

El Paso County Sheriff's Office
Quality of Life Project
Ericson Drive and Lashelle Avenue

Summary.

SCANNING

The El Paso County Sheriff's Office *Quality of Life* project focused on the areas of Ericson Drive and Lashelle Avenue in southern Colorado Springs. The neighborhood encompasses approximately five square miles of residential area, occupied mainly by residents of four-plex multi-housing units. The area has long been known as plagued by substandard neighborhood conditions and crime.

ANALYSIS

The El Paso County Sheriff's Office High-Impact Community Oriented Policing Unit (HICOP) strategy began with a needs assessment conducted by gathering crime statistics, assessing conditions, and several weeks of interviews with residents of the neighborhood. Deputies systematically gathered information about time of day and day of month and week when narcotics activity increased. They studied the demographics of families in the area and gathered their input about concerns.

RESPONSE

Deputies focused on developing relationships with residents, landowners, businesses, and agencies that would sustain the *Quality of Life* Project. Deputies Ron Reeves and Tommy Coates spent the majority of their shifts for several months patrolling the neighborhood in vehicles, on bicycles, and on foot. They came to know residents individually and how the neighborhood functioned as a whole. Deputies made necessary collaborations to improve the appearance of the neighborhood. They taught residents about safety and community collaboration.

ASSESSMENT

Riding along with Deputies Coates and Reeves in the Ericson-Lashelle neighborhood is a qualitatively different experience than it was just a couple of years ago. It is not at all unusual to see people coming from their apartments to greet the deputies

and chat with them about the current neighborhood business and what is happening in their lives. Children know the deputies by name, and run over to fill them in on their latest exploits. Deputies ask questions about school, friends, and parents. Following the Ericson-Lashelle *Quality of Life* project, the neighborhood saw marked improvement in several targeted crimes. Drug violations in the area were reduced by half, from 26 offenses in 2000 to 13 offenses in 2001. Burglary also decreased by 50%, from 62 to 31 offenses. Vandalism has also decreased. The neighborhood's appearance has improved dramatically with the disappearance of graffiti, overflowing garbage, and abandoned vehicles. Landowners have made many improvements to housing units, replacing doors and windows, and repainting buildings. The change is dramatic.

The Ericson-Lashelle project exemplifies the power of community collaboration and problem-oriented policing. The Ericson-Lashelle area will continue to rebuild and distance itself further and further from that dreaded stigma of being the "bad area of town." The community pride of citizens, land owners, and law enforcement will endure, and will sustain this effort.

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Description

Scanning

The El Paso County Sheriff's Office *Quality of Life* project focused on the areas of Ericson Drive and Lashelle Avenue in southern Colorado Springs. The neighborhood encompasses approximately five square miles of residential area, occupied mainly by residents of four-plex multi-housing units. The area has long been known as plagued by substandard neighborhood conditions and crime. Specific neighborhood concerns included the extent of drug-related crimes. El Paso County Sheriff's Office Deputies patrolling this district have identified it as problematic for many years. The Metro Vice and Narcotics Unit provided information indicating significant drug activity in the area. A disproportionate number of calls for service in that district also pointed to a need for a less reactionary solution. The El Paso County Sheriff's Office High Impact Community Oriented Policing Unit (HICOP) targeted this area to employ problem oriented policing.

HICOP Deputies selected the Ericson-Lashelle area for several reasons. Some data existed from a 1996 effort to reduce crime in the area, including information from a survey conducted in the neighborhood. The geographic area was small enough that it could be pursued intensely and deputies could develop relationships with residents of the neighborhood. Another reason the area was chosen had to do with the nature of people's residency there. Deputies knew from their work what empirical evidence has shown: improving management of rental properties can reduce drug-related crime (US Report to

Congress, 1997). All of these factors made Ericson Drive and Lashelle Avenue a good choice for the *Quality of Life* project.

Analysis

Several methods were used to research the breadth of the neighborhood problems. During team meetings, deputies requested the input of others who had worked in the area and made contact with residents regularly. The deputies also looked to previous approaches used in the neighborhood, including a project that used neighborhood surveys. The project, undertaken in 1996, was the first documented approach that did not simply involve the reactionary method of responding to calls for service. Deputies collaborated with the crime analyst and officers from the Metro Vice and Narcotics Unit to examine the frequency and severity of crimes committed in the neighborhood. They performed interviews with citizens and followed up on calls for service to learn about the neighborhood.

In 1996, deputies conducted a survey in the targeted neighborhood, soliciting information about the residents and their concerns. Ninety-five percent of the residents at that time were renting the property in which they lived. The majority of residents (66%) had lived in the area less than one year. Deputies and residents in the area agree that these salient features of the neighborhood have not changed.

The structure of ownership in the neighborhood was germane to understanding the players invested in it. Landowners were motivated to protect their properties from destructive behavior and maintain a profit. They also were concerned about renting to people engaged in criminal activity. However, since most landowners did not live in the neighborhood, they had to rely on other residents to report to them. Most residents were

motivated to make a safe environment for their children and improve the standard of living in the neighborhood. They had grown accustomed, however, to reactionary law enforcement, where deputies would respond to calls for service only to have the same problem arise again. They were also concerned about retaliation for their cooperation with law enforcement. Residents of the neighborhood who were engaged in criminal activity, specifically narcotics distribution, flourished under the neighborhood structure that allowed them to move from building to building after being evicted. Many times, drug dealers were linked to one another either through gang affiliation or tacit agreement about clientele. Like their clients who frequented the neighborhood to make purchases, drug dealers stood to lose from increased neighborhood cohesion and directed patrols. An understanding of the ecology of the neighborhood was necessary to developing a response.

The neighborhood seemed to support Wilson and Kelling's (1982) "broken windows" theory; that is, the area appeared disorderly and out of control and seemed to attract criminal activity, just as a building that already has a broken window tends to be chosen over one that has no broken windows for further damage. Garbage overflowed from nearly all the dumpsters in the neighborhood. Abandoned vehicles littered yards and the street where people were not supposed to park. The multi-housing units did not appear to be well-maintained and were in need of repair. Vehicles often sped and drove recklessly through the neighborhood, where it was not at all uncommon to see children playing near the streets. Adding to this danger was the reality that vehicles often came and went quickly due to the narcotics activity. From all appearances, the neighborhood was dilapidated and in need of revitalization.

To formulate an effective community response, it was necessary to understand when and how crimes were being committed in the area. It was also critical to collaborate with others to discover the reason for the neighborhood's appearance. One issue that was considered was the access to the area; people coming into the neighborhood could enter and exit from four different routes. Systematic deputy observation showed that there was an increase in traffic in the neighborhood around paydays. The neighborhood is just north of Fort Carson, a large military base, where people were paid on the first and fifteenth of each month. Traffic, and its accompanying drug activity, appeared to increase at these times. It was also critical to develop a working understanding of who was involved in criminal activity, gangs, and where there were child welfare issues.

A greater percentage of the population in the census tract that defines the neighborhood is Black and Hispanic compared to the county's population as a whole (U.S. Census Bureau). The neighborhood's diversity caused deputies to be attentive to cultural differences and views of law enforcement. Deputies also considered in their analysis that most families were single-parent, female head of household, and that many lived below the poverty line.

An analysis of crime statistics in the neighborhood showed a disproportionate amount of crime for its size. The area has 4.6% of unincorporated El Paso County's population, but accounted for 6.6% of crimes in the year 2000. In comparing this sector to adjacent ones, the neighborhood had elevated incidents of burglary, drug violations, and vandalism.

Response

In formulating an effective response, deputies gathered resources both within and outside the El Paso County Sheriff's Office. *There* were two overarching goals guiding the Ericson-Lashelle *Quality of Life* project. One goal was to improve the appearance and living conditions of the neighborhood. Deputies identified several objectives that would help them meet this goal. They wanted to rid the area of garbage, abandoned vehicles, and graffiti. They also wanted to collaborate with residents and landowners to repair and improve the conditions of the housing itself. The second major goal for this project was to improve the safety of the community. To accomplish this goal, deputies knew they would have to be consistent in directed patrol and build strong relationships with residents and landlords. They also wanted to improve street markings and signage to increase awareness of traffic laws in the neighborhood, and make enforcement easier. They knew their goal could not be accomplished without uniting landlords with a common mission of improving their units and evicting drug dealers.

Deputies considered the previous approaches used in the neighborhood to assess their success. The most common response to the crime in the neighborhood was deputies responding to calls for service. These deputies referred narcotics distribution information to the Metro Vice and Narcotics Unit. Because of the limitations of responding to calls for service, residents did not have faith that there would be follow through with their concerns. Often the patrol deputy responding to a call did not have the resources and time necessary to approach the problem systematically. In 1996, HICOP deputies did initiate a plan to reduce crime in the area. The plan included directed patrol, a fugitive sweep, and community surveys. Deputies implementing the *Quality of Life* project, in evaluating this earlier response, believed that it was too short in duration to make a

lasting impact. The previous response was over a few months in a rather piecemeal fashion. Deputies believed this response should be more consistent and last longer.

In formulating a response, deputies considered the feasibility and effectiveness of warrant sweeps, community building exercises, directed and regular patrol, and intelligence gathering activities. Deputies evaluated the structure and rotation of residents in the neighborhood and the motivations of landowners. They also chose gang, traffic, and narcotics related crimes to target for enforcement. They leveraged support from agencies that could help improve the neighborhood's safety and appearance.

Deputies began their project with introducing themselves to neighborhood residents and explaining their goals. They interviewed people about their concerns and suggestions for the neighborhood. In this way, they opened their plan to the community before taking any further action.

Deputies then identified and contacted the owners of 39 four-plex buildings in the area regarding the project. Owners of 16 of those properties came together in a meeting arranged by deputies and met for the first time. As a result of the meeting, landowners formed an alliance and maintain contact with each other. Deputies talked to landowners about a pattern they were seeing in the neighborhood of evicted drug dealers renting from another owner in the area so as not to disrupt their activity. Landowners discussed the need to inform each other, and receive information from deputies, about narcotics activity. Meetings with landowners and deputies continued throughout the project, and they are regularly in communication outside meetings.

After spending time in the neighborhood observing and speaking to residents, deputies focused their environmental assessment to key factors. They contacted local

Waste Management officials to explain the area needed better garbage service in order to keep the dumpsters from a constant state of overflow. Waste Management came to the neighborhood to assess the problem and made necessary service changes. The area had insufficient street markings and lacked crosswalks, making the neighborhood children's trek to catch the school bus dangerous. Deputies collaborated with the El Paso County Department of Transportation, who painted street markings, cross walks, and added signs, increasing safety and adherence to traffic laws in the neighborhood. Owners of abandoned vehicles either moved them or they were towed. These environmental changes assisted deputies in carrying out enforcement goals.

Deputies Tommy Coates and Ron Reeves, who were primarily responsible for this project, spent the great majority of their shifts in the neighborhood. They used a variety of methods to contact residents. At various times, they could be seen in the area in a patrol vehicle, on foot, or riding bicycles. They reviewed calls for service and followed up with residents who reported incidents in the neighborhood. They placed a map of the area and its residences in their office and used color-coded tacks to signify drug and gang activity, child welfare concerns, and other criminal activity. They worked to know the community by individual residents, but also to know how the neighborhood functioned as a whole. In this way, they were able to uncover connections between people and patterns of behavior.

Deputies, having developed relationships with residents, received many tips about criminal activity in the area. They used this intelligence to obtain search warrants and arrest people involved in narcotics distribution. Residents expressed concern about the traffic problems in the area. Deputies responded by increasing traffic enforcement. As a

result of the traffic stops, deputies often found narcotics, which led to search warrants for residences when appropriate. Deputies conducted drunk driving saturation patrols on weekend evenings. These enforcement activities led to a consistent, increased presence in the neighborhood.

Deputies developed relationships with a multitude of people to sustain the neighborhood improvement project. They spoke to the District Attorney's Neighborhood Justice Center to discuss their project and pave the way for mediation referrals. When there were neighborhood disputes at an impasse, deputies referred parties to the Neighborhood Justice Center. They contacted the Fire and Emergency Services Personnel responsible for the area and talked with them about the project, asking for their watchful eyes in the neighborhood. They gathered information from the Building Inspectors Office, Health Department, and Utilities to educate landowners and residents.

Deputies forged strong relationships with children in the area. They learned about their lives and their problems. They came to know children with truancy problems and children whose parents were not around most of the time. They checked on children daily, and talked to them regularly about safety. One summer day, they gathered neighborhood children and had a Neighborhood Clean Up Day. Deputies rewarded them with treats at the local 7-11 when they were finished. Deputies kept apprised of what was happening at schools and praised children for their involvement in school projects, an increase in attendance, and improvements in their grades. Deputies utilized expertise from the El Paso County Sheriff's *Office* Gang Net Unit to mentor children in the community and educate their parents about gang activity. When one teen boy was

suspended from school and was suspected of gang activity, deputies contacted the school to have a tutor for the teen during his suspension and spoke to both the boy and his parents about gang involvement. Deputies educated and empowered children in the neighborhood to learn about safety and self-improvement.

Assessment

Deputies measured the success of this project using both qualitative and quantitative methods. Just as important to them as the crime statistics is the increased trust they have fostered in this neighborhood and the sentiments expressed to them by residents. Residents comment about how much better it is in their neighborhood and how they feel like their concerns are really being addressed now.



Riding along with Deputies Coates and Reeves in the Ericson-Lashelle neighborhood is a qualitatively different experience than it was just a couple of years ago. It is not at all unusual to see people coming from their apartments to greet the deputies and chat with them about the current neighborhood business and what is happening in their lives. Children know the deputies by name, and run over to fill them in on their

latest exploits. Deputies ask questions about school, friends, and parents. Children like the ones pictured above flock around the deputies and ask to have their picture taken.

The neighborhood's appearance has improved dramatically. No longer is there graffiti on benches, garbage does not flow from the dumpsters, and the housing units are in much better repair. A crosswalk is painted for the children walking to their school bus and street markings make traffic enforcement easier. The street is free of illegally parked vehicles.

Landowners have made improvements to properties in the neighborhood. There are re-paved parking lots, repainted buildings, and increased security lights where there were none. Some landowners added extra storage areas for residents and installed new doors. Landowner improvements seemed to have a domino effect in the neighborhood; once one person did it, the others followed.

An analysis of the crime statistics comparing the year 2000 before the project and 2001 during and after the project show reductions in targeted crimes in the neighborhood. The smallest area used for crime analysis was "Sector 7302," which includes more than the neighborhood, but is a good measure of crime patterns there. Table 1 illustrates the incidents of several crime types for 2000, 2001, and the first quarter of 2002. Drug violations in the area were reduced by half, from 26 to 13 offenses. First quarter 2002 statistics show an increase in drug violations. An increase in law enforcement saturations during this quarter accounts for the increase in drug related case reports. Burglary has also decreased by 50%, from 62 incidents in 2000 to 31 in 2001. Vandalism also decreased, while theft and assault reports increased. Deputies hypothesize, based on their experience in the neighborhood, that people have become more comfortable reporting

personal theft and assault crimes because they have seen an increase in the amount of follow-through after a case report. However, there is no way to analyze the data to support or disprove this hypothesis.

Table 1. Case report frequency by crime type and year for Sector 7302.

Crime type	First Quarter 2002	2001	2000
Murder	0	0	0
Rape	0	2	2
Robbery	2	1	2
Assaults	16	66	56
Burglary	4	31	62
Theft	18	94	87
Motor Vehicle Theft	6	9	11
Forgery	2	5	4
Weapons Violations	1	4	5
Other Sex Offenses	0	2	12
Drug Violations	6	13	26
Liquor Violations	1	7	8
DUIs	12	48	45
Vandalism	13	50	69
Total	81	332	389

Deputies initially encountered some implementation difficulties with residents and landowners. Landowners were concerned that deputies were interested in searching for housing violations, and needed to be educated about the project and its goals. Residents did not generally feel like their concerns were addressed by law enforcement, so deputies had to be consistent. Building trust to accomplish the project's goals took several months of spending a great deal of time in the neighborhood.

Deputies did not believe displacement of crime in the neighborhood would be a large issue. They knew that breaking up the affiliations within the area would be beneficial and did not believe the offenders could establish those relationships in another neighborhood as easily. Four literature reviews of empirical evidence about displacement over the last 10 years has shown intervention techniques like those employed in the *Duality of Life* project often do not displace crime, and when it does it does not overshadow the positive changes that occur (US Report to Congress).

The Ericson-Lashelle project exemplifies the power of community collaboration and problem-oriented policing. The Ericson-Lashelle area will continue to rebuild and distance itself further and further from that dreaded stigmata of being the "bad area of town." The community pride of citizens, land owners, and law enforcement will endure, and will sustain this effort.

Agency and Officer Information

- I. The Ericson-Lashelle *Quality of Life* project was the primary responsibility of two El Paso County Sheriffs Office High Impact Community Oriented Policing (HICOP) deputies. However, patrol deputies were briefed about the project and made referrals to HICOP after calls for service in the neighborhood. Deputies from other units, including Traffic, Community Support, and the Mounted Unit were all involved in the project.
2. All deputies completing the El Paso County Sheriff's Office Academy receive training in the principles of community and problem oriented policing. Additionally, the deputies with the most involvement in this project attended several training sessions at the Colorado Regional Community Policing Institute and participated in many in-service trainings.
3. No additional incentives were given to officers engaging in problem-oriented policing. This approach is expected of El Paso County Sheriffs Deputies. However, as with all problem-oriented policing projects, deputies were given positive reinforcement for their efforts.
4. The HICOP deputies operated using the SARA model. The El Paso County Sheriffs Office uses a "Problem Oriented Policing Problem-Solving Worksheet," and that was completed for this project. The deputies followed this model during their response, and generated task lists, maps, and other resources.
5. Deputies found in-depth analysis of the problem to be the most challenging aspect of the POP model itself. Deputies know the most about a situation from working in the area and performing a more thorough analysis is very time consuming.
6. The El Paso County Sheriffs Office did not go beyond its budget on the Ericson-Lashelle *Quality of Life* project. Subway donated food for the landlord's meetings and other objectives were accomplished through collaborations.
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