

**SAFER NEIGHBORHOODS
THROUGH
COMMUNITY POLICING:
VOLUME II**

Three Case Studies

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The United States Conference of Mayors

The United States Conference of Mayors

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INTRODUCTION

Created through the Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act of 1994, the Office of Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS) within the U.S. Department of Justice is responsible for the advancement of community policing in the nation. Its mission has included the addition of 100,000 community policing officers to the ranks of local law enforcement agencies and the provision of grant funds to enable these agencies to acquire new technologies and equipment, to hire civilians for administrative tasks, and to promote innovative approaches to fighting crime.

Through its Mayors' Institute for Community Policing and with the support of the COPS Office, The U.S. Conference of Mayors has actively encouraged adoption and refinement of community policing strategies, integration of community policing with other local government activities, and broadening of the underlying principles of governance within community policing so that they may become part of the fabric of all local government.

In January of last year, in an effort to gauge movement toward these goals, the Conference of Mayors surveyed the mayors of more than 1,000 cities throughout the U.S. – most of them cities of 30,000 and larger which are eligible for membership in the Conference. The survey sought information on how community policing was being implemented in their city, how COPS philosophy and funding were influencing individual agencies and city government overall, and which of their community policing initiatives had realized the greatest success. The results of this survey appear in a separate Conference publication, *The Influence of Community Policing in City Governments: A 282-City Survey*.

Respondents to the survey also were offered an opportunity to provide information on what they considered to be their best community policing initiatives – initiatives which successfully addressed a specific problem in their city. A review of the many examples that were submitted with the cities' surveys found that the largest group of respondents described initiatives which addressed problems in individual neighborhoods. These “best practices” were selected for a second separate Conference publication, *Safer Neighborhoods Through Community Policing: Successful Initiatives in 72 Cities*.

This publication builds on the “best practices” report, describing in greater detail successful community policing efforts in three municipalities – Lincoln, Nebraska; Anaheim, California; and Miami-Dade County, Florida. All are “place-based” initiatives:

- in Lincoln, focusing on problem properties throughout the City;
- in Anaheim, focusing on a neighborhood of privately-owned apartment buildings; and
- in Miami-Dade County, focusing on a public housing complex within a low income neighborhood.

While each case study city addresses problems at different levels in the community, the successful community policing initiative that each has created demonstrates the importance of:

- the leadership and support of top government and police officials;
- the dedication of police officers to the communities they serve;
- the willingness of staff members from numerous agencies, public and private, to work together on common goals; and
- the involvement of residents in identifying and solving the problems affecting their communities.

PROBLEM RESOLUTION TEAM

Background

The City of Lincoln has had a quarter-century's experience with community policing. Starting in 1975 with what was known at that time as "Neighborhood-Based Team Policing," the Lincoln Police Department has made a continuous effort to expand and refine its community-based approach, incorporating it "in the fabric of daily life at LPD," in the words of Lincoln's Chief of Police, Tom Casady.

In 1996, Lincoln's commitment to community policing led to the formation of a Problem Resolution Team, a group of City officials working together to resolve especially difficult problems affecting specific properties in Lincoln – problems for which solutions would require the efforts of two or more City agencies.

The concept of a Problem Resolution Team grew out of the Police Department's work in the early 1990s. As the Department focused increasingly on problem-oriented policing (POP) projects, and as the cooperation of other City agencies was more frequently needed and requested, difficulty in securing that cooperation from agency personnel unaccustomed to police involvement in quality of life issues was more frequently encountered. In an effort to remedy this, Chief Casady asked Lincoln's Mayor (at the time, Mike Johanns) for his assistance in getting the various City agencies to join in cooperative projects. The Chief's proposal for a multi-agency group approach to problems was presented to the Mayor and City agency heads at a department directors meeting, support for it was expressed and, in June 1996, the Problem Resolution Team was established and the Police Department was designated as the lead agency.

Organization

The Problem Resolution Team is composed of a representative of the Mayor's Office, City Council, Police Department, Law Department, Urban Development Department, Building and Safety Department, and Housing Authority, the Lincoln-Lancaster County Health Department, and the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services. These are the agencies which have roles in most of the cases handled by the PRT; other agencies, such as the Planning Department, are brought in where individual cases require their involvement.

The Team meets monthly in the Mayor's conference room. Prior to each meeting, the Team's co-chairs – a top aide to the Mayor and a senior police captain – meet with the Urban Development Department's representative to review the cases on the agenda and prepare for the meeting.

The PRT was launched with the help of a Problem-Solving Partnership Grant from the Justice Department's Office of Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS). The Lincoln Police Department provides its staff support in the person of a Public Service Officer who devotes half her time to tasks such as meeting arrangements and minutes, research needed on PRT cases, and statistical analyses of PRT activities. It has an annual budget of \$10,000 for specific small projects such as neighborhood cleanups.

Team "Evolution"

When the PRT was launched, member agencies were represented by department heads or other top managers. Some were not effective in the PRT environment. With experience, the composition of the Team changed; representatives were more often individuals responsible for field work and therefore familiar with the problem properties and individuals involved in the specific PRT cases. Long-time Team members acknowledged that when the PRT started it was not a team, but that it has evolved into one. They say that current Team members now enjoy a good working relationship, and that this has been critical to the PRT's success.

Based on their experience, Team members offer a number of observations:

- It is important for members of the PRT to have both supervisory and street-level work experience.
- Team members have to want to be a part of the effort and to be willing to go above and beyond their job description in order to make a difference.
- Team members cannot worry about their "turf" and must understand that they have to work with other members in order for the PRT to succeed.

Functions

The PRT's primary functions fall into six broad categories.

1. Identifying Problem Properties

Team members nominate specific troublesome properties for consideration as PRT cases. The houses, apartments and other properties nominated are generally the sources of chronic or repeated complaints or problems; the problems are the kind that detract from the quality of life in the neighborhoods in which they are found – drug use, trash in yards, noisy parties, child abuse, structural problems, assaults and abandoned vehicles, among them.

The properties nominated may be brought to the attention of Team members by residents or may be observed by them in the normal course of their work in the City's neighborhoods. Nominations are also received through a "Neighborhood Hotline" which residents may use to register complaints about their neighbors, and through the Mayor's Neighborhood Roundtable, a monthly event in which residents present neighborhood problems directly to the Mayor.

The PRT does not – indeed, cannot – accept all cases that are referred to it. Those accepted generally involve properties that have had chronic problems and have been the subject of repeated calls for service.

- In 1996, 68 cases were submitted, 37 were accepted.
- In 1997, 58 cases were submitted, 41 were accepted.
- In 1998, 35 cases were submitted, 29 were accepted.
- In 1999, 20 cases were submitted, seven were accepted.
- In 2000, 38 cases were submitted, 13 were accepted.

While there is a rule that for problem properties to be accepted as cases they must require the involvement of two or more separate agencies, exceptions are made for cases involving long-running problems. Care is taken that the PRT does not become a “dumping ground” for cases that individual departments have difficulty dealing with, or that involve problem individuals, and those chairing the PRT do not hesitate to reject cases that are not appropriate. Team members note that the PRT does not actually wish to acquire the kind of high profile in the community that could result in it receiving more complaints than it could properly handle.

The PRT’s focus on problem properties has generated internal debates on the kind of housing maintenance standards that should be applied to the properties in question, and the Mayor has served as the final arbiter on the standards from time to time. The Law Department has cautioned the PRT on the use of political pressure to accomplish its goals, reminding Team members, in essence, that not liking the way something is done does not make it illegal.

2. Gathering and Sharing Information

The Team assembles existing information on cases (reports, correspondence, police dispatch information, etc.) and Team members obtain missing or needed information, often from their own agencies’ records and through visits to the problem property. Team members meet to exchange information assembled on PRT locations and also share information via e-mail.

3. Developing and Carrying Out Action Plans for Specific Cases

In its monthly meetings, the Team discusses possible strategies for resolving or responding to each case selected, and specific tasks are assigned to members on a consensus basis. Each Team member is responsible for coordinating the actions required of their agency in response to specific PRT case needs.

Very often, the strategy selected will be the one that enables the City to make the quickest response to a problem. For example, if a problem is reported as a building code violation, the Building and Safety Department must go to court before it can act; if it is reported as a health code violation, however, the City can act after giving five days notice.

In 1996, the City of Lincoln adopted two quality of life ordinances in response to concerns about increasing blight, particularly in older neighborhoods, expressed to the Mayor by

neighborhood associations and individual citizens. These ordinances serve as powerful tools for the PRT.

- The Housing Maintenance Ordinance addresses inadequate maintenance of properties, including the accumulation of weeds, vegetation, junk, dead organic matter or debris, and dead and dying trees and limbs that present a health or safety hazard. Enforcement is the responsibility of the Building and Safety Department; because public health code violations may be involved, complaints are also forwarded to the Health Department for review and possible action.
- The Junk Car Ordinance addresses the accumulation of junk cars on private properties – vehicles which pose health and safety problems and detract from the quality of life in neighborhoods. Complaints received by the Health Department are referred directly to the Police Department for handling if there is no health risk involved or if other public health nuisance conditions are not present. Historically, 75 percent of these complaints have included other public health nuisance complaints requiring investigation.

4. Evaluating the Results of Intervention

The Team monitors each action plan and gathers information needed to determine whether the problem is resolved or ameliorated. A detailed file is maintained on each case referred to the PRT, the cases accepted as PRT projects, the activities completed, and subsequent complaints or problems at the target locations.

Each PRT meeting agenda includes a review of 1) open cases on which actions are being taken, 2) cases which have been moved to “monitoring” status, and 3) pending cases which have not yet been accepted by the PRT.

Team members offer a number of general observations concerning the impact of the PRT:

- Most property owners are responsive when notified that a complaint has been filed. For Health Department complaints, if the owners do not take care of the problem, the City does; the property owner is then billed for the cost of the City service, plus an administrative fee.
- Property owners may be more responsive when they know that theirs has become a PRT case – understanding that when city agencies are operating as a team, they cannot get away with playing one agency against another.
- When the PRT takes a case, it stays on the “front burner” and gets the attention it needs from the appropriate agencies. If one team member gets a call from another concerning a PRT case, it is treated as a high priority.

Those involved with the PRT from the outset also observe that Team members, because of their often intense long-running involvement in cases, can feel considerable frustration when the PRT interventions don’t work and the problems persist, or when the intervention just moves the problem to another location.

5. Keeping Citizens Informed

Team leaders telephone, correspond and meet personally with complainants and other neighborhood residents affected by the problem properties that have become PRT cases, giving them ample opportunity to be heard, and providing feedback on the status and outcome of those cases.

6. Recommending Policy Changes

Because the Team, through its work, is in a unique position to identify deficiencies in the City's ordinances, policies and practices relating to health, safety, zoning and similar issues, recommendations for correcting such deficiencies are presented to individual City Department Directors, the Mayor and the City Council. Recent letters from the PRT to the Mayor and Council have contained proposals to inspect single family rental houses and duplex houses and to strengthen exterior maintenance requirements.

Key Team Members

Urban Development

Because of the PRT's focus on specific problem properties in the community, the City's Urban Development Department plays a central role in both the identification and handling of cases. The Department's mission is the revitalization and maintenance of low and moderate income communities; responsibilities include administration of federal Community Development Block Grant funds, coordination of existing public and private resources in the City, and creation of economic and employment opportunities. The Manager of the Department's Community Development Division meets with the Team's co-chairs – the Mayor's representative and the Police Department's representative – prior to each PRT meeting to review the cases on the agenda and prepare for the meeting.

Law Department

The City's Law Department assists the PRT with both civil and criminal actions, with one Department staff member in each division handling all PRT case activity. On the civil side, for example, the Law Department writes letters to landlords regarding problem tenants – the first letter generally being cordial, identifying the problem and asking for their help. If the landlord doesn't respond, a second, tougher letter is sent. The Law Department also provides guidance to landlords on proper procedures for evicting problem tenants.

On the criminal side, the Law Department is generally able to file charges when they are warranted based on what the Department considers quality reports from the PRT. For example, when the accumulation of debris on a property is such that it poses a health hazard and results in blighted conditions, it is possible to file criminal charges. The Department begins by sending letters to the landlord stating the facts and threatening criminal prosecution – letters which often have been effective, prompting landlords to give serious thought to evicting the problem tenant involved. Prosecutors feel the judges are now doing a better job handling these cases: Where they once

imposed minimal fines for property owners, they now base fines on the extent and cost of the necessary clean-up efforts.

Team members say the ability of the Law Department to get convictions in PRT cases has boosted confidence in the Department among other City agencies. This was not always the case. The PRT was not a priority for a previous City Attorney and, as a result, the relationship was adversarial – to the extent that the Mayor considered dissolving the office and contracting for legal services. The attorney now handling cases for the PRT is a former Police Department legal advisor who has brought a problem-solving perspective to the job. His meetings with heads of City Departments, including Health and Building and Safety, has increased their willingness to work together and to work with the Law Department.

Building and Safety

The Building and Safety Department's responsibilities include building construction and renovation, zoning, signs, energy conservation, and fire prevention. It's housing code employees enforce minimum housing codes and inspect and license houses and apartment buildings. These responsibilities translate into the Building and Safety representative having a central role in the majority of PRT cases.

Health

The Lincoln-Lancaster County Health Department's programs cover communicable disease control, health and vital statistics, air pollution, animal control, child care licensing, food and general sanitation, and other health-related activities, and the agency operates a Solid Waste Nuisance Program. The Department receives about 1,100 nuisance complaints each year, and health workers attempt to handle these through direct contact with the residents involved. Often, when this is not successful, cases are brought to the PRT.

Housing Authority

The Lincoln Housing Authority was actively involved with the PRT from the outset because of concerns that it was subsidizing bad landlords through the federal Section 8 assisted housing program. Today, problems relating to Housing Authority properties generally have been resolved and it is rare when one is nominated as a PRT case. The Housing Authority steps in, however, when a family involved in a PRT case needs housing or when there is a need for historical information on assistance provided to families with problems. It has established a family resource staff position, and that staff person serves on the PRT, identifying family problems in police reports and helping to secure the services needed to solve the problems.

As a result of the relationship developed through the PRT, the Police Department now provides the Housing Authority with a monthly report on calls for service to the 1,300 units owned by the agency and the 3,000 privately-owned Section 8 units. The report is used to identify both problem landlords and problem tenants. The agency can use the Police Department information to identify drug arrests involving tenants. Because it has adopted a policy of zero tolerance, it has

terminated assistance to some of the tenants identified and recommended treatment for others. Authority officials say that while this policy hasn't eliminated the drug problem, it has forced it underground.

Results of Evaluation

In 1998, an evaluation by the University of Nebraska-Omaha Criminal Justice Department found that, in its first 21 months, the Team had successfully closed 53 of the 63 cases it had handled, and that the Police Department was directly involved in 75 percent of those cases. Among the evaluators' observations:

- “The Problem Resolution Team reduces the likelihood that citizens will be transferred from agency to agency when reporting multiple-problem properties. The Team provides information back to complainants to keep them advised of the progress or results of the Team's intervention.”
- “The team approach cuts through red tape and turf squabbles to focus on the community's problems. The Team has often encountered, and brought about change in, agency practices and ordinances that are outmoded or ineffective. Cases are resolved faster because agencies pursue common goals focusing on a smaller number of locations.”
- “Unlike most criminal justice interventions, success for PRT cases is simple to measure. Typically, cases are resolved when a tenant moves or is evicted, or an owner complies with ordinances or codes. Most cases are closed in a very distinct manner, and there is little confusion about whether the problem is actually solved.”

For PRT members, the most satisfying assessments have been those made by citizens whose lives they have affected. "After endless calls to your department, a physical assault on me and vandalism on my car and more sleepless nights than I care to remember, this situation...is finally over," one resident wrote. "Without the support of you and your team I probably would have sold my house and moved by now. You and your team...have my deepest gratitude for helping me resolve this bad dream. I feel as though I am indebted to all of you. I have my neighborhood and my sanity back."

Lincoln Mayor Don Wesely gives the PRT initiative a positive evaluation, describing it as a prime example of the kind of cooperative partnerships that have been created in his City. “The PRT has led to success in improving our community's problem properties,” says Wesely. “It's a simple but effective model that could be duplicated with ease in many cities.”

Keys to Success

Lessons have been learned by the Lincoln officials who have been associated with the PRT over the years. Among their observations:

- For it to be successful, the PRT must be a priority for the Mayor and the City Council, and the Mayor's support must be communicated to the heads of the various agencies involved.

In Lincoln, one of the Mayor's top aides co-chairs the Team – a key to success, according to the Police Chief – and the meetings are held in the Mayor's conference room.

- Because of the nature of the work done by the PRT, it must be a priority for the Police Chief and other top officers. Because the Police Department is involved in most cases, it is essential that the Department play a leadership role. In Lincoln, the Team has always been chaired or co-chaired by a high ranking member of the Police Department.
- The leaders of the PRT must keep its caseload manageable. This means the PRT must be willing to adhere to its criteria for accepting cases, resist political pressure that may be applied on certain cases, and keep its focus on problem properties, not problem personalities.
- There are administrative duties attached to the PRT and it is essential that an agency staff member be assigned to the Team. In Lincoln, this is handled by a civilian Police Department employee.
- Lack of funding can be a constraint affecting the PRT's handling of cases. There should be a revolving fund that can be used for needed activities such as clean-ups of health-related problems.
- Team members must be careful and tactful in dealing with staff members of other agencies who are primarily responsible for handling the kinds of problems brought to the PRT – i.e., they must be sensitive to “turf” issues.
- The PRT must be given access to the data and information resources needed to handle cases, including Police Department crime data, County Assessor's data on properties, and Housing Authority information on tenants, Section 8 properties, etc.
- For problems in apartment complexes, the PRT must ensure that owners and managers know as much about the problems as does the Police Department.
- Because of the frustration inherent in working with complex cases over long periods of time, it is important to celebrate PRT successes so that the team feels good about the results of its often long term efforts.

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LEATRICE/WAKEFIELD INITIATIVE

Background

In 1993, an Anaheim neighborhood of 5,000 residents in 700 apartment units was responsible for a disproportionately high 2,100 calls for police service. The calls involved incidents ranging from assaults and drive-by shootings to nuisance crimes such as drinking in public and vandalism. Over the years, the neighborhood, known as Leatrice/Wakefield, had become notorious for its rampant narcotics sales and use and its gang activity, and had come to be recognized as the worst neighborhood in the City. The Anaheim Police Department estimated that policing Leatrice/Wakefield consumed one percent of its total budget. The situation deteriorated to the point that the local school district would not send buses into the neighborhood to pick up students, requiring them to meet the buses on the outskirts of the community.

The apartments in the Leatrice/Wakefield neighborhood were grouped in an assortment of 99 generally overcrowded and blighted buildings. No grass grew in the parkways. Vehicles lining the streets served as bases for drug dealing and late-night beer drinking and as gathering spots for gang members. They also shielded drug dealers and gang members from view when police officers drove by. Many of the apartments' garages were sub-let for use as housing, mostly by illegal aliens.

During the early 1990s, the Anaheim Police Department launched several aggressive enforcement initiatives in Leatrice/Wakefield. In the view of one police official, "We thought we were doing community policing, but all we were doing was a great job of arresting people – lots of people." While these enforcement efforts generally would produce immediate improvements in the neighborhood crime situation, none would make a lasting difference.

Introduction of Community Policing

By 1995, the failure of traditional police responses had prompted the Police Department to try something less traditional: the assignment of two police officers to work full time with the community on long term solutions to its problems, and partnerships with other City agencies whose involvement would be necessary to solve the problems. "Our job is to fix neighborhoods," commented one police official, "and we were doing it wrong for years. We need the people's help." In essence, the community officers were empowered to make changes and to work directly with other agencies – primarily the Code Enforcement agency and the Office of Neighborhood Services – to get needed resources into the community.

Taking this new approach required that all involved develop a different "mind set" in regard to service delivery. In fact, it took time for the police officers to make the shift from "going through

channels” in contacting other agencies, to making direct contacts with the agency staff needed to address problems. This shift eventually occurred, however, and police officials believe that this direct contact among agencies accounts for much of the eventual success of the Leatrice/Wakefield initiative.

The community officers spent a lot of time on foot patrol, and while some Leatrice/Wakefield residents were intimidated by this at the start, they came to know the officers personally, developed confidence in them, and began providing them with good information on the sources of neighborhood problems.

Implementing the Initiative

One of the first challenges confronted by the community officers was that Leatrice/Wakefield’s apartment buildings were privately owned by several individuals, most of whom lived outside the community, and had little responsible on-site management. The officers began by identifying and contacting all of these landlords, informing them of the community-wide effort to reverse Leatrice/Wakefield’s downward spiral, and enlisting their help in removing problem tenants and reducing overcrowding in their units. A Neighborhood Advisory Committee consisting of owners and tenants was formed by the City’s Office of Neighborhood Services, and leaders among both owner and tenant groups emerged.

The community officers quickly learned that peer pressure was a key to solving the neighborhood’s problems: Cooperative owners, recognizing that improvements in the neighborhood and the removal of problem residents would pay dividends to them, pressured reluctant owners to join the effort. Owners also felt pressure from the City’s code inspection agency: An aggressive inspection program threatened prosecution if buildings were not brought up to standards.

Resident Leader

Leatrice/Wakefield is a predominantly Hispanic area. Most of the residents are employed – many in restaurants and as laborers – are considered hard-working and family-oriented, and tend to remain in the neighborhood for a long time once they move in. One of these residents, Lila Jaggeares, played a key role in turning around the neighborhood. At the time, Jaggeares had lived in the area for 27 years and had managed the building in which she lived for 20 of those years. Tired of having to “walk around the bad guys” when she took her grandchild to the school bus stop, Jaggeares began calling the Police Department every time she saw a problem. She was aware that other residents were not willing to do this for fear of retaliation from gang members, and while concerned about this, she took comfort in the fact that she had joined forces with “the biggest, baddest gang in Anaheim – the Police Department.”

“No Street Parking” Ordinance

One of the most difficult elements of the Leatrice/Wakefield initiative to implement, and perhaps the most important to the community’s eventual recovery, was a parking ban on all surface streets in the neighborhood. Sought because of the problems created by vehicles crowding the

streets, the “No Street Parking” ordinance, when initially proposed, met with resistance in the community: Apartment owners feared that the inconvenience it posed would discourage and displace renters. Tenants were reluctant to clean out their single-car garages in order to park their vehicles (many of which were inoperable) and were concerned about parking for additional cars they owned as well as parking for their visitors.

Opposition to the proposed ordinance was conveyed to the City Council and a hearing on it in the Council chamber was packed by owners and residents. While the Police Department took the brunt of the criticism for the proposal, it was able to present a well-documented argument for the parking ban and, in a later meeting, the Council approved it in a unanimous vote. According to Mayor Tom Daly, the leadership of the Police Chief at that time – an avid proponent of community policing – coupled with the detailed documentation of the problem and proposed solution, produced the Council’s strong vote of support.

In the view of Mayor Daly, “It was a moment in time when something could be accomplished, and we seized the moment.”

Here again, Lila Jaggeares played a role in the ultimate passage of the ordinance, distributing materials on it door-to-door and organizing several educational meetings for residents which were held in an adjacent park. While there had been significant opposition to the ordinance in the beginning, by the time the City Council acted on it, only about 10 people turned out to oppose it. In the end, Jaggeares says, those who had lived in the neighborhood for a long time supported the ban because they were willing to try anything to improve their living conditions.

Following its passage, the ordinance faced a legal challenge mounted by street vendors working in the area and a few residents. This suit was expected, and the City prevailed in court.

The parking ban was implemented in two phases: In phase one, parking was eliminated on one side of the seven neighborhood streets affected. During the first two weeks of phase one, police officers issued parking violation warnings only; following this, regular parking citations were issued. About two months later, based on a positive assessment of the first phase of the implementation, parking was eliminated on the remaining side of the neighborhood’s streets.

Implementation of the ordinance was preceded by a neighborhood clean-up day on which 15 junked cars were towed from garages and parking spaces by the City, and several other inoperable vehicles were either repaired or removed by their owners. As part of the initiative, residents were provided parking spaces in the apartments’ garages, visitor parking was shifted to the perimeter of the area, and many of the apartment owners added parking spaces on their property to help offset the loss of the street spaces. Police officials believe one of the most important results of the initiative was that many garages that had been sub-let by tenants – primarily to illegal aliens – had to be used for parking.

Short Term Impact

Although they were concerned that the parking ban might produce an increase in the vacancy rate in the neighborhood, by the time it was approved by the City Council, an estimated 85 percent of the apartment owners favored it. Within just one month of the ban's implementation, their concerns had been put to rest: There were a dozen fewer apartment vacancies than before, and additional new tenants were expected.

One year after the parking ban went into effect, an evaluation by an interdepartmental committee overseeing the initiative found a dramatic decrease in criminal activity in the neighborhood, a reduction in calls for police service, a positive impact on vacancy rates (which had dropped 14 percent), and a significant improvement in the visual appearance of the neighborhood, due in part to the fact that many of the buildings had been painted.

Long Term Impact

The overall community policing initiative has had several positive effects:

- Property values have increased steadily in Leatrice/Wakefield since the community policing initiative was introduced. The units are almost 100 percent rented, at higher rents, which means that tenants can be more carefully chosen.
- “Curb appeal” has become an important consideration for owners and residents who now take pride in the area's appearance, and making property improvements has become “infectious” as owners strive to keep pace with one another.
- As part of the effort to stay on top of the situation and keep the problems of the past from creeping back into the neighborhood, the community officers developed an anonymous reporting form for use by both owners and residents. Completed forms are left in a box and picked up by the officers. Today, residents are willing to come forward with information when they see their neighborhood being disturbed.
- Owners and residents are also participating with police officers and private security officers in Saturday night “flashlight walks.” The area's code enforcement officer participates in these events, writing tickets on the spot when violations are discovered.
- A large park adjacent to the apartments which had been gang-infested has been designated “probation/parolee-free,” meaning that it is a violation for individuals on probation or parole to gather there. The park is now the site of classes for area residents in parenting, literacy, English as a Second Language, physical exercise and other pursuits.

A police officer who has been involved in the Leatrice/Wakefield initiative describes it as “the single most important police work I have done.” The Mayor feels it has had a ripple effect in the City with property owners in other neighborhoods recognizing the importance of maintaining

their properties and emptying their garages. Because the parking ban has been so successful in Leatrice/Wakefield, he says, the City has had no difficulty in getting approval for bans in other areas.

Key Partners

Code Enforcement

In Leatrice/Wakefield, the Planning Department has been very aggressive in its code enforcement efforts involving both buildings and parking. The code enforcement officer working in Leatrice/Wakefield is responsible for a much larger area surrounding the neighborhood, but devotes most of his time to Leatrice/Wakefield in support of the community policing initiative. Through this focused effort, the most serious problems have been eliminated, and the goal now is to maintain the neighborhood and keep the previous problems from returning.

The officer uses a City radio to call for assistance with whatever problems are observed: Abandoned shopping carts are reported to a cart retrieval service; street maintenance workers are called when furniture is discarded outside buildings (and a truck equipped with a compactor is dispatched); cars parked in the alleys or on the streets are reported to the police; and a daily report on graffiti is sent to the Code Enforcement Department (and a truck designed for graffiti eradication is dispatched). The officer periodically and randomly inspects properties, giving owners 30 days to correct any violations. If problems are not corrected, the officer is authorized to develop a criminal complaint for filing by the City Attorney.

Prior to the initiative, it was all the code enforcement officer could do to address the exterior conditions of the buildings in the neighborhood; in general, he would act on problems inside apartments only when receiving calls specifically requesting that he do so. With the property improvements that have been made in recent years, he feels he can now begin to concentrate on conditions inside the apartments.

Office of Neighborhood Services

Anaheim's Office of Neighborhood Services, established at about the time that the Police Department launched its community policing initiative, is responsible for improving the livability of Anaheim neighborhoods by enabling residents to assist themselves through partnerships with the City and other community resources. It facilitates cooperation among residents, apartment owners, schools, businesses, religious organizations, nonprofit agencies and City departments, and provides neighborhood residents with a single point of contact to assist in addressing multi-disciplinary neighborhood issues. The Office assists each neighborhood in the development of an "action plan" that identifies problems and the actions to be taken to solve them, and in the creation of a Neighborhood Advisory Council to oversee the implementation of the plan. To help the members of the Council meet their responsibilities, the Office provides them with training: A Neighborhood Academy, conducted every 18 months, covers a wide range of skills and knowledge needed by effective neighborhood leaders.

Leatrice/Wakefield was one of the first neighborhoods in which the Office worked. Office staff focused on bringing together all the neighborhood's stakeholders, including property owners and residents, with local school administrators, police and code enforcement officers. While not an easy process, they say, the ultimate success of the effort was the result of communicating in an honest way with both the stakeholders and the City agencies on the seriousness of the problems in the neighborhood and on the extent of the efforts needed to address them. And one of the most positive outcomes of the process, they say, is that the boundaries that once separated the City departments involved have blurred as a result of their working together on specific neighborhood problems.

The Office administers a \$500,000 Neighborhood Improvement Fund which is used to finance needed projects. In Leatrice/Wakefield, about half of this fund was used to purchase playground equipment and signs and to make other improvements. Additional monies, obtained from a \$5 million bond fund used to stabilize the neighborhoods around Disneyland, was used for a bus stop, street lighting and plantings – all actions called for in the Leatrice/Wakefield neighborhood action plan.

On the basis of the progress that has been made there, the Office is phasing out its activities in Leatrice/Wakefield and shifting its attention to other Anaheim neighborhoods. Office administrators believe that if the property owners remain strong, the problems are unlikely to return. A staff member will stay in touch with the Neighborhood Advisory Council and meet with members at least twice each year.

Private Security Firm

Police officials credit a private security firm, O.C. Metro Patrol, with major contributions to the turnaround of Leatrice/Wakefield. The owner of the firm is a strong proponent of community policing and is viewed as a true partner in the policing of the area. The Police Department encouraged owners in Leatrice/Wakefield to use a private security service that would have access to their properties and so be able to handle problems that police officers could not. Prior to the community policing initiative, O.C. Metro Patrol was used by less than 10 percent of the property owners in the neighborhood; today it is used by 60 percent of the owners. At this level of engagement, the firm's officers devote a significant amount of their time to the neighborhood.

The firm's primary mission is to enforce the "house rules" which are established by the property owners – and to work with the owners in the development of these rules. The owner of O.C. Metro Patrol recalls that, prior to the initiative, many building owners did not cooperate with the Police Department. Where the police saw problems with overcrowding of apartments, for example, these owners did not. It took the Code Enforcement agency to get their attention with threats of fines and even imprisonment. In time, the owners came to understand the need for strong house rules, such as zero tolerance for gang and drug activity, and began to adopt them. Today, many of the house rules address problems that are not covered by the police under law.

O.C. Metro Patrol maintains a daily report on its activity in the area, an incident report, and a "contact card" on problem individuals – records which are used, when necessary, to substantiate

eviction actions. Owners are given reports on serious problems and on patterns of problems affecting their properties. Because these reports are also shared with Anaheim officers, the owners feel some pressure to act on them.

The private patrol officers, several of whom have been employed by the firm for a number of years, know their limitations, and know when to call for assistance. When an incident involves a petty crime, the police are generally notified after it is resolved; more serious incidents will trigger a call for police assistance. O.C. Metro Patrol will call Anaheim officers when violations of ordinances, such as the parking ordinance, are observed, and police officers, in turn, will use the patrol officers to communicate with owners and tenants. The O.C. Metro and Anaheim officers routinely share information on problems of mutual concern, such as gang activity in the area.

O.C. Metro officers participate in the flashlight walks that are held, the neighborhood clean-ups and tree plantings, and attend Neighborhood Advisory Committee meetings. Police officials readily acknowledge that the success of this public-private policing partnership has much to do with the professionalism of O.C. Metro Patrol and the closeness of its relationship with the community over the years, and frankly are unsure whether such a partnership would be possible with another firm.

Relationship with Building Owners and Managers

Most of the properties in Leatrice/Wakefield are managed by one of the three large management firms operating in the area. Because the owner is ultimately responsible for the property, the police and code enforcement officers, while working with the managers day to day, ensure that the owners are notified of problems relating to their properties. City officials report that communication among the owners has improved through the community policing initiative, but that there is still room for improvement.

The code enforcement officer maintains pressure on owners to get rid of their problem tenants, and the Police Department, in conjunction with the Orange County Apartment Owners Association, has provided training and legal advice for the owners and managers on the eviction process. Training on tenant screening is also provided, and a tenant screening service is available to the owners and managers. The Housing Authority performs the screening checks on apartments when Section 8 tenants are involved.

The property owners established a grievance committee which notifies owners in writing when problems or concerns relating to their properties are observed. Generally, this notification will take care of a problem; where it does not, the Owners Association may threaten litigation. To date, the threat of litigation has been sufficient to move owners to act on problems. The Owners Association has also made its members aware that knowingly renting to a drug dealer can result in the loss of their building through assets seizure provisions of law.

Keys to Success

Lessons have been learned by the Anaheim officials who have been associated with the Leatrice/Wakefield community policing initiative over the years. Among their observations:

- For an initiative such as Leatrice/Wakefield to succeed, it must be understood by all involved that it has the support of the Mayor, City Manager and Police Chief. Everyone bought into the Leatrice/Wakefield initiative because the support for it came from the top down. City Manager James Ruth made it clear that City departments would work together on this. (In Anaheim, the Mayor, City Manager and Police Chief all have long been strong proponents of community policing.)
- The Mayor and City Manager must be willing to back the police and code enforcement officers when they put pressure on property owners to eliminate problems. Resistance to change in neighborhoods must be anticipated, and City officials must be prepared to answer questions.
- The Police Chief should personally initiate the needed partnerships with the other City agencies involved. In this way, the Chief's personal support for the initiative is clearly visible.
- The commander and/or other top officers of the police district in which the target neighborhood is located should attend community meetings, such as those of the Neighborhood Advisory Council in Leatrice/Wakefield, to demonstrate support and to get to know residents and their concerns.
- Police officers must be allowed to make direct contact with staff members in other agencies whose help is needed in solving problems. In responding to some residents' needs, there is no time to "go through channels" to get help.
- All involved in an initiative such as this must be willing and able to set aside egos and work together. When this happens, a neighborhood's problems will be solved more easily.
- Having on-site management for apartment buildings is essential in neighborhoods like Leatrice/Wakefield. Lack of on-site management was the most serious obstacle encountered at the start of the initiative.
- Neighborhoods such as Leatrice/Wakefield cannot be turned around without the help of resident leaders. The value of contributions made by persons like Lila Jaeggars cannot be overstated. Also important is the willingness of a few of the building owners to begin exerting pressure on the others.

Contact for Additional Information: Sergeant Paul Dohmann, Anaheim Police Department, (714) 765-1522.

NEIGHBORHOOD RESOURCE TEAM

Background

In West Perrine, a predominantly African American neighborhood in metropolitan Dade County just south of Miami, about 9,000 residents occupy a mix of single family homes and public and private apartment complexes. For years, the 16-block, low income area had been plagued with high rates of crime, unemployment, teen pregnancy, substance abuse, and health problems.

In 1989, a respected West Perrine businessman and community activist was murdered by local drug dealers. While this was just one of a series of crimes which reflected the extent to which the neighborhood had slipped out of control, it became a defining event for residents: They had had enough and were ready to “take back their community.”

To begin this process, 27 local pastors banded together, recruited other community advocates, and gained the support of the Miami-Dade Police Department. They started with weekly marches through the neighborhood and formed an interagency task force of state, county and private agencies and citizen activists to identify and then respond to the problems of the community. Progress was slow until February 1992 when then-Dade County State Attorney Janet Reno encouraged the establishment of a multi-agency resource team to be based in West Perrine. The Police Department’s Cutler Ridge District (which includes West Perrine), the Florida Department of Health and Rehabilitative Services, and the local Housing and Urban Development office organized the team, with space for a base of operations provided in Circle Plaza (since renamed Perrine Gardens), one of the area’s most troubled public housing developments, and the central focus of the multi-agency initiative.

Organization

The Neighborhood Resource Team began operations with five members: a police officer, a housing representative, a public health nurse, a State social worker and a teacher. When it was determined during the first year that classroom and other school-related demands did not allow for adequate participation, the teacher was replaced by a social worker from the staff of the Metro-Dade Department of Youth and Family Services.

Team members were experienced professionals knowledgeable about the resources of their agencies; they enjoyed access to the top officials of the participating agencies who were committed to helping them cut red tape and utilize whatever agency resources were needed to help the neighborhood’s families. For Team members, it was more than just a job: They worked in West Perrine, and they lived there. The NRT’s police officer – a respected veteran of the Department –

was the original Team Coordinator, and continues to serve in that capacity with responsibility for program administration and communication and for the conduct of Team meetings. The NRT introduced, and continues to use, a two-part intervention strategy:

- Family-centered intervention includes a) family assessments conducted by the entire Team in the residents' homes; b) immediate response to emergency needs identified during the assessment process; and c) monitoring and follow-up of cases to verify that needs have been met and referrals have been completed.
- Community-wide intervention includes a) a public safety initiative grounded in community-oriented policing principles of resident involvement and NRT visibility; b) efforts to change public perception of the neighborhood in order to reduce fear of crime; and c) the channeling of tenants' energies into maintenance, clean-up efforts, and other improvement activities.

An important goal for the Team Coordinator and the other police officers working in the area is to be accessible to residents around the clock. Each carries a cell phone, and the officers' phone numbers are widely publicized in the community. The officers report that they have been taking a large percentage of the residents' calls on the cell phones, most during daytime hours, and some in the evenings.

Perrine Gardens

The public housing development selected as the starting point in the NRT effort to help take back the West Perrine community was a single-story complex housing 164 families – a total of 550 residents – which was known then as Circle Plaza, and is known now as Perrine Gardens. Drug activity, gang violence and crime were rampant there and many of the residents lived in fear, staying indoors at night and sleeping on the floor to avoid stray bullets. Health and social service workers had been reluctant to visit Circle Plaza tenants unless accompanied by police officers.

The Police Department began by creating a “community hotline” for the area and by increasing police presence, and this quickly produced results: In May 1991 there had been 153 calls for service to the police; in May 1992 – one month after the effort began – calls were down by one-third, and calls for serious crime had dropped even more.

Family Assessments

The NRT moved into its HUD-donated space in Circle Plaza in April 1992 and immediately launched its family assessments. The entire Team would talk with a family and, using an assessment form, would document family composition, sources of support, housing conditions, prenatal and child care needs, health and social services needs, and the types of services being received. After the assessment, Team members contacted the appropriate resource agencies or made referrals to them. This resulted in a variety of actions, including the ordering of housing repairs, the filing of applications for day care, arrangements for visits to health clinics, and the investigation of a delinquent child's court status. Some of the families had such complex problems that the assessment took the better part of a day and required a significant amount of staff time. Because the Team itself

was based in the Circle Plaza complex, members could check frequently to ensure that tenants were following through on the referrals.

During the first two months of the operation the NRT assessed the needs of 33 families. Team members observed, not surprisingly, that many residents seemed to find it easier to talk about their problems with Family Service workers than with police officers.

As an indication of the acceptance, and the need, for its service, the NRT was soon being contacted by other tenants in Circle Plaza and in neighboring areas of West Perrine. In these cases the NRT would not perform a full assessment, but would arrange for whatever immediate help was needed. Very quickly, the self-referrals began to consume a considerable amount of the Team members' time.

Hurricane Andrew

In July, just over four months after the new Neighborhood Resource Team (NRT) began its work, Hurricane Andrew hit the area, devastating South Florida and rendering Circle Plaza virtually uninhabitable. A temporary NRT office was quickly established to assist tenants forced to relocate until repairs to Circle Plaza were completed late in 1993 and the apartments could again be occupied.

In the period following the hurricane the Team expanded its services to another public housing project where residents needed emergency help, hired and supervised workers on cleanup projects, organized events designed to diffuse community tensions, and hired a full time coordinator to work with area youth. A Teen Council was also created to help develop recreational activities for young people. During the period of emergency operations following the hurricane the NRT was unable to provide the full family assessments but did continue to respond to individual requests for service and arrange referrals for former tenants and other West Perrine residents.

The NRT also activated an established Tenant's Council and helped it focus on ways to improve maintenance of the buildings. As a result, tenants participated in cleanup efforts – for example, painting a graffiti-covered wall – and met regularly with the NRT to discuss problems and potential solutions. These meetings were often attended by senior government agency officials, including the State's Attorney.

As part of the overall effort HUD addressed persistent problems, such as broken screen doors, and provided much-needed landscaping. The post-hurricane rehabilitation of the buildings and the landscaping and cleanup of the public spaces produced a dramatic change in the appearance of Circle Plaza and in the feelings of the residents about their community. It was decided at this time that the renewal of the complex should be accompanied by a name change that would signal, for residents and the surrounding community alike, a new beginning and a break from the old image of Circle Plaza as a locus for crime problems. Circle Plaza became Perrine Gardens (originally, its legal name).

Long Term Impact on Crime

As a result of the NRT initiative, Perrine Gardens continues to be a safe and well-maintained complex. In 1994 there were 310 burglaries, 180 auto thefts and 90 robberies in the neighborhood. By 1999 burglaries were down by half, auto thefts had been cut to 70 and robberies had been cut to 36. In November 2000, for example, there were just two assaults/batteries, two domestic disputes, two drug offenses, and one tenant was arrested. While officials believe it is important to maintain a police presence in the area, the level of personnel introduced in 1992 and 1993, at the start of the initiative, is no longer required.

Current NRT Configuration

Today the NRT serving Perrine Gardens consists of the police officer who serves as the NRT Program Coordinator and maintains his office in the complex, a second officer who serves as the NRT Youth Activity Coordinator, a social worker and community health nurse whose office is just outside the complex, the Perrine Gardens Site Manager, the Tenant Council President, the Resident Services Supervisor, and the South Florida Job Corps recruiter. The Program Coordinator is now relying increasingly on “Links” people – community residents who identify family problems and needs and work with partner agencies to arrange for services. He is holding fewer multi-agency Team meetings than before, but is continuing to publish a monthly report on activities which was introduced three years ago. The social worker, whose position is funded by the Family Preservation Program, is planning to train the community residents to go door-to-door to perform family assessments.

Expanded NRT Scope

Over the years the scope of the NRT concept has expanded, and teams now operate in several additional target neighborhoods. In addition to the original Perrine Gardens location, there are teams in West Perrine’s East Green Hills Apartments, the Cutler Manor Apartments in the Goulds community, the Caribbean West Apartments in the Cutler Ridge community, and the Promenade Plaza Shopping Center in the Richmond Heights community.

The number of partnership agencies has grown dramatically since the start of the NRT. In addition to the four lead agencies – the Police Department, the County Department of Health, the Florida Department of Children and Families, and the Metro-Dade Housing Agency – the 43 current Community Partners include entities as diverse as the Dade County Department of Solid Waste; the South Dade Homeless Assistance Center; the Goulds Coalition of Ministers and Lay Persons; the Job Corps; the Perrine-Cutler Ridge Rotary Club and Kiwanis Club; and 15 area elementary, middle and senior high schools.

Partners in the West Perrine Initiative

Community Development Corporation

Police officials say the progress made in Perrine Gardens, in particular, and West Perrine in general, would not have been possible without the partnership formed at the outset with the West Perrine Community Development Corporation, an organization that has played a major role in the creation and improvement of housing, health care, neighborhood infrastructure, transportation, legal services, youth programs, senior programs, employment programs, and other services. The CDC has been responsible for the demolition of 139 problem housing units in the community, many of which were operating as crack houses. Among its services are 1) the identification and elimination of code violations; 2) the provision of a wide range of assistance to prospective homebuyers, homeowners threatened with default or foreclosure, and renters seeking decent, affordable housing; 3) the provision of a full range of services to businesses and prospective entrepreneurs; and 4) technical assistance to nonprofit organizations engaged in housing and economic development.

Several activities of the West Perrine CDC complement and support the work of the Neighborhood Resource Team:

- In 1997 the CDC developed a comprehensive plan which specifies actions to be taken to improve conditions in West Perrine in 17 areas: code enforcement, housing, commercial revitalization, health care, neighborhood infrastructure, transportation, legal services, recreation, land use and development zoning, facilities, youth, law enforcement, drug abuse, employment, education, senior citizens and business development.
- The CDC has conducted a series of “general conditions” studies designed to help various code enforcement agencies to identify and enforce code violations in West Perrine, to involve area residents in community improvements, and to regularly monitor the process to ensure continuity. The strategy is to 1) engage in a comprehensive identification and evaluation of current neighborhood code violations through a visual inspection of the area; 2) classify the violations using the categories of the various code enforcement divisions; 3) coordinate the removal of the violations with the responsible departments; and 4) hold quarterly meetings in the community with representatives of the various agencies present, to determine if community needs are being met on a timely basis. Between 1988 and 1997, the number of code violations declined by about two-thirds, from 682 to 225.
- The West Perrine Housing Opportunity Center, opened in December 1994, provides area residents with fair housing and comprehensive housing counseling assistance including 1) pre-purchase counseling which assists a household in securing affordable, decent, safe and sanitary housing in a community of their choice; 2) homeowner preservation, which works with homeowners threatened with default and foreclosure to maintain them in their home; and 3) renter preservation and access, which provides counseling to renters having difficulty affording the housing they are in, and assists households looking for rental housing to find affordable, decent, safe and sanitary housing in a community of their choice.

- The West Perrine Enterprise Center promotes the creation of new, viable business enterprises in the area, fosters the growth of established businesses, and induces job creation and retention in the area. Its incubator tenant program nurtures new firms by providing affordable multi-tenant space, shared office services and a full range of management consulting assistance. Its non-incubator tenant programs provide services to existing businesses and prospective entrepreneurs in areas such as business start-up, loan packaging, increasing sales, record-keeping systems, financial management, marketing and management training. The Center also operates an eight-week entrepreneurship training program that provides practical information on planning and growing a small business.
- The CDC's Design Center provides technical assistance to established and emerging non-profit organizations engaged in housing and economic development. It covers pre-development activities such as analysis of alternative sites, preparation of feasibility studies, and identification of financing sources; development activities such as design assistance and coordination, project construction estimating, and contractor bid analysis; and operational services such as project scheduling and tracking, construction management services, and construction quality control.

Nuisance Abatement Unit

Approved in 1992 just two months after the launch of the Neighborhood Resource Team, Dade County's public nuisance ordinance has served as a valuable tool in efforts to solve some of West Perrine's most daunting problems. Supported by then County Commissioner, now Mayor, Alex Penelas, it allows the County to take action against the owners of properties and businesses where activities detrimental to quality of life are occurring. The ordinance gives both citizens and law enforcement officers the ability to move against properties which constitute public nuisances – that is, properties which have been the site of three or more complaints relating to the unlawful sale or delivery of controlled substances, youth and street gang activity, prostitution or solicitation of prostitution, illegal gambling, the illegal sale or consumption of alcoholic beverages, or lewd and lascivious activity. Any resident, employee or officer of Metropolitan Dade County may file a nuisance complaint in the form of a police report or arrest affidavit. Once the complaint is received, the allegation is investigated and, if it is substantiated, a case is prepared for presentation to the Nuisance Abatement Board.

When three or more separate complaints about a property are received and substantiated within a six month period, the Nuisance Abatement Unit, which is located in the Police Department's Intergovernmental Bureau, notifies the property or business owner and allows that owner 14 days to abate the nuisance and to respond to the allegations. If the owner contacts the Nuisance Abatement Unit and corrects the problem within 14 days, and if no other nuisance activity or complaints occur, no further action by the Board is necessary. An owner who does not take these steps, however, is required to appear before the Nuisance Abatement Board for a formal public hearing. Police officials stress that their goal in handling cases is to resolve them before they reach the formal hearing stage.

During the hearing the Nuisance Abatement Unit presents the complaints and evidence against the owner and complainants are given the opportunity to present evidence. The owner, who may be represented by counsel, is able to question witnesses, present witnesses and dispute any evidence. If the Board finds against the owner, it has a number of options, including to: declare the place or premises a public nuisance; order the property or business to be closed and secured and all activities on the premise halted; order that the owner pay the costs of the investigation within 10 days, and, if they are not paid, place a lien against the property or foreclose on it; and take away the owner's unrestricted use of the property or business for one year and require the owner to pay the County for the cost of investigating the public nuisance.

In the South Dade area, which includes West Perrine, the Nuisance Abatement Unit has used targeted enforcement initiatives to generate numerous arrests and code enforcement inspections. These initiatives have addressed community and neighborhood complaints involving vagrants, sanitation issues, panhandling, drug use in abandoned buildings, illegal vendors and trespass violations. During a three-month period in 1999, for example, 163 misdemeanor and seven felony arrests were made. A major case involving elderly neglect culminated in the arrest of the owner of six unlicensed assisted living facilities who was charged with 21 felony counts of elderly neglect and disabled adult neglect and 55 misdemeanor counts that included health violations, building and zoning offenses and culpable negligence.

COPPS Program

The South Dade Neighborhood Policing Unit began operations in January 1998 with 54 COPPS officers, most from the group of 60 officers originally hired under a grant from the federal Office of Community Oriented Policing Services and subsequently folded into the Miami-Dade Police Department's operating budget when the federal funds expired. This Unit is now the umbrella under which the Neighborhood Resource Team operates.

The COPPS officers work out of three offices in South Dade, including the Cutler Ridge District's Hibiscus Office which serves the West Perrine community. The offices are open to the public weekdays, providing citizens with fingerprinting services, clearance letters, police reports, and other official information they may require for personal or business purposes. COPPS officers are given long term assignments to specific geographic areas and communities so that they can become familiar with those areas and their residents. They develop personal contacts in the communities, attend community meetings, and become involved with homeowners associations, crime watch groups, business organizations and churches. They work flexible hours in order to be available to the community, and provide residents with crime prevention education and information on crime trends. They also maintain working relationships with other local government agencies such as the Health Department, Unsafe Structures Unit and Environment Investigation Unit.

Team Metro

The COPPS officers have worked very closely with Team Metro, a Miami-Dade County agency designed to help residents access a variety of County services. Team Metro operates out of a main downtown office and several regional offices, one of which, the South Office, serves West

Perrine. The downtown office is responsible for staffing a single “hotline” phone number which may be used by residents to access services. The regional offices house outreach and code compliance staff; they also provide a variety of transit and rail passes, permits and licenses. The code compliance officers handle such problems as overgrown lots, illegal signs, and removal of graffiti, junk and trash.

In the West Perrine and Goulds communities, police and Team Metro officers have worked together on the demolition of 96 unsafe structures, most of which were operating as crack houses. As a result of the partnership, in 1999 alone, 122 overgrown lots were cleared, 101 junk vehicles and 16 abandoned boats were removed from the public right-of-way and private property. The code enforcement activity of the COPPS officers is documented in 63 Scanning, Analysis, Response and Assessment (SARA) projects.

Team Metro inspectors, as well as inspectors from other agencies, will call for police escorts into buildings or apartments whenever they are concerned about their safety.

Keys to Success

Lessons have been learned by Miami-Dade County officials who have been associated with the Neighborhood Resource Team and the West Perrine initiative over the years. Among their observations:

- Top-level political and governmental support spurs a multi-agency initiative in a troubled area such as West Perrine. The NRT concept had the support of the State Attorney, a County Commissioner who was a West Perrine resident and leader, and the Police Director and other members of the command staff, among others.
- There must be support in the community for a multi-agency presence such as the Neighborhood Resource Team. In West Perrine, the call for help came directly from community leaders following the murder of the community activist.
- Partnerships with community organizations that share the goals of community policing are essential. In West Perrine, the Community Development Corporation works very closely with the Police Department and the NRT on day-to-day problems, such as code violations, and long term problems, such as affordable housing.
- For an initiative such as the NRT to succeed, Team members must be personally committed to the community in which they are working. Miami-Dade officials agree that the commitment of the police officer chosen to serve as the Program Coordinator and the officer’s detailed knowledge of the community was the key to the overall success of the effort.

- Because residents often find it easier to talk about family problems and needs with social service workers than with police officers, initial Team contacts led by social service personnel can often be most productive.
- To change attitudes toward the police in troubled neighborhoods, residents need to know they can reach police officers at any time. Cell phones have made this possible in the West Perrine area.

Contact for Additional Information: Sergeant Jeff Lampert, Miami-Dade Police Department, (305) 234-4904.