# The Neighborhood Network Center: Part One
## Basic Issues and Planning and Implementation in Lansing, Michigan

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## SUMMARY

The Neighborhood Network Center concept evolved from Community Policing, the police reform that provides decentralized and personalized policing to the community. The Community Policing approach stations officers permanently in defined beat areas, so that these Community Officers and the people they service can work in partnership to make their neighborhoods better and safer places in which to live and work.

Experience with Community Policing shows that Community Officers are so well received within the community that they often find themselves inundated with tasks beyond the traditional scope of law enforcement. As police problem solvers who act as a catalyst for positive change, Community Officers routinely network with other social service providers, whose support is essential, but whose participation is limited by the fact that they are not out in the community each day, alongside the Community Officer.

The Neighborhood Network Center concept seeks to apply the decentralized and personalized model of Community Policing to the delivery of other public and private social services. This new approach allows other social service providers, such as social workers, public health nurses, mental health professionals, drug

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treatment counselors, education specialists, and probation and parole officers, to join the Community Officer in the community on a part-time or full-time basis. This new community-based team of professionals operates from a facility located in the target neighborhood.

The Community Officer serves as the vanguard and as the informal leader of this new group of community-based problem solvers for many reasons. First, the Community Officer knows the community intimately, its strengths and weaknesses. Second, the Community Officer has already established a bond of trust with the law-abiding people in the community, which can serve as a foundation for the other service providers. Third, the Community Officer acts as the protector for the other professionals who follow his or her lead back into the community, just as the Community Officer is the protector of the private citizens and volunteers in the beat area. Fourth, the Community Officer has the broadest range of options, ranging from a pat on the back for a job well done to the use of deadly force, in dealing with the problems that the community may face.

This report identifies the basics of the Neighborhood Network Center concept, its evolution from the Community Policing movement, and the experience of the Lansing (MI) Neighborhood Network Center so far. The National Center for Community Policing at Michigan State University is also consulting with other communities nationally that view this approach as important to neighborhood problem solving.

# INTRODUCTION

## The mini-series
This publication is the first of two (or more) booklets offered as a mini-series on the Neighborhood Network Center concept within the Community Policing Series. This first installment will define the basic Neighborhood Network Center concept and its roots in Community Policing, then it will focus on the planning and implementation of the new Neighborhood Network Center in Lansing, as a means of identifying the issues and obstacles that these new efforts must confront.

The second installment will elaborate on how the Lansing Neighborhood Network Center functions in practice, as well as the impact that it has had on the surrounding community. Future installments will appear, as warranted, to update results on the Lansing experience, to report on the other sites in the United States and England currently being monitored by the National Center for Community Policing, and to discuss emerging issues and concerns.

## A brief definition
The Neighborhood Network Center concept adapts the decentralized and personalized model provided by Community Policing to the delivery of other public and private social services to the community. The concept is based on establishing a decentralized office in a defined beat area, from which a team of part-time and full-time service providers can operate as a new community-based team of problem solvers, with the Community Officer acting as both protector and catalyst for improving and enhancing the delivery of social services.

The objective is to allow these professionals to work together to intervene with troubled individuals and families and their social and physical environment, with the goal of helping to make the neighborhood a better and safer place in which to live and work. In addition to the problems of crime, fear of crime, and illicit drugs, the Neighborhood Network Center approach is designed to assist and expand Community Policing's attempts to deal with social and physical disorder in the community.

This means that the Neighborhood Network Center concept will be evaluated on whether it can make a positive impact on problems as diverse as substandard housing, neighborhood decay, child neglect, substance abuse, or any other of the host of ills plaguing many neighborhoods today. The range of problems to which the Neighborhood Network Center concept can be applied is limited only by the kinds of problems that appear in

target neighborhoods and the skills, resources, and creativity that the new community-based team of problem solvers can bring to bear.

## Why Lansing?
The Lansing Neighborhood Network Center was chosen for special attention for a number of reasons:

- The Lansing experiment is among the first pilot projects in the Neighborhood Network Center concept in the United States, and it comes closest to fulfilling the basic requirements identified by the National Center for Community Policing.
- The National Center for Community Policing has had the opportunity to work closely with the Lansing Police Department and the various participating agencies early on, prior to the opening of the Lansing Neighborhood Network Center, which allows this publication to provide a detailed history and analysis of the issues that must be addressed in planning.
- The National Center for Community Policing is involved in efforts to monitor the progress of the experiment and to assist in evaluating its impact, which provides the opportunity to continue to update results.
- The Lansing Neighborhood Network Center is unusual in that this experiment has been launched without any substantial extra funding. All too often, innovations that depend on special grants disappear once the funding The emergence of what has come to be called the Neighborhood Network Center concept builds on the successes achieved through Community Policing. In essence, the Neighborhood Network Center concept applies the lessons learned from providing decentralized and personalized police service through the Community Policing approach to the delivery of other public and private social services to the community. The concept rests on the belief that Community Officers can serve as a model for the creation of a new community-based team of public, private, and volunteer problem-solvers, with Community Officers in the vanguard, as both the protector of those who follow and as the catalyst for positive intervention in the lives of people who live and work in troubled neighborhoods.

As this suggests, understanding the potential future of the Neighborhood Network Center concept requires understanding the history of Community Policing reform, since many of the same dynamics pertain. We should remember that those early experiments with what has come to be called Community Policing were once criticized for being a throwback to an earlier era--a nostalgic attempt to return to a romanticized past. In reality, of course, Community Policing updates the role of the old-fashioned beat cop, by asking today's Community Officer to do much more than simply pound the pavement and rattle doorknobs, as a visible deterrent to crime.

### The multi-faceted role of the Community Officer
Today's Community Officer does indeed function as a full-fledged law enforcement officer, but the job also requires involving average citizens in the process of identifying, prioritizing, and solving problems in the neighborhood. Community Officers help in organizing and mobilizing the resources available in the community, and this includes empowering average citizens, by challenging them to participate in efforts to make their communities safer and to improve the overall quality of life in their neighborhood. This often means recruiting citizen volunteers from inside and outside the neighborhood who are willing to donate their time and talents. Obviously, this also means reaching out to the local business community, to help solve their problems and to ask for their help in return.

In addition, the job requires Community Officers act as both liaison and ombudsman to other public and private agencies that can assist in reducing the social and physical disorder in the community. Dealing with physical disorder often means working with code enforcement on efforts to close dope houses, tear down abandoned buildings, and upgrade rental properties. Efforts can involve agencies ranging from animal control to sanitation to the fire department.

Many problems of social disorder that Community Officers must deal with also benefit from the direct involvement of human services providers--mental health therapists, substance abuse counselors, social workers, public health nurses, education specialists. Sometimes this means inviting one or more of these professionals to help intervene with a specific individual or family, or it can mean providing people with problems with a referral. Other times, Community Officers help organize broad-based efforts, for instance, by working with a public health nurse on providing regular classes for young mothers in the area on how to nurture their babies.

Community Officers routinely involve area schools, churches, synagogues, and temples in creative initiatives, and they also have the mandate and the authority to enlist assistance from non-profit agencies, such as food banks and groups that assist fragile populations such as the homeless and runaways. The roster of public and private agencies that Community Officers may involve is dictated by local needs and resources.

### Sharing the workload
Experience also shows the Community Officers who try to "go it alone" risk early burnout. Moreover, Community Policing has been criticized for turning police officers into social workers, when the reality is that Community Officers often find themselves forced to assume duties better handled by other service providers whose jobs no longer allow them to spend time in the community. The police remain the only public agency open 24 hours a day, seven days a week, which means that they are often asked to provide assistance to situations better handled by other social service agents.

In that sense, the Neighborhood Network Center concept not only recognizes what is already happening in many Community Policing beats, as Community Officers turn to other for help, but it carries the idea important steps further, by formalizing the relationship of the community-based team of problem solvers and by establishing that they should work together part-time or full-time from an office in the community. The opportunity to network with and involve other service providers can often make the difference between the success or failure of many Community Policing initiatives, not only because it provides more concerned professionals who can apply their talents to the challenges, but because it allows others to share the load, thereby allowing Community Officers to preserve their main role as a law enforcement officer.

As this implies, the Neighborhood Network Center concept puts a burden on service providers to adopt the Community Policing model of providing decentralized and personalized service. And if we remember the pressures that led to Community Policing reform and the resistance that it spawned in its early days, we can more easily recognize the obstacles that the Neighborhood Network Center concept will likely face.

Pressure To believe that effective and efficient crime control depended on the speed with which the police arrived at specific crime incidents, rather than on what they did when they arrived.

Also lost in the process was the direct connection between people and their police that had existed in the past, and this provided fertile ground for increasing mistrust and even outright hostility. Instead of the friendly beat cop on the corner that everyone knew, we now had the "thin blue line" of hard-nosed motor patrol officers dashing from call to call. Instead of people and police working in partnership to keep communities safe, this "professionalizing" of the police contributed to the widespread perception, in both police departments and in the community, that it was the job of the police, as the experts, to solve the community's problems by "catching all the bad guys."

Over time as well, the inherent limitations in a reactive approach that focuses almost exclusively on rapid response as the key to crime control began to emerge. A fundamental problem, of course, is that

this means that the police cannot act until a crime incident occurs and someone notifies the police. While the ability to arrive as quickly as possible at the scene is an essential function of the police, this approach does little to prevent people from being victimized, which is what people really want.

Research confirmed that the biggest lag was not between the time of the call to the police and the arrival of officers on the scene, but in the time that it takes people to contact the police. Obviously, many calls are delayed because crime victims and witnesses simply cannot get to a phone. Or a burglary victim does not even discover that a crime has been committed until long after the perpetrator has fled. Yet studies also showed that the vast majority of calls to the police do not involve a crime in progress, but other problems for which people want help. And research such as the Kansas City Preventive Patrol Study also called into question whether the mere visible presence of motor patrol cars on the street did much, if anything, to deter crime.

The crises, such as riots and clashes with anti-war protesters, that had added urgency to Community Policing experiments did abate over time. Yet not only did serious crime persist, but problems with illicit drugs exploded, and it has been the failure of traditional policing to halt or reverse the growing chaos in many communities literally overwhelmed by drugs that has sparked adoption of Community Policing reform nationwide.

## Why Community Policing works

Indeed, the problem of drugs underscores the limitations of traditional policing and therefore the importance of Community Policing reform. As the epidemic of crack verified, efforts to stop the flow of drugs to the street by having police focus the bulk of their resources on Mr.&127; Big is not enough. Community Policing balances efforts aimed at the top of the drug-dealing pyramid with initiatives that focused on solving the myriad of problems that illicit drugs cause in drug-infested neighborhoods.

Only by stationing Community Officers permanently in the community can the police intervene effectively with problems that range from the corrosive effort of open drug dealing on the community, to the challenge of impelling a pregnant addict into treatment, to the random violence as drug gangs battle for turf, and the child abuse and neglect that all too often result from addiction. Community Officers are the only agents of social control whose options in dealing with such problems range from providing a helping hand, to making a referral, to arrest, and even the use of deadly force.

## "Social work"--whose job is it?

Yet it is this broadening of the officer's role beyond the traditional focus on arrest that impels critics to argue that Community Policing smacks more of "social work" than "police work." While this ignores the strong social work component that has always been part of police work, Community Policing advocates note that Community Officers have increasingly adopted more of this role by default. The police remain the only public servants on call 24 hours a day, seven days a week, who still make house calls.

At issue as well is whether too many Community Officers risk burnout trying to wear too many hats. And if we think back to those days when the old-fashioned beat cop patrolled city streets, we should remember that those were the days when an unofficial team of other public service providers spent much of their time making house calls. In that era, social workers routinely made home visits to see firsthand whether children were neglected or abused. At the same time, the public health nurse might be out in the community, visiting the homes of the young, the elderly, and the infirm. Probation and parole officers, too, made scheduled and unscheduled home visits, to ensure that their clients were living up to the terms of their release. Those were also the days when so-called truant officers roamed the streets, making sure that kids were not "playing hooky."

## Centralization of public services

As this suggests, many of the same dynamics that pulled the police away from direct contact with the community resulted in centralizing--and thereby depersonalizing--the role of other public service providers. If we use social workers as an example, we see again that well- meaning attempts to professionalize the job dramatically changed the nature of the relationship between service provider and client. In place of the social worker, going from house to house, checking up--or snooping--on their clients, centralization created the image of social workers as educated professionals, seated behind desks in a downtown office, where clients come to them.

Part of the rationale for this shift toward centralization was the desire to reduce opportunities for individual discretion. Viewed positively, discretion was what had previously allowed the social worker whose heart was moved by a struggling family's plight to bend the rules a bit, to give them more than the rules might allow. Viewed negatively, discretion also meant that a social worker who disapproved of a parent's lifestyle could threaten to cut the family's benefits. Centralization shifted power and control to supervisors downtown, in the hope that this would reduce opportunities for fraud and abuse, just as pulling police from the community and setting their agenda through the police radio allowed police managers greater control over their agenda.

## Drawbacks to centralization

Among the unintended consequences of removing service providers (including the police) from the community was that this reduced opportunities for them to act as informal agents of social control. In the past, everyone from the youngster tempted to skip school on a warm spring day, to the purse-snatcher, to the alcoholic parent who might otherwise leave a toddler unsupervised had reason to fear that their misbehavior would be detected by someone with the authority to intervene.

Pulling those agents of social control from direct contact with the community also meant that only those problems that reached a certain threshold of severity would come to the attention of the formal system. Neighbors concerned about that unsupervised toddler, for example, might think twice about filing a formal complaint, if only because of fear of retribution. Yet that is the kind of concern that might well be conveyed informally to a police officer, social worker, or public health nurse who was known and trusted by the community. With Community Policing, for example, not only do we find that Community Officers find out more about illicit activities than even undercover officers, but their sustained presence allows them to take so-called "petty crime" seriously, before the problems escalate, just as the problems with that neglected toddler may well magnify and multiply over time, if no one acts.

This shift also reduced opportunities for these service providers to act as positive role models for the young. Perhaps it is no coincidence that the transition to centralization took place at the same time that rising crime rates also persuaded those members of the community who could afford to do so to flee to safer neighborhoods.

Over the years, it has become apparent that one of the crucial difficulties that youngsters face growing up in low-income/high-crime neighborhoods is that the most "successful" adults that they are likely to see are those who break the law--the pimps and the drug pushers. Corrosive as well is that this narrows the yardstick of success to money. Public servants who help make the neighborhood a better and safer place demonstrate firsthand that there is satisfaction in work beyond the size of the paycheck. They also serve as a vivid example of the virtues of delayed gratification--that staying in school on that warm spring day and studying hard can pay off in the future.

Another downside to centralization is that it contributes to alienation on both sides. Imagine the challenge that the mother on welfare clad in secondhand clothes faces in confronting an impersonal bureaucracy. First, she must find a way to visit the agency, which may well be far across town. Then,

she must arrange for child care or take her children with her. When she arrives, she may be forced to wait for hours to be heard--by educated professionals who may not speak her native language or who may employ a vocabulary that she doesn't understand or finds intimidating. Maybe she finds herself shunted from desk to desk, line to line, rarely seeing the same person twice on repeat visits. It is easy to see why she views government as a faceless and impersonal bureaucracy--and the bored and tired youngsters at her side are not inspired to want to grow up to become the professionals that Mommy cursed all the way home.

On the other side of those desks are the professionals, trapped in offices where they spend more time talking with each other than with the people that they are supposed to serve. All day long, they listen to complaints and problems, as a stream of clients struggle to make themselves understood. On their way home at night, no doubt many routinely avoid the neighborhoods where most of their clients live, and they may, in fact, never go there. Again, it is easy to see how this structure promotes the attitude on the part of social workers that clients typically try to manipulate the system and that they always have a ready excuse for each problem of failure.

The job rarely if ever provides opportunities for these professionals to see the challenges that their clients face and to see the progress that many people make despite the odds. Just as with the police, centralization inadvertently promotes an "us" against "them" mindset on both sides.

## Public clamor for change

Trapped in the middle are restive middle-class taxpayers, increasingly frustrated at paying more and more for government services that seem to accomplish less and less. Many automatically resent seeing so many tax dollars spent on services that they never expect to use themselves. But resentment can turn to fury when they believe that these expensive efforts do not seem to make any dent in the violence and the misery that they see on the nightly TV news.

Admittedly, voters have many misperceptions about those who are trapped in low- income/high-crime neighborhoods. According to journalist William Greider, in the case of welfare, 60% of the poor receive no public assistance, though costs for such help have risen dramatically during the last decade, as nearly a million more recipients have been added to the welfare rolls. Two-thirds of all poor families have at least one worker, often someone trapped in a menial job insufficient to support the family.

Important as well is that "{w}elfare is still a badge for shame for most people, white and black, and they get off as soon as possible. The majority are on AFDC (Aid to Families with Dependent Children) for less than a year, a quarter for less than four months."(1)

Another myth, debunked by a study in California, is that welfare mothers have a higher birthrate than other mothers. In fact, in the past two decades, the number of children in the average welfare family has dropped from three to two. Greider also reports, "A nationwide survey found that welfare mothers in states like California with higher benefits do not have more babies than welfare mothers in states with meager benefits."(2)

Adding to the controversy about services for the poor is the volatile issue of race. Two-thirds of the poor are white, yet many taxpayers continue to think of welfare in terms of a black single mother with more children than they themselves can afford, which contributes to endangering their willingness to support welfare funding. Instead, we are seeing cutbacks. Michigan dropped 82,000 single adults from the welfare rolls, and other states are considering cuts or rule changes to eliminate additional benefits for each child. California's Governor Pete Wilson is also promoting an initiative where voters will decide whether to cut AFDC benefits by 25%.(3)

As this suggests, the delivery of services to low-income/high-crime neighborhoods cries out for reform, not only because the people who live there want programs that really work, but because perceived failures of the existing system threaten support for future funding. Primary among voters' concerns is that the prevailing system does not put enough of the responsibility for positive change on the community. Just as traditional policing fostered the attitude that crime is a problem for the police to solve, many fear that the current system of delivering public services to troubled communities fosters dependence.

Community Policing challenges people to find solutions to the problems that they care about, and this subtle but profound shift extends to the Neighborhood Network Center concept. The goal is to empower and assist, not to step in and provide all the answers.

## A worrisome future
In their Pulitzer-Prize winning essays, reporters Donald L. Bartlett and James B. Steele report that the number of jobs in manufacturing are dropping, as lower-paying jobs in retail and service are climbing. In their book, *America: What Went Wrong?*, the authors note that the percentage of all workers employed in manufacturing dropped from 33% in the 1950's to almost half that today, "17%--and falling."(4)

Free trade between the United States and Mexico is also expected to accelerate the trend where U.S. companies export manufacturing jobs to Mexico. According to the authors, since 1965, more than 1,800 plants, employing more than 500,000 workers, have been built in Mexico, most by U.S. corporations. Competing in the new global economy also means that companies are slashing their white-collar workforce; for example, General Motors recently announced that it will trim thousands of white-collar jobs from middle management as part of restructuring.

Meanwhile, the places hit hardest by unemployment and underemployment are often those where the tax base to support public services is shrinking. According to a report on ABC's Nightline, between 1980 and 1990, workers wages rose on average 53%, while corporate profits rose 78%--and executive salaries for CEO's rose 212%.

Of particular concern to urban police, who depend on local taxes for the bulk of their support, is that those who benefited most from the boom of the 1980's tend to live outside their jurisdictions. Many human services agencies, such as social services and public health, depend instead on a mix of state and federal funding, which means that the wealthy still pay their share. So while we can expect to see public and non-profit agencies exploring the opportunities in the Neighborhood Network Center concept, because the idea makes sense, it is the police who are most likely to spearhead this change. Not only do they see firsthand what a decentralized and personalized approach can accomplish, but their unique financial problems mean that they cannot afford to pick up any slack for other agencies. Indeed, for Community Policing to survive the current economic crunch, many departments will be forced to agitate for Neighborhood Network Center reform.

## The Ideal
The "perfect" Neighborhood Network Center
Several years ago, the National Center for Community Policing began to explore how the Community Policing model could be applied to the delivery of other public, private, and volunteer services to the community, coining the term "Neighborhood Network Center." While there is indeed nothing new under the sun, and some communities in the United States and Canada have experimented with community-based service delivery of social services, these efforts have often been piecemeal, and most have ignored

the crucial role that Community Officers can and should play. In this section, the goal is to identify the ideal--how the theory of the Neighborhood Network Center would be realized in a perfect world.

## The roster

The initial question, of course, is what agencies beyond the police should participate. However, there is no easy answer to that question--no ideal list--since the roster should be based on the needs of the community.

In a perfect world, the police department and the area's Community Officer would be involved early on in the planning process. The input of the Community Officer is essential, since they have the best handle on local needs, through their work in the community, and they could suggest and invite community residents whose input would be valuable. Most importantly, the people who live in the area must be the catalyst in all efforts to make the neighborhood safe. Ideally as well, the Neighborhood Network Center would soon attract the support and participation of all public and private agencies identified as useful in solving the kinds of problems that the community faces.

Almost always, the ideal Neighborhood Network Center would require the direct participation in the facility of the following public-sector agencies: police, social services, community mental health, public health, probation and parole. In some communities, it might make sense for a code enforcement official to move into the Center. In Lansing, it made sense to offer space to school personnel. We could also envision circumstances, such as if the Center is located in a fire department substation, where fire fighting personnel might spend part of their time helping out. Again, the roster of public agencies depends on local needs and resources.

In addition, there are many non-profit agencies that could logically place all or part of their personnel in the Center: Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts, Salvation Army, and groups that help fragile populations, such as the homeless or people with AIDS. The support of local religious institutions is also essential, though it may or may not make sense to station their personnel on site unless the Center is located in one of their facilities. Ideally as well, volunteers recruited from the community would donate time for office chores, such as answering phones, opening mail, and keeping records. Volunteers with special skills, from inside and outside the neighborhood, should also be recruited to help.

## The site

As the list of essentials that follows attests, the Neighborhood Network Center concept requires establishing a local office in the community. In many ways, locating this office in a school is ideal, because so much of the work required to improve the overall quality of life in the community over time requires intervening with juveniles, and the support of local schools is integral to success. It should be noted, however, that many schools simply have no space to spare, and, in Lansing, the reverse occurred, when school district personnel asked for space in the new Neighborhood Network Center located in the former State of Michigan Library.

Churches and recreational centers may also provide free or inexpensive space for a Neighborhood Network Center, but it must be clearly understood that the Lansing Neighborhood Network Center is not a social center. While the lease prevents the Lansing facility from serving as a true "drop-in center," it is a place that people turn to for help. Neighborhood Network Centers can also be the site for various enriching activities, such as classes on how to find a job or perhaps for AA meetings. Ideally, it can become a place where community volunteers can help their neighbors with special needs ranging from babysitting to tutoring. The community-based team of problem-solvers must have the flexibility to host activities that they deem useful, and residents of the community feel welcome, but it cannot be allowed to degenerate into a place where people merely "hang out."

Part of the challenge in establishing the ideal Neighborhood Network Center is finding an affordable site, or, preferably, one that is free. In Fort Pierce, Florida, the city donated a house to the police department for use as a Neighborhood Network Center, and it might be poetic justice to have a structure seized through drug forfeiture turned into a Neighborhood Network Center. Perhaps there is free space available in public housing or in apartment complexes whose owners recognize the benefits in having this kind of facility located in their midst.

## Getting started

Ideally as well, the community-based team will challenge individuals, businesses, and corporations from inside and outside the neighborhood to donate office equipment and to provide the budget for utilities and telephone. A logical first project in which to involve the community might well be a campaign to paint, decorate, and ready the new facility for its Grand Opening. Asking local businesses to donate the cleaning products and paint might be a good way for the new staff to introduce itself to the private sector.

## Basics identified from Community Policing

A Neighborhood Network Center differs from other community-based efforts because it implies creating a new community-based team of service providers who work together as problem-solvers in the community. Again, if we look to Community Policing as the model, we see that true Neighborhood Network Center reform requires:

o   A commitment to structural and organizational change within the participating agencies.

There is a tendency in any bureaucracy to want change in theory, but to resist change in practice. Community Policing requires that the entire department adopt the philosophy implicit in developing a new relationship with the community (the easy part). But it also requires structural and organizational change that allow civilian and sworn employees to express this commitment in their jobs, and it also requires that the department deploy line officers permanently as Community Officers in defined beats (the hard parts).

Applying this model to Neighborhood Network Centers means that participating public and private agencies and volunteers must embrace the philosophical change embodied in the commitment to involve average citizens as partners in the process of identifying and prioritizing problems and implementing solutions. All activities must contribute to the goal of improving the overall quality of life in the community.

To make that commitment real requires that everyone in the participating agencies, from top administrators to support personnel, must find ways to express the change in philosophy in their jobs. It also means making the structural changes required to place one or more line-level employees permanently in the Neighborhood Network Center facility, part-time or full-time, where they will operate as a member of the community-based team of problem solvers.

o   A formal mission statement and letter of agreement.

Institutionalizing change is an important part of the process, and the discussions required to document the change often serve as an important way to clarify goals. Ideally, each participating agency should rewrite its mission statement to reflect the new commitment, and all participating agencies should spell out as many specifics as possible in their basic agreement to work together in the Neighborhood Network Center.

- Tailor the response to local needs and ity in a defined beat area.

The concept of ownership is essential to Community Policing, since it makes Community Officers feel responsible for and care about the neighborhoods that they serve. Engendering this feeling in the community-based team not only requires defining a beat area, but also providing a facility in the community that allows the entire team a place where they can interact and field questions, complaints, and input from the public.

Community Policing demonstrates that Community Officers, who maintain daily, face-to-face contact with people in defined beats, are held directly accountable to the people they serve, of obvious importance in light of the Rodney King incident and the riot in Los Angeles. Experience shows that this constant interaction breaks down anonymity on both sides. This means the Community Officer knows who deserves a pat on the back and whom to keep an eye on; at the same time, the people in the community know that they can confront their officer personally about any concerns related to his or her behavior. We anticipate that the same dynamics will enhance the mutual accountability between the other service providers and the people in the community.

It should be noted, however, that some members of the team may operate within different geographic boundaries, because their workload may dictate that they need to work within a smaller or larger space. As a general guideline, however, the beat area for all participating professionals should follow the boundaries established by the Community Officer, whenever possible.

- Opportunities for part-time and full-time line-level employees (and volunteers) to have sustained, face-to-face contact with the community.

As noted above, it is easy to embrace the philosophy of Community Policing, but much harder to commit to the organizational change required. The concept requires stationing a Community Officer permanently in a defined beat area, where the officer can maintain constant and direct contact with the community, and the same holds true for the rest of the community-based team. It is not enough to say that the service providers will "visit as necessary," if that in any way implies that this is a euphemism used to obscure a lack of commitment to the structural and organizational change that the Neighborhood Network Center requires.

The same holds true for the decision concerning whether the participating professional will work out of the Neighborhood Network Center part-time of full-time. The decision should reflect the needs of the community and not the needs of the bureaucracy. It should be evident that the agency is making a full commitment, even when the team member spends less than 40 hours a week at the facility.

- Community input in identifying and prioritizing problems (through surveys and direct contact).

Perhaps the biggest danger in creating a community-based team of professionals is that they will spend too much time talking to each other and not enough time with people in the community. For this to be a grass-roots effort mirroring the best of Community Policing, it is essential that the community must have a voice in setting the agenda and in fashioning solutions. The community-based team should employ formal techniques, such as surveys and community meetings, but they should also take the time to find

out people's feeling, through informal home and business visits and chats on the street and at the Center.

- o Education and support of the Big Five.

  Community Policing requires the support of the Big Five--the police department, civic officials, the community, other agencies, and the media, and the Neighborhood Network Centers must follow this model, if they are to succeed. As this implies, the members of the community-based team must have the support and commitment of their own agencies, and they must be alert to the dangers of internal friction and jealousies. The support of civic officials is obviously essential, since they will ultimately be held accountable by voters. Part of their education must include an awareness that there will be failures and embarrassing mistakes--that is simply the implicit price of allowing this new community-based team the freedom to experiment.

  In terms of community support, the challenge is often to make sure that both average citizens and community leaders understand and support the efforts. A new challenge will be to ensure that agencies which do not place any of their personnel in the Center must still be willing to assist with community-based initiatives, when and if they are asked. Informing the media about the concept can also help in efforts to educate the community about this approach, its goals and objectives, and the tradeoffs that it may imply.

- o A focus on problem-solving, through a team approach.

  As with Community Policing, the goal is not just to work hard, but to work smart. The community-based team must always focus on results, shifting and adjusting the roster of professionals and volunteers who will work on various efforts, to ensure that their efforts contribute to making the community a better and safer place in which to live and work.

  The difference with the Neighborhood Network Center approach is that the team can mobilize its members to attack problems from many different angles. Consider the possibilities if a school counselor brings the team concerns about a youngster whose grades have plunged suddenly and who has begun skipping school. Perhaps a visit from the social worker raises concerns that the youngster needs help from a mental health therapist. Perhaps the parents have problems with substance abuse and should be referred to treatment. Maybe part of the problem is that the youngster isn't eating properly, and the public health nurse could assist the parents by showing them how to prepare nutritious meals on a tight budget.

  Perhaps the youngster has joined a gang that deals drugs, and the Community Officer should play a role. Or part of the answer may be to encourage the youngster to participate in new community-based activities instigated by the team that are designed to build self-esteem. Maybe the youngster needs specific tutoring help that a community volunteer could provide, through a referral list kept at the Center. It is even conceivable that a code enforcement official could play a role; maybe the family's apartment has decayed to the point where the youngster has no place to study, or the house next door may be a dope house where customers keep him up all night, and code enforcement could provide a remedy.

  Through specific and broad-based efforts, the community-based team can focus on using their resources and the resources in the community to solve problems.

- A commitment to recruit and involve local volunteers.

  As noted before, the goal of the Neighborhood Network Center is to empower the community, so that it takes responsibility for solving its own problems. Part of this new partnership with the community requires that average citizens must help, through support and direct participation. The community-based team should also attempt to identify individuals who have special talents or abilities that they can contribute, and it will often make good sense to have local volunteers provide office help. Some may be willing to donate their time out of goodwill, while others will benefit from compiling experience and references that can help them land a paying job later.

- A mandate to be creative and innovative.

  The challenge is not just to identify the neighborhood's weaknesses, but its strengths as well--and to turn problems into opportunities. For example, fear of crime is often a serious problem among the elderly, exacerbated by loneliness and boredom. At the same time, many single parents are often struggling to raise children alone. The community-based team may decide to recruit retirees to provide emergency care for youngsters whose parents have problems, or when a parent needs someone to watch a sick child while they work. Encouraging contact between the elderly and the young can help make the kids less likely to vandalize or otherwise victimize their new "friends," at the same time that communication with these youngsters can help ease the fears of the elderly. The Neighborhood Network Center approach is unique in encouraging service providers to use all their skills, including their imagination, and only through experience over time will we learn all the ways that it can be applied.

  With this ideal in mind, we will now look at how the Lansing Neighborhood Network Center made the transition from being a promising idea to becoming concrete reality. As you still see, there was fertile ground in Lansing for a Neighborhood Network Center, because of the past history where the Lansing Police Department had a successful Community Policing effort in place in the neighborhood, and because the Bingham School Group had introduced the idea that problems in the community demanded greater coordination among service providers. Following the history of the Lansing experiment so far, we will explore issues and obstacles specific to Neighborhood Network Center and the obstacles which all such initiatives must confront.

# The Lansing Experiment

## Setting the Stage

Since January 1990, Community Officer Don Christy has committed himself to reversing the spiral of decay that plagues the Sparrow Estates neighborhood, and, since 1991, the adjoining Green Oaks neighborhood in Lansing, Michigan, focusing his energies on projects to physically improve the neighborhood, shut down drug houses, and by organizing social events to help the neighbors get to know one another, "Uncle Don," as he is affectionately known by the neighborhood children, has had a positive impact in his beat area, by restoring a sense of "neighborhood" to an area that not long ago was identified with drugs, prostitution, and disorder.

Plenty of door-to-door contact with the residents has resulted in the sharing of information most crucial to help solve the crime problems that the neighborhood faces--the drug dealing and prostitution, and the frequent social events that he puts together help to lessen the fear of crime. Christy says that the events tend to moderate the behavior of troubled people, and all ages attend--from 6 months to 80 years. The

19-year-old vandal is less likely to attack the home of the 70-year-old widow down the street, if he knows her by name and they spoke at a social event. Hence, the 70-year-old widow is less likely to fear the 19-year old, and the fear of crime diminishes.

The social events have ranged from a non-alcohol New Year's party in 1991, to the annual overnight campout held in the local elementary schoolyard. Parents and children alike experience the country in the city, sleeping out in tents donated by the National Guard, roasting hot dogs and marshmallows on an open fire, with the skyline of downtown Lansing in the near distance.

Improving the physical appearance of the Sparrow Estates/Green Oaks neighborhoods has been part of Christy's commitment, and he organized a neighborhood trash pickup that netted 37 dumpsters of trash that were hauled away. With federal beautification money, the t the school system. The directors of the Ingham County Department of Social Services, Tri-County Mental Health, Ingham County Health Department, and the Ingham County Probate Court, the Superintendents of the Lansing School District and the Ingham Intermediate School District, and Cory initially met to discuss how they could improve services to those dysfunctional families in response to a crisis in the schools. Thus began the Interagency Group which continued the discussion on a regular basis.

Cory recalls that there were communication problems early on. First of all, there is no common lexicon used among the agencies to describe a common problem. An "at-risk" child may mean one who is at-risk for malnutrition or disease to the health department, while it may point to a child whose parents are abusive to the mental health department. The Probate Court may identify criminal behavior as a shoplifter who steals food to feed the family, while the mental health department may identify common ground, and to develop an "inter-agency language" to be able to speak with one another.

The agencies, by nature of their function, tended to be territorial and protective of their turf. If families had two or three service agencies involved to help them with their various problems, the agencies might be unaware of the participation of the other, and nobody seemed willing to accept responsibility for the whole problem. The nature of the business is to pass the buck, so to speak. Families commonly are passed from agency to agency, with nobody acting in a position of responsibility for the whole problem. The Inter-Agency Group meetings helped the administration of the agencies see that the problems shared common ground and that it would be worthwhile to continue to meet to talk about finding ways to work together and share information and ownership of problems.

## The Bingham School Working Group
A year after the first Inter-Agency Group meeting, Jacque Urso said that she needed services, not more discussion. She needed access to the service providers, not the administrators. An inter-agency meeting was held, and it was agreed that the administrators would allow a group of service providers (five levels down from them) to meet at Bingham School, at a grass-roots level, to see what they could do to work together to aid the dysfunctional families of the children at Bingham School.

Since 1989, the Bingham School Working Group has met on a monthly basis, to target the troubled school children and their families, working with multiple agencies to try to solve the numerous problems that the family may face. Initially, the group consisted of Jacque Urso, school psychologist Ellen Chaney, various teachers, representatives from the Ingham County Department of Public Health, a public health nurse, Ingham County Probate Court, and Community Mental Health. The group has expanded to encompass anywhere from four to 15 service providers at the meetings, depending on the case. Only those service providers working on a case are invited to attend that meeting, but others may be brought in, if the group decides that they may be able to help. Ellen Chaney chairs the group and calls in "consultants" from a list of 35 different specialties and agencies.

Urso states that the only obstacle to overcome with the group initially was to build up a sense of trust among the participants. This was a new approach, and they were travelling into unknown territory. Some of them feared breaches of confidentiality. The group built up a sense of trust after working closely together over time, and the meeting format has been revamped so that only those working on a particular case can be in the room at the time of the discussion. In order to maintain the confidence of clients, the families are asked to sign a "sign-off sheet" developed by the Inter-Agency Group which allows the various agencies working on their case to share information. Urso or Chaney often take the sign-off sheet to clients' homes and explain how the sharing of information can further help the child or family. So far, they have only had one refusal.

Chaney cites an example of how working together, the Bingham School Working Group was able to turn a youngster around by focusing on his talents, not his weaknesses. The child was targeted by the group because of his reputation as a neighborhood "terror." He also exhibited behavioral problems at school, as well as a learning disability. The child was placed in special education for the learning disabled, which lowered his already fragile self-esteem. The mother was hesitant to have the group intervene and was uncooperative and unhappy that her child was placed in special education. They called in a self-esteem specialist to work with the child and uncovered a talent for gymnastics. The group invited a coach to evaluate him, and he confirmed that the child did, indeed, have quite a talent. The Bingham School Working Group found a local business to sponsor him in gymnastics classes, which would have been too costly for the mother to afford. The child's behavior and self-esteem took a turn for the better, as did the mother's willingness to cooperate with the Bingham School Working Group.

## Expanding the model

When Officer Christy arrived on his beat a year after the Bingham School Working Group started, he shared many of Urso's feelings. The problems in the Sparrow Estates neighborhood were more than disciplinary or law enforcement problems. Unemployment, inadequate housing, poor health care, lack of parenting skills, substance abuse problems, and child abuse and neglect were rampant, and crime was one outcome of those underlying problems. Christy was overwhelmed by the need for multiple services, as most Community Officers are, once they get out of the car and onto the beat.

Since the Bingham School Working Group was offering multiple services to the families of children attending the school in Christy's beat area, he began to attend the meetings. This began a give-and-take with Christy sharing what information he could to help bring solutions to the problem families that had a child attending Bingham School. In return, he was given information that would aid him in solving some of the problems on his beat. This, however, was limiting. Only those with school-aged children attending that school were served. Those who fell through the cracks were the elderly, singles, families with preschool aged children (many of whom are single parents), and those whose children attend school outside of the Bingham School area--about half of the Sparrow Estates neighborhood. The group had no way to address other problems, such as the physical and social environments of the neighborhoods. These were beyond the scope of what could be done from the school perspective, but they certainly influenced the quality of life of clients served by the Bingham School Working Group, as well as the rest of the neighborhood.

With the Bingham School Working Group already in place, and discussions at the top administrative level still taking place with the InterAgency Group, a launching pad for a new method of service delivery was already in place that might be expanded to include a broader range of people and problems in the Green Oaks/Sparrow Estates neighborhoods. Officer Christy; his supervisor, Sgt. Andy George; and Assistant Chief Dave Sinclair of the Lansing Police Department, along with a neighborhood representative from each of the two neighborhoods, began attending the Inter-Agency Group meetings, to see what could be done. Christy had already begun to act as a catalyst for change in the neighborhood,

to reduce drug trafficking and fear of crime, and the neighbors were beginning to feel safer. Using Christy as a catalyst for change and using him to pave the way and make it safer, why not bring the multi-service approach to Green Oaks/Sparrow Estates, to solve problems as the Bingham School Working Group had done?

Community Officers can only do so much in their beat area alone. Christy found himself acting in the capacity of a social worker, mental health professional, employment counselor, medical referral source, and welfare caseworker, above and beyond his role as the Community Officer. Other than the fact that wearing all these other hats took time away from his law enforcement duties, it took up much of his personal time as well. One of the biggest problems that Community Officers face is burnout, because they don't have the resources available to do the things that need to be done in their neighborhoods, and they end up trying to do things themselves that are commonly the jurisdiction of other social-service providers.

Christy had also built up a great deal of trust between himself and the people in the neighborhood. Knowing the individuals and their problems on a personal level, it was hard for Christy to have anyone else come in to do anything to help. It would be difficult to delegate responsibilities to anyone who did not know of the culture and people of the neighborhood firsthand, since they would not have the same level of trust.

Robert Trojanowicz, director of the National Center for Community Policing, had long been a proponent of decentralizing and personalizing police through Community Policing and he began to see how decentralizing and personalizing other social services was the next logical step for the Community Policing movement. He envisioned having the Community Officer act as the catalyst and protector for a number of social service providers, operating from a storefront in a troubled neighborhood, to help to tackle the wide range of problems plaguing urban areas. Calling this the Neighborhood Network Center concept, Trojanowicz had a theory but no site. He approached the top command of the Lansing Police Department with information about the Neighborhood Network Center concept, as a way to make more significant change in the neighborhoods and to ease Christy's burden as the sole decentralized and personalized service provider. At this juncture, Assistant Chief David Sinclair of the Lansing Police Department invited Trojanowicz to join him at the Inter-Agency Group meetings to discuss the possibilities of making the Neighborhood Network Center concept a reality.

### The Letter of Understanding
The Inter-Agency Group was working on a document that would formalize their commitment to work together and identify common ground, and it was signed by the agency heads in February 1991, the result of two years of effort. The Letter of Understanding formalized their commitment to:

- o cooperate to provide a continuum of quality services for children and families as close to the home environment as possible,
- o meet from time to time to discuss and implement inter-agency cooperation with the goal of better servicing the needs of the citizens in the service areas of the agencies,
- o fully meet the needs of all children in the agencies service areas,
- o identify gaps in human services in the community and identify funding sources to meet those gaps,
- o identify areas and circumstances in which potential clients of the agencies would benefit from services of more than one agency,
- o evaluate and determine specific initiatives that require agency or inter-agency cooperation to meet the needs of unserved and underserved persons in need or coordinated services from these human service agencies,
- o seek out, consider, and develop possible funding proposals for the funding of coordinated human services from and for these agencies for the residents of Ingham County.

- o identify and bring for consideration issues that may benefit from joint problem-solving initiatives, and
- o work cooperatively for the commitment and planning of benefits and services to be provided by the agencies to the residents of the country while recognizing that each agency must work within the constraints of that agency's statutory responsibility and limitations.

Although at this time the agreement was still in the works, it was apparent that the agencies involved in the Inter-Agency Group were willing to make a commitment to begin to do something cooperatively to assist their clients, and the Neighborhood Network Center concept seemed to fit with their commitment. With the National Center for Community Policing located nearby at Michigan State University in East Lansing, the opportunity was there for the Center staff to consult on the project, and in return, the Center could use the Lansing experiment as a research lab for the concept.

## Obstacles

The Bingham School Working Group was operating successfully, because they were given permission to cut red tape in order to get things done. However, trying to pull a similar project together and eliminate red tape among the top level bureaucrats of the Inter-Agency Group was not as easy as it was at the "worker bee" level. There were many obstacles to overcome before the Neighborhood Network Center could be a reality.

In some cases, wrenches were thrown into the gears because of the bureaucratic mindset. One service provider argued that if her agency were to decentralize and put a provider into an office, the Neighborhood Network Center would have to provide an expensive computer linkup to central headquarters and provide an overnight security guard to protect the computer and the caseworker's files. When asked if they had that kind of security at central headquarters where there were thousands of files, the answer was "no." The bureaucratic mindset often finds reasons not to change, even if the change may be for the better, sticking instead with the status quo.

As the issues surfaced for discussion, so did a multitude of questions, many of which still have no answer:

- o Confidentiality--Different agencies have different restrictions on who the service providers can talk to and about what. Although the Bingham School Working Group has the sign-off sheet that permits agencies that are working on the same case to share information, what about the breach of confidence that could occur at the coffee machine as part of talking about the job at the worker bee level?
- o Jargon--As stated earlier, there is no common lexicon to define the problems.
- o Turf--The concern was raised that turf battles would surface. What happens when you put a group of professionals from different agencies together in the same place? How will they act? Who will handle what? Who take credit for the successes and failures?
- o Worker safety--Does liability increase for the worker who is now making home visits in a "bad" neighborhood? Does the Community Officer provide enough protection? What risks will they be taking?
- o Funding--If an umbrella grant should come into the Neighborhood Network Center, how will the money be used? Who will decide? Who pays for what in the general operation of the Neighborhood Network Center?
- o The bureaucratic impulse--Will there be a tendency for the group of professionals in the Neighborhood Network Center to talk mostly among themselves and turn the effort back into a bureaucracy?
- o Personnel--What type of person works best in the Neighborhood Network Center setting? How do you develop a job description for that person, and a pay scale? How will they be evaluated?
- o Accountability--Who is boss? Who will be accountable, and who will resolve issues among the agencies?

The next step was for Officer Christy to see if there was a site available that could be used as a Neighborhood Network Center. Christy was then renting an office in his beat located in the basement of the old State of Michigan Library, which had been purchased by a local real estate developer. The entire second floor of the

building was available, since there was a glut of office space on the market. Christy, with his uncanny ability to "scrounge" and pull things together, convinced the landlord to donate the space for the Neighborhood Network Center. Having the space donated turned out to be the real "drawing card" that got the Neighborhood Network Center up and going, as is discussed later.

The Neighborhood Network Center space had been neglected for years, and with the help and skills of people in the neighborhood, Christy organized a massive cleanup and the site was opened officially in January of 1991.

Karen Gotting began working with the Inter-Agency Group after a project she was working on was completed. Gotting worked for Highfields, a non-profit social service organization, that had obtained a grant for a specific project from the Gannett Foundation to explore inter-agency cooperation among three neighboring counties. Her work was completed early, but the grant continued, so she was sent to the Inter-Agency Group to offer her skills in problem identification and inter-agency cooperation. Using a technique she calls "storyboarding," Gotting held meetings with the Inter-Agency Group, neighborhood representatives from the Green Oaks/Sparrow Estates neighborhoods, and Officer Christy to help them identify and prioritize the problems of their neighborhood and develop a roster of services that could be delivered from the Neighborhood Network Center.

It became clear from these meetings that there was a difference in what the neighborhood representatives wanted as opposed to the Neighborhood Network Center concept which the Inter-Agency Group and Community Officer were working toward. The Neighborhood Network Center concept allows neighborhood leaders a voice, but, in this case, it created a conflict for two reasons: On the one hand, the agreement to occupy donated space included agreeing not to use it as a community center or drop-in center, due to increased liability for the landlord. On the other hand, the neighborhood representatives wanted it to be exactly that. In some circumstances, this could have split the factions against each other--neighborhood vs. service providers--but the reality was that the neighborhood representatives, on closer examination, had little community support. Down the road, the neighborhood representatives formed an eight-person "Oversight Committee" that is informed of any news regarding the Neighborhood Network Center and which then offers its suggestions.

Gotting feels that it is tricky when outsiders go into a neighborhood and attempt to do something. Just because the service providers are outsiders, there is resentment and suspicion, mixed with gratitude. This, she felt, may be part of human nature and would have been an obstacle in any similar situation.

Another obstacle at first seemed so large that it threatened to close the doors of the center as soon as it opened. Michigan's new Governor Engler had been elected only months before and quickly began "Right-Sizing" all government agencies because of a severe budget problem in Michigan. The problem was very pronounced and the idea of expanding into the Neighborhood Network Center during such a time seemed impossible. The fear was that no agency could afford to place a service provider at the Neighborhood Network Center.

Although the ideal was to decentralize and personalize a social service provider from agency, it seemed impossible to do at the time. In one case, it wasn't the cost, but the caseload. Probate Court, with its offices located less than a mile away from the Neighborhood Network Center, found only 10 or 12 juvenile cases in the Green Oaks/Sparrow Estates neighborhood. A typical caseload for a juvenile probation officer is 30 to 40 cases. Since their office was already so close, it seemed to make better sense to stay where they were and instead offer a telephone liaison to the Neighborhood Network Center, to answer questions when they arose.

An anonymous donor came up with money to pay for utilities for the first year of operation of the Neighborhood Network Center, and it was then decided by Assistant Chief Dave Sinclair of the Lansing Police Department, Bob Trojanowicz of the National Center for Community Policing, and others meeting in the Inter-Agency Group to forge ahead anyhow, knowing that they no longer had the luxury of developing a roster of services based on neighborhood need. The Neighborhood Network Center was opened with free rent to any service provider who might desire to relocate into the Neighborhood Network Center.

First to commit was the Lansing Police Department. Other than Officer Christy's office, space was provided for an office for the three district patrol drivers who serve the area which included Green Oaks/Sparrow Estates. In addition to providing a restroom, the officers could use the facility to make phone calls, write reports, drink coffee, or have lunch.

By August 1991, the Lansing School District moved some of their people in. The convenient location saved money on mileage, and the free rent was an incentive during hard financial times. Along with them came a secretary who acts as a receptionist who also answers calls for Officer Christy as a cooperative effort. From last August to the time of this writing, the Neighborhood Network Center staff roster has expanded and includes the following:

- o Student interns--From nearby Michigan State University and Lansing Community College. Help on special projects and supervise court-appointed community service kids in the Green Oaks/Sparrow Estates neighborhoods, may also analyze radio calls to the area, find apartment vacancies and possible placements, and babysit children during parenting classes.
- o Region 13 parenting class teacher--Works out of the NNC approximately 10 hours a week to provide parenting classes for neighborhood people.
- o School psychologist (Lansing School District)--Works as the Community/School liaison psychologist. Ellen Chaney also heads the Bingham School Working Group. Shares the same geographic beat boundaries as the Community Officer.
- o Infant training for new mothers (Community Mental Health)--Grant-funded social worker provides infant training for new mothers. Matches a successful mother in the area with an "at-risk" mother. If the workload in the area decreases, will expand into another Community Policing beat as well.
- o Learning specialist (Lansing School District)--Works with youth who live in the beat who are identified by the school district. Beat area has priority, but works in other areas of city as well.
- o Chapter One nurse (Lansing School District, Chapter One Program)--Chapter One is a program where federal money is funneled to those school districts who demonstrate the greatest need by academic scores. When a child is labeled as Chapter One, they receive medical and dental coverage. The Chapter One nurse supervises other nurses who provide medical services and the child health advocates (see below). Beat area is priority.
- o Child health advocates--Two Lansing School District employees who assist Chapter One nurse by making health care appointments and providing transportation to and from medical facilities.
- o Operation Graduation coordinator (Lansing School District)--Works with high school students "at risk" of dropping out of school. A ten-hour a week job is provided to students in the program who stay in school and maintain good grades. A student answers the telephone two hours a day at the Neighborhood Network Center.
- o Neighborhood Youth and Parent Prevention Partnership Program--This federal grant employs four people in the Neighborhood Network Center. Two of them, the Neighborhood Partnership Consultants will hire four adults, four high school, and four middle school students from the neighborhood to act as neighborhood recruiters in an attempt to bring people together for drug-abuse education and other risk-reduction efforts. Also on site are the grant coordinator and an administrative assistant.
- o Gateway Social Workers--The supervisor of the Gateway Social Workers is housed at the Neighborhood Network Center where she oversees a number of social workers. Two social workers serve the beat area, spending their time in the schools and at children's homes. Gateway Community Services, located

in neighboring East Lansing, is a multi-service agency concerned with substance-abuse, health care, crisis intervention, runaway youth, and homeless families and youth. Gateway has provided a copy machine and other office supplies for use by everyone in the Center.
- o Michigan State University Nurses--Two days a week, 15 nursing students from MSU who are completing their bachelor degree are assigned to the Neighborhood Network Center to fulfill their public health work. Neighborhood people are referred to them by the Community Officer, the Chapter One Nurse, and the school psychologist.
- o Others involved--A volunteer program, staffed by a recent criminal justice graduate of MSU, oversees the adults in the neighborhood who are doing community service as part of their court sentencing. The community service adults perform a variety of tasks, including handing out flyers for events, picking up trash, and doing janitorial work. Overtime hours can knock off some time from their sentences, and those who live in the neighborhood seem the most responsible, since they have a stake in what's happening in their own neighborhood.

A Vietnamese interpreter will soon be coming on board to assist in getting the Vietnamese community involved in the Neighborhood Network Center. One apartment complex in the Sparrow Estates neighborhood houses all Vietnamese families, and they have been the hardest to involve in community activities due to cultural and language difficulties. The interpreter will also work to provide social service referral in order to stabilize the community.

The Ingham County Department of Social Services (DSS) is attempting to identify what needs the neighborhood has, and it will put someone into the Center to handle those needs. DSS currently has a telephone liaison to cut red tape for any questions that arise in the neighborhoods. Gateway will soon rent the parsonage of a local church, to house their "hands on" projects, because of the restriction that the Neighborhood Network Center cannot be a "drop in" center. This new site will be considered an extension of the Neighborhood Network Center, and it will also house such activities as the parenting groups, the neighborhood newsletter committee, and nutrition and composting classes. A Michigan State University intern will oversee the daily operation during business hours, and Gateway will have substance-abuse counseling on site in the evenings.

## Structure and leadership

Lansing's experience may be unique, because the Neighborhood Network Center was a risk, and everyone was willing to "wing it." When problems arise, they're dealt with within the resources at hand-- not a typical bureaucratic response to problem solving. There is no rigid management scheme in place, and there are no written procedures as to how things will be handled--mostly perhaps because they do not yet know the kinds of problems they will face.

Officer Christy, who coordinated the opening of the Neighborhood Network Center, seems to be the unofficial leader, acting more as a catalyst than a supervisor. It was a natural role for him, since he knows the people and culture of the neighborhood better than anyone, because of his longstanding work with the community. Traditionally, as the Community Officer, he is often the first to field problems, whether it is homicide or a "cat in the tree," whether it's that somebody is ill or that a family needs food or medical care. It's unlikely, for instance, that a nurse will get information on drug dealing, so Christy has logically become the person that all others in the Neighborhood Network Center turn to for input on their ideas. Cooperation as equals is essential because everyone knows it's up to them to find ways to work together to solve common problems.

General meetings are held monthly to determine who's going to sweep the floors and replace the coffee, and the general operation has been smooth so far. There is a petty cash account set up for the Neighborhood Network Center, but no actual funding structure at this time.

## The Problem-Solving Team

In December 1991, the Problem-Solving Team at the Neighborhood Network Center was formed on a basis similar to that of the Bingham School Working Group. The core group, which meets once a week, consists of the Community Officer, the school psychologist, a code enforcement officer, a police supervisor, the head of the police drug unit, and three district police drivers. The team targets a specific house in the neighborhood, much as the Bingham School Working Group targets a child and his or her family, checking the record weekly to follow the progress on improving the house without pricing it out of the reach of the people in the community. The team brainstorms ideas on how to deal with the multitude of problems that the target house may have. They coordinate their efforts and chip away at the problems, sometimes bringing in other specialists to help.

The team is responsible for the closure of eight drug houses from January to February, 1992. If the drug houses had cooperative landlords, the eviction process was used to oust the tenants. Or the district drivers would pressure the dealers by stopping all cars going to and from the house. Or the drug unit might arrange for a raid. If all else failed, the code enforcement officer would hit the house with violations.

One argument against Community Policing is that it only displaces problems but doesn't solve them. The team hopes to keep the problems where they are, but focus on making better neighbors out of the people already there--whether it means helping them get a job or obtain counseling, or whether this requires making their homes more liveable. Although the number one priority of the Problem-Solving Team is to tackle the drug houses, other issues have surfaced which have been addressed successfully with this approach. A single mother in the Sparrow Estates neighborhood was about to be evicted. Some work was being done with the children in their school, and this would have been discontinued if the family had to move. The team scoured the neighborhood and found them new housing in the same area so that the children would not have to change schools. Information surfaced that the mother was being abused by her boyfriend, and Christy was able to help her to get a court injunction to keep him away. The district police officer drivers were knowledgeable about the situation, and were alerted to pay special attention to the situation if a call should come in about a domestic dispute at her address. Because of the trust that was built between the team and the mother, she confided that she has some substance abuse problems, and they are currently working with her to get her help.

Part of the challenge in structuring the Problem-Solving Team is to assure that the community has a voice in the nominating and prioritizing of problems. A recent urban renewal project in the Sparrow Estates/Green Oaks neighborhood leveled a block of businesses in order to make space for "build to suit" office space. The local laundromat, unfortunately, was razed, making it extremely difficult for any family in the area to do laundry. Some families found it easier to obtain new used clothes from the churches and other charities than to haul laundry for a family of six on a bus miles away. This is a priority if you live in the neighborhood, and may be more of a priority than closing down a drug house if your child is being made fun of at school for his dirty clothes.

The challenge professionals face as well is to focus on the mission of their approach which is to serve the needs of the community residents. During an Inter-Agency Group planning session, for example, more than an hour was spent wrangling on reasons why one agency could not put someone in the Neighborhood Network Center. The moderator turned to a community resident and asked if she thought the group was making progress in reaching the goal of improving quality of life in the community. She explained that her primary concern was during the summer when two preteen girls would circle an intersection near her home on their bicycles. Seated on the curb was their pimp. How was all this discussion going to help with that problem? Community input about immediate needs of people who live in the neighborhoods is an important part of the process of reminding professionals what the real goals are.

Another issue plaguing the Neighborhood Network Center is that there is no lease signed, since there is no rent paid for the building. If the building is sold, the Neighborhood Network Center must find a new location or close its doors. There is hopes that new grant monies will allow the Center to pay rent and secure a lease, giving them more stability in their location. But what happens if the building is sold? Where would they find a new facility in the neighborhood?

Officer Christy's motto is: "Expect the best, and you won't be disappointed." Simple though it is, it seems to be that attitude among the Neighborhood Network Center workers that's making a success of this tremendous undertaking in Lansing, Michigan.

# Issues and Obstacles

### Specific Challenges
The Community Policing model requires philosophical, structural and organizational reform. This also applies to Neighborhood Network Centers. But, as the Lansing experience suggests, this new approach faces its own unique challenges. The following is a brief discussion of all the new issues that Neighborhood Network Centers must confront, and, again, at this stage of the research, there are more questions than answers:

- o Funding--As noted in the introduction, the Lansing experiment was selected for special attention in part because the Neighborhood Network Center was launched without significant outside funding. Yet it was still an immense challenge for the group to find operating funds for the center, for example, to pay for utilities. Fortunately in Lansing, an anonymous donor provided enough funding to pay for utilities for a year, but this raises questions about the stability of this kind of funding over time.

  It makes sense to find ways to launch a Neighborhood Network Center through existing funding, so that its future does not depend on money that may someday disappear. But some communities may well have difficulty finding a free facility. Other communities will open a Center with full or partial grant funding and then face the challenge of maintaining it when and if the funding ends.

  This raises the issue of what role the business community can play. Can local businesses and corporations provide some of the necessary resources? Does the concept require a new partnership that includes a strong business component? Complicating matters further is that some participating agencies rely primarily on local funding, some on funding from federal, state, and county coffers. Obviously, there may be problems with various revenue sources over time, and it will be a challenge for each participant to maintain necessary funding without expanded budgets.(5)

  We anticipate that many communities will face problems where one or more of the agencies whose participation is deemed essential has funding problems--what does this mean for the future of the entire community-based team? For example, we consider the participation of the Community Officer essential, but what if the department faces budget cutbacks that threaten its ability to keep the Community Officer in place? And what if the Center is so successful that the area no longer seems to require the full-time attention of a Community Officer? Can district police officers adequately handle the job if the Community Officer is removed?

  As noted earlier, the ideal roster of members in the community-based team of problem solvers located at a Neighborhood Network Center would undoubtedly include a Community Officer, a

social worker, a mental health professional, an education specialist, probation and parole officers, and a public health nurse. Working alongside them would also be a host of other professionals from public and non-profit agencies and volunteers from inside and outside the community.

But what if social services announces that it cannot afford to provide a social worker? Is the social worker's participation so essential that the effort risks failure if they do not eventually provide a worker on site? Will other agencies use that as an excuse to do less than they could? Will other agencies simply refuse to participate unless the social worker is brought on board? And while the community-based team may be able to make up for the lack of a social worker on site, is that fair to the others who must take up the slack? And if special funding is used as a lure to entice reluctant agencies to participate, will other agencies balk unless they receive special funding, too?

At issue as well is what constitutes "critical mass." The community-based team may be able to work around the lack of a social worker or a public health nurse, at least for a while, but how many of these "core" professionals can the Neighborhood Network Center afford to do without? This has implications for funding, since future funding will depend on the success or failure of Neighborhood Network Center efforts.

o   Evaluating success--In early experiments with foot patrols that spawned Community Policing, there was a tendency at first to focus on crime rates as the primary measure of success, with mixed results. In some communities, crime rates went down, while in others, the rates stayed the same or went up, yet people said that they felt safer. Were the people simply wrong? Or were these efforts having a positive impact that could not be captured by the crude yardstick of crimes reported to police?

Over time, it became apparent that the people were not wrong, they did feel safer, and they felt safer because Community Policing has a demonstrable and dramatic impact on reducing fear of crime. A closer look also confirmed that fear of crime can be as big a problem as crime itself, since it is what keeps people trapped inside their homes like prisoners, which robs the community of its spirit. Judged by that yardstick, Community Policing is a success.

As this implies, evaluating the efforts of Neighborhood Network Centers will require developing new measures. The relative success or failure of these efforts will require focusing on qualitative rather than quantitative outcomes. In plain language, it is not enough to look at statistics about the number of clients served, the number of interventions, and the number of calls to police. The evaluation must focus on whether the community-based team has solved problems with troubled individuals and families, and whether this has contributed to making the neighborhood a better and safer place in which to live and work.

An additional challenge in evaluating the Neighborhood Network Center concept relates to the "critical mass" issue raised above. We anticipate that experiments with the Neighborhood Network Center concept will vary in their ability to attract the direct participation of a full roster of "core" professionals. Unless these efforts are evaluated by researchers who can analyze the results in terms of how well the experiment fulfills the ideal, their relative success or failure may be misunderstood. The risk, of course, is that the Neighborhood Network Center may be deemed a failure without receiving a "fair shake" unless the issue of critical mass is fully understood and addressed in evaluations.

This underscores the importance of investing in rigorous research on evaluating the Neighborhood Network Center concept. Unless this is done, there is good reason to believe that

half-hearted experiments with the Neighborhood Network Center concept, which may well be doomed to fail from the outset, will unduly poison the waters. Community Policing survived, despite negative results from foot patrol experiments that failed to give the officers the autonomy and authority to do more than act as a visible deterrent to crime, because research uncovered the flaws in this model. Had there been no such research, Community Policing might well have been stillborn, before it had the chance to demonstrate its true potential.

o Leadership--As noted earlier, the support of the Big Five is essential to Community Policing, and the same model applies to the Neighborhood Network Center. However, it must be stressed that the Neighborhood Network Center complicates the challenge even more, because many of the participants depend on funding from various levels of government--federal, state, county, and local. As this suggests, building broad-based political support, from elected and appointed officials and average citizens, is an even thornier issue with so many people to please.

Implicit in these concerns is that the Neighborhood Network Center requires strong leadership at both the executive and grass-roots levels. As we saw in Lansing, the time was ripe for the National Center for Community Policing to propose consideration of the Neighborhood Network Center concept, because of the fertile ground provided by the Bingham School group and the preparatory work done on the Inter-Agency Agreement. The challenge in other communities will be for the police department to identify other agency executives who are open to considering this approach, in the hope that their leadership and enthusiasm can bring others into the group.

At the grass-roots level in the Neighborhood Network Center, there is also a need for the community-based team of problem solvers to identify a group leader, formally or informally. Again, we expect that many initiatives will build on the efforts of the Community Officer, so we expect that they may well emerge as the official or unofficial leader of the team.

o Formal and informal accountability--There is no one "boss" on site, if we define boss as someone with the power to hire and fire and set raises. Each team member is therefore held ultimately accountable to supervisors in the agency for which he or she works. And the fact that no one team member has authority over another underscores the importance of cooperation.

Success is everyone's child, but failure is an orphan, so the issue of formal and informal accountability most often comes into question whenever there are problems or mistakes. With Community Policing, experience shows that both the police department and the community hold Community Officers directly accountable for their actions, which makes them even more accountable than other members of the department. As this suggests, we anticipate that the members of the community-based team of problem solvers will find themselves held directly accountable not only to their superiors but to the community as well, which is the most important clientele.

Yet it must be stated clearly that part of why Community Policing makes some police departments "nervous" is that Community Officers often end up identifying strongly with the community--in many cases, more strongly than with fellow police. While this sense of ownership is much of the reason that Community Officers accomplish so much, there can be circumstances where top command perceives this as a problem of "misplaced loyalty."

The goal is to encourage the community-based team to forge a strong sense of identification with the community and with each other. Participating agencies should clearly expect and understand that this will create new tensions in their relationships with their employees. This puts an additional burden on management to shift from the "control" or "paternalistic" model of

supervision to one where line-level employees enjoy greater autonomy and freedom of action, as long as their actions contribute to the goal of making the community a better and safer place.

- o The bureaucratic impulse--As the preceding paragraph shows, participating agencies must understand the importance of stifling the bureaucratic impulse whenever it appears. Left unchecked, it is the nature of bureaucracies to exercise rigid hierarchial control, to demand more documentation than is necessary, to require quantitative rather than qualitative results, and to reduce opportunities for innovation, risk-taking, and autonomy among first-line supervisors and line-level personnel. The Neighborhood Network Center breaks the mold of the bureaucrat as part of an uncaring agency, out of touch with the community, that buries both workers and clients in a blizzard of meaningless paperwork and red tape.

It is important to recognize, however, that this kind of profound change in the delivery of service to the community is likely to inspire a backlash within the agency, unless these concerns are dealt with up front. Imagine the social workers and their supervisors, tied to desks downtown, who read a glowing article in the newspaper about the efforts of the community-based team, including comments from the social worker on site who talks about how wonderful it is to see firsthand the positive impact that their efforts are making.

The opportunities for jealousy and friction are enormous, which is why departments that embrace Community Policing recognize the importance of educating everyone about the concept and encouraging a department-wide commitment to the new approach. Yet, while this will help to reduce internal friction, it can never be completely eradicated, which is why administrators must be alert to the dangers of resistance and even overt attempts at sabotage. To expect otherwise would be naive, so the best solution is to ensure that top administrators reinforce their commitment to the concept whenever possible.

- o Security, liability, confidentiality, terminology & ethics--Security is an issue that underscores the importance of the participation of the Community Officer. However, while the Community Officer acts as the protector for his or her colleagues, it must be understood that the Community Officer's job is not simply to act as the personal bodyguard for team members. This also raises obvious questions about liability, concerning both the team members and their clients.

Another concern that has surfaced is security for sensitive files. In Lansing, as noted earlier, an agency demanded, as a condition of their on-site participation, that the Neighborhood Network Center hire a security guard for the nighttime hours, to guarantee that their files would be safe. It should be noted, however, that the agency did not have an overnight security guard patrolling their central location, which housed thousands of files, while only a few hundred at most would have been kept at the Neighborhood Network Center. Yet security of sensitive materials is a valid concern, and there may be circumstances where an agency's participation hinges on finding funding for secure telephone lines, dedicated computer lines, and other security devices.

However, overriding concerns that sensitive materials might fall into the hands of outsiders is the question of how to handle the issue of confidentiality within the team. Various laws and regulations govern sharing information on individual students in the public schools; clients receiving health care, mental health therapy, drug treatment, or public assistance; suspects in criminal investigations, etc., and this can create complications for the community-based team.

To work together effectively, the team must share certain kinds of information. At the same time, the team members must all agree to honor the levels of confidentiality required by the participating agencies, and this is best spelled out in the Letter of Agreement that all must sign. However, no formal agreement, no matter how detailed, can cover all eventualities, and no doubt

informal sharing of information within the team will occur. The challenge is to avoid a lapse or slip of the tongue to others outside the team that could literally threaten the future of the experiment.

Also at issue, as in the Lansing experiment, is that part of the challenge of working together as a team is that different agencies define problems differently. An "at-risk youth" means one thing to a police officer, another to a social worker or mental health therapist. It is one thing for the mental health professional to claim that a client is "suicidal," and another if the Community Officer says so. Only by working together and discussing the use of professional jargon can the team learn how to function together with mutual agreement.

While we can assume that all participating agencies have written and unwritten codes of ethics, it is important to review areas where they may differ, so that any omissions or inconsistencies can be addressed. As noted, different agencies may have different rules about their ethical responsibility to release information to the press--or to keep it secret. But all guidelines should be reviewed, so that the community team operates with sensitivity to ethical concerns about how they will interact with each other and with the community.

o   Flexibility--There is not yet enough experience with the Neighborhood Network Center approach to identify all the ways in which the issue of flexibility may arise. However, we often find with Community Policing that Community Officers need flexibility in scheduling their hours, and that this can run afoul of work rules.

Among the many questions yet to be answered are: Will all team members be allowed the flexibility to work hours as needed? How will each agency handle issues about overtime? Is it likely that some team members will shift from part-time to full-time and back again, as needed?

Will team members have the right to change the boundaries of the "beat" area that they serve? As the community stabilizes, for example, we might expect the size of the Community Officer's beat to grow.

Will changing demographics in the community require changes in the roster of the team? Will some initiatives be so successful that some team members are no longer needed? If so, does it really make better sense to have them return to working out of a centralized facility? Or should this be the model for the delivery of service, regardless of the level of problems in the community?

o   The role of personality--Most managers view personality as a negative--the wild card that can trump an otherwise "scientific" management plan. Community Policing and the Neighborhood Network Center concept instead turn the argument around, arguing that the challenge is to find ways to capitalize on individual talents and abilities. The outgoing person who enjoys talking to large groups may well be the best candidate to give speeches. The thoughtful individual who doesn't like to say much may well prove to be the person tapped when a good listener is needed. The virtue of this team approach is that each individual's strengths can be used to counterbalance another's weaknesses, provided that everyone involved gives all they can to the job.

# CONCLUSION

## The family as metaphor

It bears repeating that this mini-series on the Neighborhood Network Center concept, focusing on the Lansing experience, is merely an initial attempt to define and explain the approach and to deal with some of the major issues that have already surfaced. So, to add to that understanding, perhaps the best recap requires thinking of society as a huge family--a group of very different people, of all ages, whose collective future will be shaped by their relationships to each other.

If society is a family, then it makes sense to see government agencies as the adult authority figures--the parents who set and enforce the rules and who serve as role models for proper behavior. In that sense, it is easy to see social workers and other human service providers as mothers--as the traditional nurturers and caregivers. And it is also easy to see police officers and other members of the criminal justice system as fathers. In that sense, the Community Officer is not the stern father of the past, who was far quicker to mete out punishment than praise, but the enlightened father of today, who understands that his role requires providing not only discipline but compassion and concern.

As this suggests, Community Policing allows "Dad" to establish a "home" among his family, while the Neighborhood Network Center provides the opportunity for him to move "Mom" with him into a new and bigger house--one where all those aunts and uncles and grandparents can visit and provide a helping hand. It is not that Dad hasn't been doing a great job, but being a parent is a tough job, made even tougher alone.

The danger in using this metaphor, of course, is that it risks being perceived as sexual stereotyping-- though more than nine of 10 police officers are male, while the reverse holds true for the so-called helping professions, such as social work and nursing. Yet perhaps this discussion can contribute to defeating those stereotypes, since the Neighborhood Network Center concept requires the entire community-based team to work together, as equals, just as we see parents embracing equality. A family today may well consist of Mom going to work, while Dad stays home--or where Stepmom and Stepdad blend two families into one, just as the roster of professionals and volunteers who operate from the Neighborhood Network Center can shift and change. And today we understand that the old model of parenting must change, that we can no longer expect to impose our will purely through authority, but that we must challenge and inspire through example.

Our changing society requires exploring new forms--and the bottom line must always be the goal of helping the next generation fulfill its potential.

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