Perhaps the biggest problem that dedicated Community Officers routinely face is finding the time and energy for all the worthwhile efforts that offer the promise of solving problems and improving the quality of life in their beat areas. No doubt many think about how great it would be to work out of a storefront in the community, alongside other enthusiastic public and private social service professionals whose active support would bolster their efforts to reduce crime, violence, illicit drugs, and community disorder and decay.

Far from being a dream, this new Neighborhood Network Center concept will soon become reality, as pilot projects open in three American cities and at a site in England that have been finalized:

- Perhaps the most fully realized pilot project will be in Lansing, Michigan. Representatives from the Lansing Police Department, Community Mental Health, Probate Court, Social Services, Public Health, Public Schools, and City Planning have been meeting for two years, to hammer out the inter-agency agreement that will allow these other service providers to work directly in the new Neighborhood Network Center that has already been established by Officer Don Christy (see Footprints Focus).

- In Norfolk, Virginia, Assistant City Manager George Crowley, whose responsibilities include the police, has announced that the city will open a new Neighborhood Network Center, where the Community Officer will be joined by other social service agents who can address the priorities of greatest concern to area resident.

- Chief R. Gil Kerlikowske of the Fort Pierce (Florida) Police Department is launching a pilot Neighborhood Network Center in the six-bedroom home that the city recently donated to the police department. The department has already provided space to the Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts, and more service providers will move in later, as they begin to identify specific local priorities.

- Chief Inspector of Police John Broughton, a Fulbright scholar, will be in charge of efforts to organize the pilot program in Newcastle-Upon-Tyne in Northumbria, England.
The Center intends to add other major sites as plans develop. We will keep you informed concerning the total research and evaluation component when final plans have been confirmed.

Funding from the C.S. Mott Foundation of Flint, Michigan, will allow Michigan State University's School of Criminal Justice and the National Center for Community Policing to provide training and technical assistance, as well as research and evaluation. The primary goal is, of course, to identify the impact that these new Neighborhood Network Centers have on the community. But it is equally important to study how the various sites cope with the political and bureaucratic obstacles to success. The ambitious five-year-study will focus on producing a workable model that other communities can use in both planning and implementation.

**The rationale for change**

Community Policing reinvents the role of the old-fashioned beat cop, blending the best of the past with today's reality - combining high-touch with high-tech. Today's Community Officers are full-fledged law enforcement officers whose mandate requires them to serve as creative catalysts for positive change, as local community problem solvers.

Yet when we look back at the past, we see that the old-fashioned beat cop was just one of a number of public service providers who worked directly in the community. Probation and parole officers personally made sure that ex-offenders followed the rules. Social workers and visiting public health nurses visited client families, where they could see for themselves whether the children suffered abuse or neglect. Truant officers often nipped problems in the bud, tracking down youngsters who played "hookey."

Perhaps it is no coincidence that the dramatic rise in serious crime that has plagued our society first erupted soon after these social service providers left the community for offices downtown. Much of the staggering increase in violence can indeed be attributed to the bulge of Baby Boomers reaching their most crime-prone teenage years, as well as to improved crime reporting. But the removal of these agents of social control from troubled neighborhoods may also be part of the key.

Critics will no doubt suggest that Neighborhood Network Centers are mere nostalgia for a safer past that never truly existed - the same argument that is often leveled against Community Policing. And there were good reasons for removing these social service providers from the community, just as putting officers in patrol cars initially seemed like a tremendous stride forward. The problem is that these sweeping reforms may have inadvertently thrown out the baby with the bathwater.

In the case of foot patrol officers, faster response to emergency calls implied improved efficiency, and linking the officers to the department by means of the police radio allowed the department greater control and enhanced opportunities to monitor their performance. Most of all, it seemed that shift would reduce opportunities for corruption and abuse of authority.

The pressure to centralize other public social services stemmed from similar concerns. The primary goals were to improve efficiency and professionalism, and to eliminate the opportunities for abuse and fraud. With centralized supervision, no service provider could bend the rules to reward and to punch. Direct, face-to-face contact with people in the community seemed less like a plus and more like an unwarranted intrusion on the individual's right to privacy.

Over time, however, the drawbacks became increasingly apparent. The police, the only social service agency open 24 hours a day, seven days a week, whose representatives still made house calls, discovered that isolating officers from direct involvement in the community threatened to rupture the all important bond of trust and cooperation. A system that fostered having officers spend more time with each other than with the people they serve risked severing the department's link to the law-abiding people in the community whose participation and support are so essential maintaining order and reversing the spiral of decay.
Centralizing these other service providers also risked increasing depersonalization. Clients tended to become numbers, rather than people with problems. The needs of the system threaten to overwhelm the needs of the people they were designed to help. Instead of narrowing the gap between professional and client, centralization tends to promote the growth of an impersonal bureaucracy that can easily snarl clients in red tape.

As in policing, centralization and depersonalization also foster a system that measures performance by the numbers. Success is defined by the number of arrests made and clients processed, rather than on whether the problems are solved.

**Developing new models**

Yet many will also argue that, even if there is merit in decentralizing and personalizing service to the community, our society can no longer afford the costs associated with the inherent inefficiencies of the past. When the police confronted this challenge, they recognized the need to update the role of the old-fashioned beat copy in ways that maintained the close community contact of the past, while recognizing the need to improve their efficiency and broaden the scope of their impact.

If we look at the beat cops of old, we see that the job required them to pound a beat and rattle doorknobs, in the hope that this would deter crime. Yet it was their unofficial duties, the elements that did not appear in a job description, that everyone missed so much when they left. Community Policing institutionalizes and enhances those aspects of the job, by challenging today's Community Officers to use their free patrol time to promote the direct involvement of residents in efforts to solve problems and to improve the overall quality of life in their neighborhoods.

Borrowing from that model suggests that the key to updating the role of these other social service providers requires restructuring their jobs to maximize their collective impact and involvement. And that implies forging them into a new neighborhood-based team of problem-solvers who can work together with the people in the community to address the priorities that the people care about most. Sometimes this will mean working on the specific problems of individuals and families. Perhaps the ex-offender out on parole needs drug counseling. Or the juvenile suspected of petty theft is also skipping school, which means the truant officer should become involved. Sometimes it could mean that code enforcement officials work with both social workers and the police on efforts to upgrade the living conditions for families in rental units.

But the goal is also to galvanize this new community-based team into developing creative long-term solutions to long-standing concerns. In some neighborhoods, this might mean developing an intervention to address the attitudes that promote violence among the young. It could mean using the Neighborhood Network Center for classes to help teen mothers learn how to nurture their young. Maybe the most pressing concern is to develop an imaginative approach to reducing drug use among dropouts. The possibilities would be bounded only by the needs and resources of the community and the creativity and enthusiasm of everyone involved.

The involvement of the Community Officers is essential. Not only do they provide the other professionals the protection and security that they need to feel safe in following the police back into the community, Community Officers are also the only social service agent who can employ a full range of options, ranging from a pat on the back to pulling the trigger, depending on the specific problem that they face.

The plus for Community Officers is that they will receive much-needed direct help from other professionals. Community Officers are always looking for receptive individuals in various agencies who will assist with referrals, but working together in a Neighborhood Network Center not only formalizes the process, it also allows the team the time together that they need to develop broad-based, long-term efforts. And far too many Community Officers risk early burnout trying to do too much themselves.
Quite obviously, no one can yet know precisely how the new community-based teams will function in practice. Nor can anyone anticipate all the problems that they may face. As this implies, the research and evaluation component is vital in identifying what works and what doesn't - and why. We look forward to using Footprints as a vehicle to keep you abreast of this extraordinary effort. All readers currently on the mailing list will also receive upcoming pamphlets in the Community Policing Series that will detail the findings from the research study. For now, we invite you to join us in imagining the possibilities.

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