

Community Revitalization:
Is crime control the only key to success?

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The Command College Futures Study Project is a FUTURES study of a particular emerging issue of relevance to law enforcement. Its purpose is NOT to predict the future; rather, to project a variety of possible scenarios useful for strategic planning in anticipation of the emerging landscape facing policing organizations.

This journal article was created using the futures forecasting process of Command College and its outcomes. Defining the future differs from analyzing the past, because it has not yet happened. In this article, methodologies have been used to discern useful alternatives to enhance the success of planners and leaders in their response to a range of possible future environments.

Managing the future means influencing it—creating, constraining and adapting to emerging trends and events in a way that optimizes the opportunities and minimizes the threats of relevance to the profession.

The views and conclusions expressed in the Command College Futures Project and journal article are those of the author, and are not necessarily those of the CA Commission on Peace Officer Standards and Training (POST).

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Introduction

It is true, and we all know it. When our most troubled communities are saturated with a law enforcement presence, crime goes down and the community feels safe.¹ While patrolling the Park Mesa Heights community in the City of Los Angeles, a gang member even said he was happy to see the large law enforcement presence because, it means that he was less likely to be shot at. Using the Park Mesa Heights as an example for community revitalization, the Los Angeles Urban League (LAUL) has created an initiative, Neighborhoods@work, which addresses issues related to education, employment, health, housing, and safety. While focusing on these issues the LAUL strives to bring about a model for sustainable change within the community and improve the quality of life.²

Realizing the issues faced in the urban communities are interrelated and cannot be addressed individually, the LAUL program is designed to attack the problems of the identified elements concurrently. In the Plan, law enforcement's role is designed to be proactive and modeled in a manner consistent with principles of community oriented policing with a strong emphasis on gaining the trust of the community. Establishing confidence within the community is imperative and quick response would not only have to be assured, but also actualized.

Recently, Chief Charlie Beck, Los Angeles Police Department recognized Detective Venus Mason for the arrest of a murder suspect from the State of Georgia. Chief Beck and Detective Mason praised members of the Crenshaw/Park Mesa Heights community who had the trust of the Police Department and turned over a local security guard when they discovered he was a

¹ Center for Problem-Oriented Policing (2004), *"The Benefits and Consequences of Police Crackdowns"*, Response Guide No. 1, Michael S. Scott. Retrieved July 24, 2010, http://www.popcenter.org/response/police_crackdowns

² <http://www.laul.org/neighborhoodwork>

murderer.³ Both cited that “community policing is a two-way street, lined with choices and responsibilities that it works best when we act as full partners, not obstacles or enemies.” The overall strategy and goal for policing is to establish prolonged relationships with other disciplines that would have a stake in participating in the revitalization effort. Capitalizing on successes such as this, a partnership was created amongst the Los Angeles Police Department, California Highway Patrol, Crenshaw High School, University of Southern California, and various other state and local agencies in November 2009 to address mutual community concerns in a multi-disciplinary way.⁴

These collaboratives may be a glimpse of the future on a broader scale. In the past year, the use of community revitalization collaboratives led to policies to preserve communities and stimulate economic health. For example, realizing that crime reduction is the key to community stabilization, Vice President Joe Biden announced in a White house press release dated July 8, 2008, that the role of law enforcement was imperative to building stronger communities. One billion dollars in grant monies was made available to law enforcement for the hiring of additional personnel soon thereafter.⁵

Research indicates that as communities experience gentrification, new and more affluent residents utilize their cultural capital to mobilize community resources to construct brighter street lights, renovate walkways, insist on street cleaning services such as garbage removal, and call on law enforcement agencies to take action against crime.⁶ This means law enforcement agencies

³ Sandy Banks, “Community policing works”, Los Angeles Times (Los Angeles), July 24, 2010, <http://www.latimes.com>

⁴ University of Southern California Center for Economic Development Community Outreach (COPC). Retrieved July 28, 2010 from www.usc.edu/schools/sppd/research/copc

⁵ Presidency News (July 8, 2008). Retrieved 08/10/2009 from <http://www.presidencynews.com/joe-biden-/press-release-vice-president-biden-attorney-general-holder-announce-recovery-act-funding-to-support-law-enforcement>

⁶ American Society of Criminology. Retrieved July 27, 2010 from www.allacademic.com/meta/p_mla_apa_research_citation/2/0/1/5/0/p201502_index.html

will be faced with a more aggressive, demanding, and politically connected community which will put political pressure to redirect additional staffing to their community.⁷

In this article, we will discuss the effect community revitalization will have on law enforcement, and ponder whether it means agencies will be required to shift their strategies to increase community involvement. Will LAUL-like programs create new demands as they are copied on a broader scale? In truth, changes to the scope of policing are coming. On these pages, we will examine what they are, and what we might do about them.

The Issues of Involving Community Revitalization

The LAUL Neighborhoods@work initiative studied the various community programs in the City of Los Angeles. In an effort to improve the quality of life in the Park Mesa Heights community, they established target areas to address issues related to education, employment, health, housing, and safety. Developing programs to address target areas is considered by the LAUL as the common thread to bring success to community revitalization. As health, employment, housing, and education all tie together, and when all four achieve success, LAUL envisions the community transforming into a striving, productive and forward moving environment.⁸ A closer look at each target area will facilitate a better understanding of how they interact.

Health

The goal of the LAUL health initiative is to improve the overall economic health and well-being of the community.⁹ To achieve this goal, Neighborhoods@work focuses on youth

⁷ Freeman, L., & Braconi, F. (2004). *Gentrification from the Ground Up; There goes the "HOOD"*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

⁸ Canadian Centre for Community renewal, Community Economic Development, <http://www.CEDworks.com/CEDdefinition.html>

⁹ Clemson University Restoration Institute, *Community Revitalization*, http://www.clemson.edu/restoration/focus_areas/community_revitalization/index.html

and family wellness, health advocacy, and outdoor activities. The community is engaged on a continual basis through a call-to-action plan, which will challenge the public to take advantage of various health programs that include community health assessments and programs that are designed to improve health outcomes. Through the implementation of innovative strategies, residents and consumers could achieve optimal health.

Law enforcement agencies can take advantage of the optimal health strategies by utilizing their community base to function as the eyes and ears of the collaborative. In Contra Costa County, the Health Services Department has created the Community Wellness & Prevention Program (CWPP).¹⁰ The aim is to improve the environmental, social, and economic conditions that contribute to poor health. The CWPP supports a quality of life that promotes the health and well-being of all county residents, with special attention to the underserved community. To accomplish this, the CWPP works in partnership with individuals, communities, and organizations to increase individual knowledge and skills relative to implementing health improvements. As they educate and mobilize communities, they advocate for changes in organizational policy.

One health strategy sponsored by LAUL and the law enforcement collaborative is the creation of “walking clubs” during times when children are commuting to school. Community members are encouraged to become active during that same time period and report any suspicious activity. Encouraging retirees to walk, water their lawns, become involved as cross walk monitors is one avenue of adding to those present during school commute hours. The increased police and community presence enhancing safe passage for the children has resulted in a decrease in crime associated with walking to school and creates a sense of safety.

¹⁰ http://www.cchealth.org/topics/nutrition/fitness_tips.php

Employment

The LAUL goal regarding employment is to provide opportunities, job training, and business development. During the fourth quarter of 2009, California lost more than five times as many jobs in September as it did in the previous month.¹¹ For community revitalization to materialize and function effectively, employment opportunities must be available for the community.

Police agencies in the collaborative were already involved in cadet programs to prepare youth for employment in law enforcement. The California Highway Patrol's development of cadet/explorer programs is designed to assist the youths with working with law enforcement officers, use of equipment and developing interviewing skills.¹² In the multi-disciplinary collaborative, these programs can also be used to provide employment opportunities through oral interview preparation, establishing relationships with small businesses needing short-term employees, and developing partnerships with local and state government entities with youth employment programs. Other efforts at the federal level can support these services.

The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) has developed "Jobs-Plus", a welfare-to-work project intended to increase employment for low income families on public assistance. Each housing authority is eligible to receive a \$200,000 grant to be matched at least 2 to 1 at the local level for the direct cost of program implementation and research.¹³ The creation of jobs and economic growth derived from this program could be invaluable to the community and assist in the reduction of crime. The creation of accessible jobs deters crimes of desperation that are often rampant in depressed communities.

¹¹ Alana Semuels, "State's job losses just keep coming," Los Angeles Times (Los Angeles), October 17, 2009, <http://www.latimes.com>

¹² www.chp.ca.gov/community/explorers.html

¹³ <http://www.portal.hud.gov/portal/page/portal/HUD/programdescription/jobs>

Housing

The LAUL strives to ensure that current homeowners are able to stay in their homes, and also attract potential new residence to the area. The growing foreclosure crisis has forced suburban law enforcement agencies to tackle a new challenge: policing empty houses. As evictions mount and many houses remain unsold for months, even years, vacant properties have become havens for squatters, vandals, thieves, partying teenagers and worse, officials said.

An article in the Washington Post indicates that in some localities the officers are targeting vacant houses on regular patrols, using maps of foreclosed properties as guides, while working with community watch groups to identify trouble spots.¹⁴ The article reported that in Modesto CA, police reported marijuana is being grown in the yards of vacant houses, in Atlanta, police compile lists of vacant homes, where drug use, prostitution and squatting are becoming more common and in the Tampa area, the Hillsborough County sheriff's office have assigned a detective to specialize in metal theft, a response to a spike in copper tubing, air conditioners and other appliances being stolen from vacant homes. These are but a few of the challenges facing policing on a larger scale.

Law enforcement will see some relief due the second quarter of 2010 decline in default notices. Homes entering the first stage of foreclosure process have plummeted 43.8% over the same period last period.¹⁵ As current homeowners are burdened with the rising cost of everything from fuel to food, they are also quickly reaching the retirement age. The news of

¹⁴ Jonathon Mummolo and Bill Brubaker, "As Foreclosed Homes Empty, Crime Arrives", The Washington Post (Washington DC), April 27, 2008, http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/04/26/AR2008042601288_2.html

¹⁵ Alejandro Lazo, "Housing defaults at 3-year low," Los Angeles Times (Los Angeles), July 22, 2010, <http://www.latimes.com>

decreasing foreclosures will increase the value of homes and provide some financial relief.¹⁶

Currently, vacant homes in urban neighborhoods are a possible blight, and law enforcement agencies must monitor housing conditions within their community. As the economy and housing markets stabilize, the effort of the LAUL and similar efforts then have a foundation for success.

Education

The ultimate goal of any education initiative is to ensure that students are socially and academically prepared to graduate from our middle and high schools on track, work ready, and college bound.¹⁷ To this end, the LAUL is working across the lifecycle of the student, from Pre-K through high school in developed programs like their Neighborhoods@Work. The educational initiatives being implemented across the nation create opportunities for academic enrichment, healthy relationships with positive adult role models, connections with relevant career options, and the development of a supportive peer culture.

Over the past several decades the Los Angeles School Police Department (LASPD) has recognized the need to place officers on the campus of our high schools to provide real time safety. These officers often play a double role; ensuring the safety of the students, and acting as role models.¹⁸

An additional component to the Neighborhoods@Work program is the Crenshaw High School Safe Travel Program. A severe problem and complaint among the students of Crenshaw High School is the constant bullying and theft of items from iPods to sneakers. The school safety component of Neighborhoods@work unites law enforcement with community groups and

¹⁶ Kraus, M., "*Foreclosures Decrease Drastically in California*", Total Mortgage Services, April 21, 2010. <http://www.totalmortgage.com/blog/mortgage-rates/foreclosures-decrease-dramatically-in-California/3066>

¹⁷ <http://www.laul.org/neighborhoodswork>

¹⁸ <http://www.laspd.com/specUnitCPO.htm>

block clubs to assist in the safe passage of children as they travel to school daily. This strategy has attained an overall 7.2% reduction in crime in the City of Los Angeles.¹⁹

Programs such as The Teens, Crime, and the Community (TCC) initiative and Neighborhoods@work have motivated more than one million young people to create safer schools and neighborhoods. TCC's *Community Works* program helps teens understand how crime affects them and their families, friends, and communities, and it involves them in crime prevention projects to help make their communities safer and more vital.²⁰

Is cultural change necessary?

In 1990, the Portland Police Bureau and the City of Portland adopted the “Community Policing Transition Plan,” with a goal of making the transition to a “department-wide” community policing philosophy over the next five years. With a little more than one year into the transition, it was apparent that the most difficult part was changing the way the rank and file approached their jobs.²¹ As Departments realize there is a resistance to change the consideration should be given to adopting a less grandiose project. Instead, developing programs that ask officers to volunteer to participate and are less likely to resist the modification of duties and who will take ownership in the program.

The future of creating partnerships, openness, and collaboration with the community looks more intriguing. New community awareness programs, as well as the ability to identify hot spots for crime, will aid law enforcement personnel in the deployment of personnel and the ability to provide quality information as Departments communicate with community groups.

The Regional Institute for Community Policing has found the recruiting process and basic

¹⁹ <http://www.lapdonline.org>

²⁰ <http://www.ncpc.org/programs/teens-crime-and-the-community>

²¹ Footprints, The Community Policing Newsletter, Officer Wayne Kuechler, Portland Police Bureau, “*Community Policing and Cultural Change: An Officer’s View*”, National Center for Community Policing, Michigan State University, Winter/Spring 1992

training of officers is important, both in content and delivery.²² Law enforcement agencies must examine their training programs to determine if they are training fighters and soldiers, or peacekeepers and problems solvers. This self examination could determine if officers view their roles as compartmentalized rather than taking a broader view of problem and working with the tools available to them to solve a community problem.

This concept is not unique to law enforcement, and is functioning in other communities. The Los Angeles Police Department and the California Highway Patrol are two large agencies who have collaborated to make a change within a community and clear the way for community revitalization. They have combined the resources and talents of both agencies which have had created astonishing results in the crime reduction in the Crenshaw community of Los Angeles. This collaboration has the complete support from the community and their respective government leaders and has seen positive results in crime reduction that surpasses the citywide crime statistics.

As departmental leadership realizes there is a resistance to change, the consideration should be given to adopting a less grandiose project. The focus should turn to developing programs that ask officers to volunteer, decreasing the likelihood of resistance to the modification of duties and ambivalence surrounding taking ownership in the program.

Conclusion

Law enforcement agencies will need to take advantage of initiatives that provide a community-based strategy. This concept is not unique to law enforcement, and is already functioning effectively in other communities. As government agencies continue to provide funding for community revitalization and law enforcement agencies continue their collaboration

²² Doster, B., (2001). The Future of Community Policing, Retrieved 8/2/2009.
<http://www.RICP.uis.edu/Communicators%5Newsletter062001.pdf>

with public/private organizations, community revitalization will increase exponentially. To ensure this change in the community, law enforcement agencies must remain aware of the established targeted areas: creating jobs, maintaining a healthy community, maintaining safe zones around abandoned housing, and providing a safe environment for kids to attend school.

Law enforcement agencies must also foster public/private partnerships that include representatives from community activist groups, government leaders, and institutions of higher learning that create a safer community environment. These partnerships will allow community revitalization to transpire and provide a greater role in community oriented policing, criminal investigations, and general law enforcement.

The traditional method of attacking only crime at its source will no longer be an effective practice. Law enforcement agencies must remain proactive, innovative, and in-touch with the community. Is your agency prepared to establish and collaborate with all elements of community policing? It depends on the level of commitment and understanding of the target areas. At what point do managers decide that becoming involved in the targeted areas will benefit the Department as a whole? How drastically will your agency's strategic plan change? Are your personnel ready to step out of the box?