and improve the quality of life of the residents of the West Atlantic community.   While the results have been limited by the relatively small amount of resources which have been devoted to the project, the nonetheless should serve as a demonstration of the potential for commitment, progress and leadership to have a positive impact on the community.   Finally, these efforts should be viewed as first steps in a long-term plan which is directed at fundamental structural change in the community.   It is recognized that a community is more than a congregation of individuals. Communities are first and foremost desirable places to live.   They are places where individuals want to work and keep their homes.   They are places where they want to raise their children and send them to school.   Consequently it is recognized that in the future, the

efforts of the larger city of Delray Beach will have to be directed at the West Atlantic community. The historical pattern of isolation and neglect will have to be abandoned, and concerted efforts made at strengthening the infrastructure in the community to create the sense of community which is desired. The response of the police, in turn will have to support these efforts because the extent to which communities and informal social controls are strengthened, then the efforts of the police, as mechanisms of formal social control are also made more effective.

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