

Community Policing Programs

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As law enforcement leaders consider the history of policing and recent police research, plus changes in communities and in the characteristics of crime and violence that affect them, they find persuasive reasons to support changes in the policies and practices of their organizations. Crime statistics show crime fighting has not had the planned effect of reducing crime. Police leaders, especially in high crime areas recognize the urgent need to meet increased challenges to citizen safety with more effective and innovative methods. As policing leaders have considered what changes need to take place, the concept of community policing, and the philosophy behind it, has drawn increased attention.

Community policing is collaboration between the police and the community, consisting of partnership and problem solving. This rebalancing of the officer's responsibilities affects crime fighting by improving the community problems that affect crime and disorder. Prevention of crime continues to be a priority but many different methods are employed to work toward that goal. New emphasis is placed on tackling the underlying causes of crime by addressing problems at the grassroots level. The community members become active participants in the goal of increasing the safety and quality of the neighborhood, while the police are no longer the only guardians of law and order. The officer's role, supported by the larger police organization, changes to helping community members mobilize support and resources to solve problems and enhance quality of life. The emphasis is placed on community members participating actively in problem solving, and on patrol officers taking a prominent role as they provide policing services. Community members voice their concerns, contribute advice, and take action to address their concerns.

The goal of community policing is to reduce crime and disorder by carefully examining the characteristics of problems that contribute to crime and disorder in neighborhoods, and then applying appropriate problem-solving remedies. Solutions range from simple, inexpensive measures to complex, long-term answers. Problem solving is limited only by the enthusiasm, creativity, and persistence of those involved. Solutions are specific to the particular concerns of each community. The best solutions are those that satisfy community members, improve safety, decrease anxiety, and increase order in the neighborhood.

A problem that has received attention is that of the centralized management structure of most police organizations, which often isolates police from the community they serve. Technology has made response time to calls, requests, and alarms rapid, yet police are reacting to a problem when they answer calls, not preventing or mitigating the problem that led to the call. When officers are isolated and do not have strong ties to the community, and communication between police and community members is limited, police may be unaware of all the problems and dynamics of the community. Community policing presents an alternative way to deal with this. Community members must see

police interest in their concerns and problems as genuine before they can begin to consider the police as part of the community. As the group becomes more active and organized, officers will be less isolated and will have more time for preventing crime. It will be a slow process, but as relationships of trust are established, isolation fades, and information exchange becomes a reality, including information that can prevent crime from occurring.

As police officers become more involved in crime prevention, community policing requires the shifting of initiative, decision-making, and responsibility downward within the police organization to the neighborhood officer. The officer becomes responsible for managing the daily delivery of police services to the community. Officers are given freedom to decide what should be done, and how it should be done, in their communities.

A community includes diverse cultures, values, and concerns, particularly evident in urban areas. Churches, schools, hospitals, social groups, private and public agencies, and those who work in the area are members of the community. This disparate and seemingly unrelated group must become partners with the police. This group has much to offer with such diversity of experience, beliefs, and skills, but the group must be committed and unified in its response to crime and disorder. A goal of community policing is to be a partner in creating self-sufficiency. In order for the process to be successful, community members must make a commitment to take responsibility as a group for safeguarding the safety and welfare of the community. By working with the police to address non-criminal community problems of disorder and neglect, situations which may lead later to serious crime can be recognized, and plans to lessen or correct them can be created.

Community policing can become a force for enhancing democratic principles. The dominant and overriding commitment of community policing should be respect for all citizens, and sensitivity to their needs. All citizens must have equal access to police services to be full and productive partners.

How can the success of community policing efforts be assessed? The evaluation of this policy's success involves an increased level of community resources devoted to crime reduction efforts. Active involvement and financial participation by institutions, agencies, schools, and business demonstrate that community partnership efforts are working. Communities also should begin to initiate and conduct projects with minimal guidance from the police. Renewed activity within the community also will demonstrate the effectiveness of community policing efforts, as citizens become less fearful of leaving their homes. Increased activity in the area will help deter future criminal activity and build more dynamic neighborhoods. It is important to remember that change may come slowly. Any positive results, even of seemingly minimal impact, are still a sign of success since the opportunity is then created for additional positive results in other areas.

Many see community policing as a concept deserving close attention. Policing practitioners themselves are the leaders in this movement seeking change. This reflects a profession that is striving to meet changing law enforcement in a changing society. Examples of successful community policing:

Naperville, Illinois. Police had been dealing with an emerging gang and burglary problem that was centered on a set of high density, multi-family housing complexes. In 2002, Naperville Police Department opened a neighborhood service center in the area. Extended evening hours and a mix of sworn and civilian personnel were on hand to provide a number of basic civic and public safety services. Public safety information such as crime prevention information and assistance with filing police reports were among services offered, as was paying utility bills, and obtaining parking permits. The center was extremely popular, with hundreds of local residents utilizing a variety of services. This brought a renewed sense of community that had far-reaching benefits to those living in the area.

Anaheim, California. In the mid 1990's, the Anaheim Police Department successfully reduced blight and disorder in the Leatrice/Wakefield neighborhood by working with landlords, tenants, and the Office of Neighborhood Services to create a Neighborhood Advisory Committee. This committee was responsible for removing problem tenants and reducing unit overcrowding. In the following years, the neighborhood saw marked improvements in building safety, vacancy rates, and reductions in incident reports. This increased the community members' perceived quality of life, leading to further positive changes.

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