# Proactive Collaborations and Data-Driven Responses to Address Crime and Societal Problems



# Herman Goldstein Award Submission 2024



#### <u>Summary</u>

This submission will outline the proactive collaborations and data-driven responses to address crime and societal problems in the City of Oneida, NY. The City of Oneida is the only city located within Madison County in upstate New York, spanning approximately 22 square miles, encompassing a mix of urban and rural terrain, with a population of approximately 11,000 people. The City of Oneida is situated halfway between two larger cities (Syracuse and Utica) where there are flourishing crime problems, which often find their way into Oneida. (See the RVCRI site profile link at: <u>https://ruralvcri.org/agency-profiles/oneida-new-york-police-department/</u>)

Unfortunately, the City of Oneida has experienced a chronic and frustrating problem of crime and quality of life issues within certain areas of the City, especially in the once vibrant downtown area, now home to subsidized housing and empty storefronts. Based on police experience, it was known that this chronic problem needed to be addressed differently. The approach needed to be comprehensive, long-term, and sustainable, and address both crime and underlying causes of the criminal activity. It was clear the solution could not rest with the police department alone, and that we would need to enlist not only other city departments, but others as well, including the community stakeholders and residents.

Beginning with an initial scan of the problem, we identified specific index crimes which we wished to address. Subsequent scanning also identified underlying problems, including mental health and substance abuse, as well as environmental issues, which we also took action to address. Using data analysis, we identified where and when these issues were occurring, and we employed various response techniques to respond to these issues. Through our ongoing use of the SARA model, and through collaborations, we continue to proactively address these issues, and seek further guidance, assistance, education, and peer-support both with our own initiative, as well as providing problem solving guidance to others who have similar problems and initiatives.

#### **Initial Project Funding**

To support project activities, the Oneida City Police Department (OPD) was awarded a FY21 \$150,000 grant from the US Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA), as part of their <u>Rural Violent Crime Reduction Initiative (RVCRI)</u>, aimed at reducing violent crime and addressing problems associated with violent crime in the community. OPD was awarded a supplemental RVCRI award in the amount of \$50,000 in 2023 from the <u>Safety & Justice</u> <u>program at Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC)</u>, which serves as one of two RVCRI Training & Technical Assistance (TTA) providers. In October 2023 OPD was awarded an additional \$300,000 grant from BJA.

Each of these monetary awards are being used towards implementing and expanding crime reduction strategies, improving investigations, improving services to victims, enhancing collaboration between local stakeholders, training, deployment of personnel and technology, environmental and technological improvements, and expansion of community-based crime prevention programs and partnerships with victim services providers. The goal is to ensure that our efforts to reduce crime and improve quality of life provide a long-term impact for the community well-being.

#### **Description**

The OPD recognized the need to address recurring crimes, disorder, public safety, and quality of life issues within certain geographical areas of the City which have been habitual and chronic problems for decades. To address these issues, with long-term sustainable results, OPD's approach has embodied and integrated approaches found in various concepts, including:

- Problem Oriented Police
- Compstat philosophy
- Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design
- Community-Oriented Policing
- Intelligence-Led Policing
- Place Network Investigations
- Situational Crime Prevention
- All-crimes approach
- Deterrence-based approach

To initially obtain a strategic understanding of the problems OPD employed the use of the **SARA** model (Scan, Analyze, Respond, Assess) to identify and analyze the problems (both real and perceived), as well any underlying causes, and then to determine the best way to respond, and assess our response(s) and any changes to the problems. Understanding that the SARA model is not linear, but rather is a circular process that encourages ongoing analysis and strategy refinement, the stages will be listed more than once as we felt the need to revisit throughout our ongoing initiative.

#### **Initial Scanning**

A key goal of the RVCRI program is to reduce rural violent crimes and victimization. As such, the department began by identifying the initial focus/problems of the initiative to include the following index crimes: assault, burglary, robbery, weapons offenses, and homicide related crimes. To secure appropriate levels of data for longitudinal study, the OPD's records staff compiled incident report data from the local record management system, from 2017-2022. We then enlisted the assistance of the CNY Crime Analysis Center (CNYCAC) to analyze the data and create mapping products and actionable data which allowed us to see the locations, dates, and times of the violent crimes over the 5+ year period.

#### **Initial Analysis**

The CNYCAC provided an analytical and mapping product, showing WHERE and WHEN the index crimes had previously occurred. The initial mapping product showed highlighted heat signature areas at certain geographic areas in the City of Oneida, where higher levels of criminal activity were identified. *(Appendix #1)*. The results shown on the mapping product further corroborated the historical experiences of OPD and the suspected geographic areas of concern, each containing a few blocks, which we identified and labeled as: 'Hot Spot A', 'Hot Spot B', and 'Hot Spot C'. Each hot spot had varying levels of residential, business, and commuter areas, some with more than others. As a result, we designed our initial response to focus on these hot spot areas. *(Appendix #2 & 2A)*.

#### **Training**

While the initial analysis was underway, OPD proactively sought additional training opportunities. The Chief of Police attended an evidence-based policing course through George Mason University, which was sponsored by the New York State Division of Criminal Justice Services (DCJS). Additionally, OPD sent two Officers, a Fire Marshal, and the Director of the Parks & Recreation Department to CPTED training. The training was invaluable in showing the different departments what roles they play in the overall goal of reducing the opportunity for crime.

The project managers saw the importance of applying CPTED to this initiative, so OPD worked with LISC's Safety & Justice team to create short training videos to provide a basic understanding of CPTED for Officers and City Employees. Four videos were created and sent to the various City department heads with the request that they take the time to view the videos, to provide a better understanding of what CPTED is and what role they play. *(Appendix #3)* 

Understanding the importance of getting Police Officers to 'buy in' to something different, OPD took an alternate approach to training our Officers in CPTED. We explained what the initiative was, and how we wanted to incorporate the use of CPTED and community engagement to address crimes. Officers learned that this project would include data-driven deployments of Officers to specific areas, on specific dates and times. Officers were informed that while participation was not mandatory, those who wished to participate had to watch the training videos to understand CPTED better. This ensured that the deployed Officers had a basic understanding of CPTED and wanted to be part of the initiative.

Two Officers also attended the DCJS Public Safety Symposium where they attended breakout sessions relative to the project, including training about data-driven problem solving, public communication strategies, building strategic partnerships, data-informed community engagement, etc. Each of these presentations provided valuable information and insight which could be applied to our initiative in the City of Oneida. The networking aspect of the symposium also offered OPD Officers the opportunity to interact with others who have similar projects underway.

#### **Initial Response**

Using the data from the CNYCAC, we initially began deploying Police Officers to the hot spot areas in May 2023. The deployments were scheduled to occur during the days and times which the data indicated activity was most likely to occur. We first focused on reducing the opportunities for the targeted crimes. While the presence of uniformed Police Officers can be a deterrent, we ensured deployed officers used the CPTED principles to make note of any environmental issues they felt should be addressed.

Additionally, the Officers were instructed to canvas the residences and businesses in their assigned 'hot spot' area, and conduct in-person interviews with the residents, business owners, employees, employers, patrons, etc. Officers asked the people about their views and concerns regarding the specific area and for suggestions on how those issues could be addressed. While OPD did meet some initial resistance due to public perception, as well as buy-in from some personnel and community members, we knew it was crucial that the community know about the initiative and show that the department valued their input. Upon returning from deployments, Officers submitted their observation notes which were compiled into a spreadsheet detailing their locations, observations, and suggestions, all of which were subsequently analyzed for further action. *(Appendix #4 - standardized deployment activity sheet)* 

#### Additional Analysis

The information gathered and provided by Officers identified problems including environmental issues, crime locations and actors, and other concerns from citizens. It was clear that many citizens were uncomfortable and fearful of the areas and had concerns of personal and/or property harm/theft while they were in the hot spot areas. This also impacted businesses who suffered losses due to low sales from concerned customers while having their own fears and concerns regarding the possibility of theft, damage to their property, personal injury, and overall perceptions of the area in general. Furthermore, there were complaints regarding loitering, the cleanliness of the area, drug paraphernalia found on sidewalks and parks, general upkeep, and maintenance of properties, etc. It was clear that the concerns and fears of speculative harm had an overall negative impact on the areas, community, and society, and that the community did not feel as though enough attention was being paid to these problems.

The notes from the Officers also provided recommendations, from both Officers and citizens, on how the issues could be addressed. Many of the issues identified could be categorized into included: unsightly abandoned buildings/lots, violent crimes, property crimes, substance abuse & sales, disorderly & nuisance problems/places, community/area cleanliness, chronically mentally ill people, and an overall lack of community engagement. Therefore, we analyzed that information to determine WHAT could be done, WHO could do it, and HOW.

#### Additional Response

Understanding the concerns regarding the lack of community engagement, we enlisted the assistance of the public relations research class at Syracuse University's Newhouse School of Public Communication to help us evaluate how we could better communicate with the

Page 8 of 27

community. OPD presented the project to the students and asked for their help in researching how best to communicate with the community. Throughout the course of the semester, the students conducted their own analysis, research, and surveys and presented their final reports to us. Their reports indicated that there was in fact a need to expand our public outreach and communication, with some recommendations.

With an understanding of CPTED, and the analysis of the environmental concerns noted, many of the issues were quickly identified, and responses were formulated. For instance, OPD addressed complaints about excessive litter by utilizing grant funds to procure attractive trash cans, and then strategically positioned them in hotspot areas lacking public receptacles. There were complaints of bicycles strewn around and leaning against utility poles and buildings, leading to thefts, arguments, and unsightly conditions. Therefore, to combat thefts and disorderly conditions caused by scattered bicycles, OPD purchased and installed bicycle racks in hotspot areas. (*Appendix #5 - photos of new trash cans & bicycle racks*) There were public areas which were dark and created an optimal atmosphere for criminal comfort. Therefore, OPD enhanced safety by installing bright LED lights in dimly lit public spaces. (*Appendix #6 - before & after photos of some new lighting*)

Furthermore, we continued regular deployments of Police Officers into the hot spots, during the days and times which crimes were most likely. With a better understanding of the problems and concerns in the areas, Officers were directed to pay particular attention to the identified problems, locations, people, and activity. They were instructed to be proactive, remain visible, interact with the community, and to continue taking notes of any new issues which may come to their attention.

Regarding specific individuals and locations involved in criminal activity, Officers and Investigators were instructed to take enforcement action when possible. Investigators were instructed to research specific locations and to build criminal cases for prosecution. This led to increased enforcement and arrests, especially related to illegal drug activity, including the execution of search warrants resulting in drug seizures and arrests. Officers and Investigators also increased efforts to execute arrest warrants on individuals within the hot spot areas.

We also recognized that there were problems which the police are not capable of addressing. Therefore, we brought other City department heads in and briefed them on the initiative, the findings, and their role in addressing the many issues identified. These other City departments included the Mayor's Office, Codes Enforcement, Fire Marshal, Parks & Recreation, Department of Public Works (DPW), Planning & Development, the Traffic and Sign Department, and the City Engineer. Each department head was provided with the information that the Officers had collected, and specific departments were given specific tasks to assist the effort. Some examples include:

• The Parks & Rec Department addressing a city park with had become overgrown and littered with trash and had become a local hangout where criminal activity was occurring including substance abuse & sales, disorderly & nuisance problems, and assaults. The Parks & Rec Department was given specific tasks as related to the CPTED principles, to clean up the park, allow for natural surveillance, provide access control, delineate the space and territoriality, and ensure regular maintenance. They trimmed up tree branches, cleared foliage from lights, installed trash cans, locked electric outlet receptacles, and ensured the park was tended to on a regular basis. They are also installing signs stating the rules and hours of the park. The efforts in this park thus far have decreased criminal opportunities, provided for legitimate use of the park, and have drastically reduced the problems. This in turn has been a notable improvement for surrounding businesses, as

well as perceptions of the immediate area in general (*Appendix* #7 - *before* & *after photos of the park*).

- The Codes Department and Fire Marshal work together to address nuisance properties and multi-family dwellings which were not well maintained and were conducive to criminal activity and disorder. We asked that they hold the property owners strictly liable for any deficiencies, issue vacate orders, and to make it known that the City was paying particular attention to the properties and would take enforcement action. We also suggested that they enforce any overgrowth related ordinances on properties within the hot spots, so that property owners would take better care of their property exterior, thus improving public perception.
- The use of the DPW to pay particular attention to the public areas within the hot spots. We requested that they frequently clean up trash, clean the streets and sidewalks, mow and trim city owned properties, and remove debris that could be used as weapons (rocks, bricks, broken glass, etc.). We also asked them to trim any low hanging tree branches and remove any dead trees, improving sight lines and allowing streetlights to illuminate areas better.
- The use of the Traffic & Sign Department to install new stop signs where residents had voiced concerns; create 'No Parking' areas in front of properties which were identified as being nuisance properties known for criminal activity; repaint/replace faded/rusted light poles, repaint stop lines in the roads, repaint handicapped parking spaces, fix signage, install new LED streetlights, etc.

#### **Assessment**

In the fall of 2023, OPD again partnered with Syracuse University's Newhouse School of Public Communication. Using our partnership, we collaborated with the students to determine how we could better communicate with the community and continue building positive public communication and trust. The students again conducted research and analysis and provided numerous recommendations, including the expansion of our social media presence, rebranding of the department, and developing online community surveys. *(Appendix #8 - group photo)* 

After consulting with the students, and our RVCRI TTA provider, we created an online follow-up community survey, with a QR code for ease of access, to evaluate the overall effectiveness of our responses thus far. Officers were then deployed back to each of the hot spot areas, and were instructed to go back to each business, residence, citizen, etc. and explain the survey and encourage citizens to participate. Citizens were told that the survey was a method for them to voice their opinions and would allow us to further evaluate and assess our efforts to determine effectiveness and potentially modify our responses. Specifically, we wanted to know if the citizens within the hotspots had noticed any improvements, and whether our efforts thus far had been successful in improving perceptions regarding safety and in deterring/preventing criminal activity. Key results of this follow-up community survey included the following:

- Most of the respondents felt that their neighborhood is now safer.
- Respondents felt that drug abuse is still a big problem.
- Respondents felt that mental health is a big problem.
- Respondents felt that absentee property owners continued to be a problem.
- Improvements in the neighborhoods were being noticed.
- Most respondents noticed and appreciated the increased police presence.

- Most respondents were pleased with the increased attention in their neighborhoods.
- Most respondents felt that the police were more attentive to their problems and concerns.
- Most respondents noticed that the police were more engaged with the community.
- Most respondents felt that the increased police efforts will continue to have a positive impact on quality of life in their neighborhoods.
- Most respondents believed that the ongoing efforts, improvements, and increased community engagement will help deter and/or prevent criminal behavior.

#### Additional Scanning & Analysis

Much of the feedback provided by Officers and community members, obtained through the focused deployments and survey, identified problems with recurring mental health issues and substance abuse related issues. Records staff again collected and compiled incident report data specific to mental health incidents and drug seizures. OPD again enlisted the assistance of the CNYCAC to analyze and map this data and overlay that data onto the initial mapping. The goal was to see if mental health issues, and substance abuse related issues were in fact prevalent in the same areas as the index crimes, as suspected.

The result of the analysis indicated that a vast majority of the mental health issues, as well as substance abuse related issues, did in fact overlap the same hot spot areas where the index crimes were occurring. Therefore, in addition to our focus on the index crimes, we recognized that mental health and substance abuse related issues were underlying problems that also needed to be addressed. A coordinated cross-sector team approach to these issues will be a key focus area for OPD's 2024 deployments.

#### Additional Response

OPD then contacted local mental health and substance abuse professionals and expressed an interest in collaborating with them to determine a proactive way to intervene and address these problems before they get to the level of being involved in crimes. The mental health and substance abuse professionals showed great interest, leading to a follow-up meeting where we discussed the initiative's purpose and reviewed data and mapping products. OPD agreed to provide the Crisis Intervention Team (CIT) professionals with information regarding incidents on a regular basis so they could proactively follow-up with citizens who had experienced mental health and/or substance abuse issues and provide them with the support and services they needed/wanted.

OPD also developed a pamphlet which identified the local resources available and contact information for both outpatient and crisis assistance. Officers and providers/counselors will co-deploy in the hot spot areas together, in an effort to proactively address the underlying issues by bringing the resources to the people and provide the community with educational and any other pertinent materials (i.e.- the new resource pamphlet, drug test strips, Naloxone, Crime Stoppers contact information, 'See Something Say Something' information cards, etc.) in order to ensure that the community knows what resources are available *(Appendix #9 - pamphlet)*.

In addition to the deployments, OPD is also planning on co-hosting collaborative community engagement/educational events which the entire community can attend and interact with the local providers, law enforcement, and other community stakeholders/partners. Educational information will be available, and Naloxone training will be provided to attendees if desired. It is our goal to use these types of events to engage with the community, continue listening to their concerns and suggestions, and provide access to services which may help address the underlying problems, including mental health and/or substance abuse issues. (*Appendix #10 - 2024 event flier*)

#### **Additional Analysis & Assessment**

During 2023, deployments of Officers within the hotspot continued throughout the year. *(Appendix #11 - breakdown of deployments)* In early 2024, the CNYCAC was provided with updated information regarding index crime incidents, mental health incidents, and drug seizures in 2023, for the purpose of analyzing and mapping the data. This was to see if there were any changes in WHERE and WHEN the incidents were occurring, and any changes in the volume of incidents. The results of the analysis revealed that the issues mostly remained within the 3 hots spots, with some minimal variations.

Anticipated reductions haven't been fully realized yet, but OPD is continuing proactive collaborations and efforts to deter/prevent crime and increase the quality of life in the City of Oneida. In 2024, we are continuing to work with the CNY CAC, who have agreed to further assist by conducting quarterly analysis and mapping updates, to provide accurate and timely information necessary for accurate response strategy formulation and implementation. This will also help with continued assessment of resource deployment and accountability. In fact, the first quarterly analysis and comparison indicates that total criminal incidents within the hot spots have dropped consistently starting in the 3<sup>rd</sup> quarter of 2023, while drug seizures drastically increased. These can be attributed to our efforts to not only address the index crimes, but to the increased drug enforcement efforts. *(Appendix #12 & 13 - 1<sup>st</sup> quarter analysis of 2024)* 

#### Continued Response (2024)

Currently the department is developing a mobile app to increase public communication and interaction to be released in summer 2024. This is thanks to the aforementioned RVCRI supplemental grant awarded by our TTA provider at LISC.

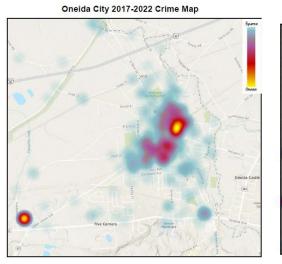
We are also continuing to expand our partnerships with educational institutions. In February 2024, key initiative team members met with Dr. Gregory Drake of St. John Fisher University, who was chosen by DCJS to provide us with additional research assistance. Dr. Drake will provide applicable research as well as evaluations of the methods and tactics used. Also in February 2024, we conducted additional research and internal education into Place Network Investigations (PNI) and sought out the professional feedback and advice of Dr. Tamara Herold on the project activities and its relevance to PNI. Through these proactive partnerships, lessons learned from OPD's grant funded problem-solving initiatives could develop into valuable knowledge sharing opportunities for similar small and rural police departments across the country.

OPD have ventured headlong into a new and likely sustainable crime prevention strategy in rural Madison County focusing on continuing data-driven hot spot deployments. Deployed officers will remain visible, interact with the citizens and businesses, note environmental issues and recommendations and concerns/suggestions from citizens, and take enforcement action when necessary.

The continued work with other City departments facilitates relative accountability to make the necessary proactive efforts to effectively address any issues which may arise. In addition, OPD will also continue investing in environmental improvements, including lighting, cameras, trash cans, bicycle racks, signage, and other applicable technology to deter/prevent crime and enhance the quality of life.

We are also continuing our collaborative relationships with the local resource providers, to include co-deployments, community events/education, and information sharing. By continuing this partnership, we hope to develop strategic intervention plans for reducing the likelihood of violent crimes. We also hope to engage additional stakeholders, implement/expand community-based crime prevention programs, and maintain partnerships with victim & crisis services providers. These proactive approaches have the capability to effectively address underlying issues, which may contribute to crime in the community, while being sustainable for the foreseeable future.

## **Appendices:**

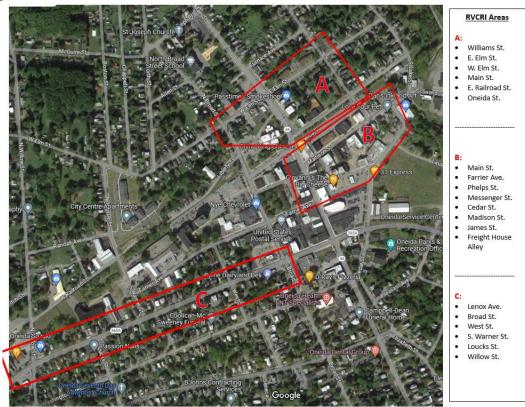


### <u>#1 - Initial Mapping of Violent Crime Incidents, 2017-2022</u>

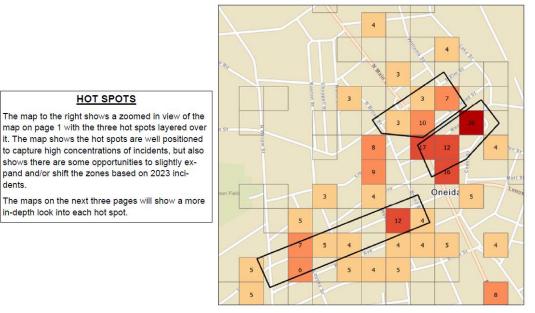
6 Year: 2017-2022 Heat Map



<u>#2 - Established 'Hot-Spots', Based on Crime Mapping, for Deployments/Focus</u>



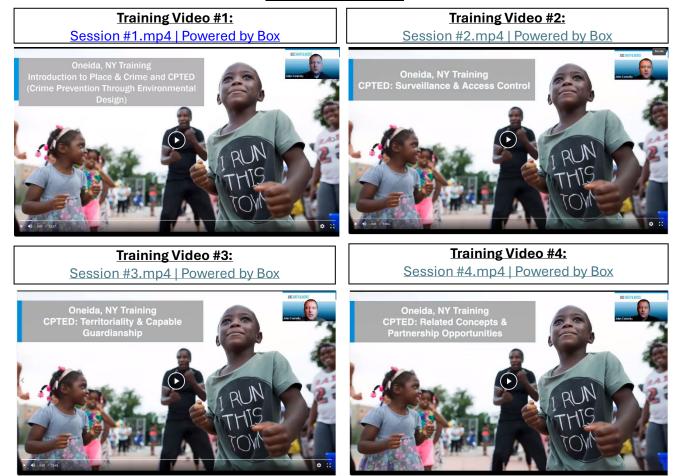
#### <u>#2A – 2023 Overlay Map with Incidents</u>



#### **#3 - Training Videos**

dents.

in-depth look into each hot spot.



Page 19 of 27

### **<u>#4 - Standardized Deployment Activity Sheet</u>**

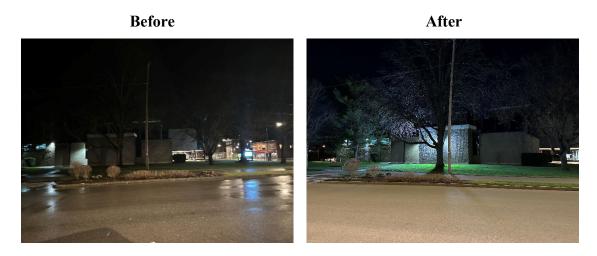
Officer(s):			Patrol Method:		
Scheduled		(Marked/uniform, unmarked/plain clothes, foot, bicycle)			
Shift Hours & Date:		Location:			
Shire Hours & Date.	8 <u></u>				
Citizen Contacts		Total	All Case Numbers		
Proactive Contacts					
Juvenile Contacts			17. 19.		
Group Dispersals					
Community Meeting	(s)		20 20		
Business Contacts					
Other Contacts Not L	.isted:				
		-	25		
			-		
			2		
	the Contractor		0//	-	
<u></u>	affic Contacts	Marnings	Offense	100	-
All Violations (list):	UTTs	Warnings	Activity Offense Description	Arrest V	a Varnings
All violations (list).			Dis. Con.	Allest	varnings
			C.P.C.S.		
	-		Open Container		
			Warrants		
	2	-			
				()	
Total Stops:	Totals:				
Other Activity, Notab	ole Events, Description	of Citizen Conta	cts, CPTED Suggestions, Fee	dback, etc.	
Name	Hours Claimed	Initial	Name	Hours Claimed	I Initials
Name	Hours Claimed	Initial	Name	Hours Claimed	I Initials
Name	Hours Claimed	Initial	Name	Hours Claimed	I Initials

## <u>#5 – New Trash Cans & Bicycle Racks</u>





## <u>#6 – Before & After of new Lighting</u>





Before



After





### <u>#7 – Before & After of Higginbotham Park</u>

Before



### <u>#8 – Syracuse University's Newhouse School of Public Communications</u>



### <u>#9 – Pamphlet for Mental Health & Substance Abuse Resources</u>





### <u>#10 – 2024 Collaborative Community Event</u>



#### Total Day Evening (07:00-15:00) (15:00-23:00) Shift Hours **Proactive Contacts** Juvenile Contacts **Group Dispersals Community Meetings Business Contacts** Other Contact **Offense Arrests Offense Warnings** Traffic Violation UTTs **Traffic Violation Warnings**

### <u>#11 – Breakdown of 2023 Deployments</u>

### <u>#12 & #13 - 1st Quarter Analysis of 2024</u>

#### Central New York Crime Analysis Center

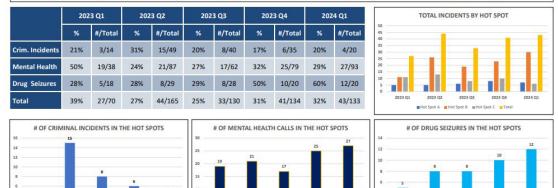
fficial Member of the New York State Crime Analysis Center Network

### City of Oneida Hot Spot Analysis



The following is an analysis for the Oneida City Police Department of the criminal incidents, mental health calls, and drug seizures from January 1, 2023 through March 31, 2024 in the three hot spots identified by the department. The total incidents have increased the last two quarters, driven by increases in mental health calls and drug seizures. Criminal incidents have dropped consistently starting in the 3rd quarter of 2023.

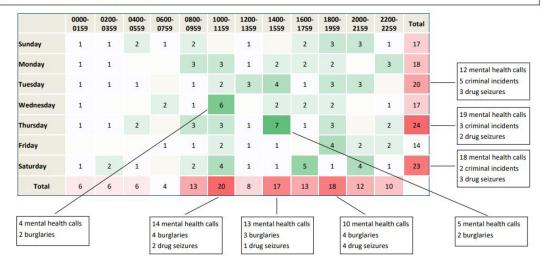
The table below shows the percentages of total city-wide incidents that occurred in the hot spots. The percentage of criminal incidents has remained low, while the percentage of drug seizures has seen a large increase in the last two quarters. The graph directly below shows the incidents by quarter in the individual hot spots, and the graphs on the bottom show each incident type by quarter.



Central New York Crime Analysis Center Official Member of the New York State Crime Analysis Center Network City of Oneida Hot Spot Analysis



The table below shows the mental health calls, criminal incidents, and drug seizures in the first quarter of 2024 by day and time. Approximately 70% of the incidents through March 31 have been mental health calls, and that remains roughly proportional in the breakdown done for the times of day and days of the week with the highest counts. No consecutive blocks of times were among the highest counts, nor consecutive days of the week.



#### Our Team:

- Key Project Team Members:
  - CID Sgt. Michael Burgess
  - Chief Steven Lowell
  - o Clerk Melissa Luck
  - o Michael Stella, CNYCAC Crime Analyst
  - o John Connelly, LISC, Sr. Program Officer
- Primary Project Contact Person:
  - Chief Steven Lowell Chief of Police Oneida City Police Department 108 Main Street, Oneida, NY 13421 (315)363-9113 slowell@oneidacityny.gov
- Secondary Project Contact Person:
  - Sgt. Mike Burgess
    Sergeant of Criminal Investigations Division
    Oneida City Police Department
    108 Main Street, Oneida, NY 13421
    (315)363-9113
    mburgess@oneidacityny.gov