

The NeighborWorks® Journal



Neighborhood Safety and Crime Prevention

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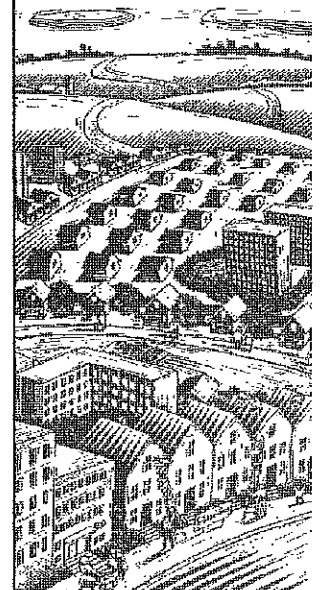
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Community Renaissance with Community Justice

by TODD CLEAR AND GREGORY SAVILLE

Society, in general, is used to thinking of the public safety problem as a contest between good guys and bad guys, or us versus them. In so thinking, society tries to penalize guilty citizens as severely as the law will allow. It is assumed that, somehow, if the state can use the law and the criminal justice system as a tool for removing from the community as many offenders as possible for as long as possible, public safety will follow. To this end, in recent years we, as a society, have embarked upon the most vigorous prison-building crusade in our history. While crime has declined in our country during this period, similar declines in crime rates have occurred in many other western countries without the same rates of spending on prisons or police.

Clearly, there is much more involved in public safety than meets the eye.

Criminologists use the term "social control" when talking about controlling the roots of crime. Social control is divided into three forms: formal, parochial, and private. Formal controls – the police, courts, and prisons – constitute our traditional criminal justice system. Parochial controls are those we experience in everyday neighborly relations, such as voluntary organizations, churches or schools. Private control is related to personal influences through intimate associations with family and friends.

The traditional criminal justice system operates almost exclusively at the level of formal controls and, overwhelmingly, it is formal controls on which

our society spends money for the purpose of public safety. Recent changes in criminal justice have mostly involved strengthening formal controls through increases in size, power, or efficiency of the police, courts or prison systems. This has been occurring since the 1970s.

According to the U.S. Department of Justice source-book of statistics for 1997:

- ▶ the number of sworn police officers has grown 22 percent between 1980 and 1993
- ▶ the number of judges has grown 52 percent between 1980 and 1993
- ▶ correctional staff has grown 99 percent
- ▶ the number of offenders under formal supervision grew from under one million in 1973 to over five million in 1997
- ▶ time served of first-time prisoners grew from 21 months in 1973 to 29 months in 1995
- ▶ the cost of criminal justice grew 100 percent between 1975 to 1992, after adjusting for inflation.

And what has been the result of this effort to control and, more importantly, to prevent crime? Except within the last few years, crime increased in almost every category.

Still, some believe that the spending spree has finally worked. Crime is now beginning to decline and we are beginning to see the results of our efforts. Unfortunately, this theory is flawed for a number of reasons. First, the crime drop of the last decade has occurred throughout the western world regardless of

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whether more police were hired, whether courts meted out stricter sentences, or whether more prisons were built. Demographics, not justice spending, have led the way.

In recent years aggregate urban crime rates have declined, but so too has the proportionate number of crime-prone youth. Demographers David Foot and Daniel Stoffman claim in *Boom, Bust, Echo* (1997, Macfarlane Walter and Ross Publishers) that as the current wave of baby boomers age, crime will decline.

Young males have always dominated crime statistics, and recent declines reflect demographic patterns. In the current decade, however, when the children of the boomers grow into their crime-prone years, things will reverse. When they do, will society be ready? With the quality of violence among adolescents worsening (a prime example being the shootings at Columbine High School), this bodes poorly for the future. We cannot simply rely on the exigencies of demographics to reduce our public safety problem. We can also expect little help from a prison construction boom that has accompanied the mass incarceration of offenders in recent years. When this enormous population of offenders gets out, reports Sasha Abramsky, we can expect "a future of violent chaos, with a large, uneducated army of enraged ex-cons flooding the streets of inner cities." (*The Atlantic Monthly*, June 1999.)

Few disagree that courts should remove the serious violent offenders from the community. Unfortunately, they also frequently remove minor offenders of drug, larceny and traffic violations, many of whom are placed alongside serious violent felons and provided with little or no treatment for their disruptive behavior or drug problems.

A Better Approach

Criminologists have known for some time a disproportionate amount of crime comes from a small number of young men within pockets of troubled neighborhoods. Not surprisingly, a number of these same young men move from minor offending early, to serious crime later on. The traditional criminal justice system generally removes responsibility from neighborhoods for contending with these young offenders. For example, police officers, often from outside the community, are summoned to the scene of crimes where they arrest local transgressors and drive away with them handcuffed in the back seats. Courts apply sentences using victims only as wit-

nesses for evidentiary purposes. In legal terms, the transgressor has offended against the state – even though it is the neighborhood and the local victims who actually suffer. The criminal is then sometimes removed to prison, usually returning to those same neighborhoods upon completion of their sentence. This is hardly a vision for building what planners like to call the sustainable community.

Social scientists, justice workers, and the public have been gradually rediscovering an old approach that has more relevance than ever before. It harkens back to a time when our communities relied on private and parochial controls far more than formal controls. Where this matters most is in the opportunity to show children the direct consequences of delinquent actions, and show them the damage to, and feelings of, their victims – their neighbors.

The name of this vision is community justice, and it includes a wide variety of new strategies that hold great promise.

Community Justice

Community justice is an amalgam of concepts ranging from community policing to resolving neighborhood disputes in meetings called family conferences. This alternative approach to public safety – which has nothing to do with vigilantism – uses neighborhood problem-solving strategies to obtain better, longer lasting, results. It is precisely in neighborhoods without a sense of community where police spend most of their time. This new approach empowers local beat cops with special training and then allows them to work in conjunction with residents and local businesses, rather than sending them endlessly from radio call to radio call. It helps teach neighbors how to help themselves. It holds offenders responsible locally and then reintegrates them back into their communities.

Some of these approaches go under different names, such as restorative justice. (See related article on page 21.) Their intent is to restore the ability of neighborhoods to more appropriately deal with local crime problems, with civil responsibility and individual rights at the core. It has enjoyed popularity in recent years among justice professionals and has drawn the attention of researchers. It has been providing some remarkable new success stories and, in the struggle to obtain safe neighborhoods, it represents a very different approach from gated communities, barricades, private security, and criminal justice strategies such as incarceration.

What is Restorative Justice?

Restorative justice is a victim-centered response to crime that provides opportunities for those most directly affected by crime – the victim, the offender, their families, and representatives of the community – to be directly involved in responding to the harm caused by the crime. Restorative justice is based upon values which emphasize the importance of providing opportunities for more active involvement in the process of: offering support and assistance to crime victims; holding offenders directly accountable to the people and communities they have violated; restoring the emotional and material losses of victims (to the degree possible); providing a range of opportunities for dialogue and problem-solving among interested crime victims, offenders, families, and other support persons; offering offenders opportunities for competency development and reintegration into productive community life; and strengthening public safety through community building.

Restorative justice policies and programs are known to be developing in more than 45 states, including a growing number of state and county justice systems that are undergoing major systemic change. Restorative justice is also developing in many other parts of the world, including numerous European countries, Australia, New Zealand and South Africa. The principles of restorative justice draw upon the wisdom of many indigenous cultures

from throughout the world, most notably Native American culture within the United States and Aboriginal/First Nation culture in Canada.

Specific examples of restorative justice include: crime repair crews, victim intervention programs, family group conferencing, victim offender mediation and dialogue, peacemaking circles, victim panels that speak to offenders, sentencing circles, community reparative boards before which offenders appear, offender competency development programs, victim empathy classes for offenders, victim directed and citizen involved community service by the offender, community-based support groups for crime victims, and community-based support groups for offenders. As the oldest and most widely developed expression of restorative justice, with more than 25 years of experience and numerous studies in North American and Europe, victim offender mediation and dialogue programs currently work with thousands of cases annually through more than 300 programs throughout the United States and more than 900 in Europe.

Research has found restorative justice programs to have high levels of victim and offender satisfaction with the process and outcome, greater likelihood of successful restitution completion by the offender, reduced fear among victims, and reduced frequency and severity of further criminal behavior.

— Mark S. Umbreit

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A primary example is in Sacramento, California, where the Police Department and residents of two housing developments managed to cut crime rates there by over 70 percent and bring some sanity back to what had been called a war zone. In 1991, 7,000 residents in the low-income neighborhoods of New Helvetia and River Oaks were suffering from an environment infested with gangs, open-air drug dealing, and rampant violence. For years, traditional enforcement and court sanctions had failed to solve the problem. Single-parent families predominated along with fights and shootings between the rival Crips and Blood gangs. Residents distrusted government, especially the police. There was a lack of positive role models for youth on site, and little positive interaction between different ethnic groups.

In 1992 officers Harold Bickel and Greg

Dieckmann were assigned to the area. Police had been responding to the high call loads at River Oaks and New Helvetia by radio and enforcement. For many residents contact with police meant an arrest. One arrest was being made for every two households annually. The traditional justice system was completely ineffective at creating public safety.

Bickel and Dieckmann had the task of garnering support from the community where little community existed. They started with problem-oriented policing tactics, a community justice strategy, to build relations with fearful residents on site. To deal with the open-air drug market they targeted zero-tolerance enforcement, which allowed residents to begin to regain control of their own community. They then built partnerships with other local organizations, such as the housing authorities, which instituted ten-

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ant-screening procedures to weed out some of the more troublesome criminal gang members. They also worked with resident councils to improve the physical environment, such as improving lighting on site and instituting new parking procedures to control illegal parking by gang members. These physical changes are called "crime prevention through environmental design," and they are yet another example of strategies that can be effective in a community justice project.

Were these "softer" activities worth the effort compared to the traditional enforcement model of policing? Within a year the initiatives took hold and residents began to see improvement. Bickel and Dieckmann set up a small police office in the neighborhood. They helped set up sports activities in evenings and accompanied many high-risk adolescents on daytime fieldtrips. These included programs at the local middle school and community service groups. In 1995, a neighborhood health and education center was set up which was quickly adopted by the resident councils and residents themselves. In short, neighbors began to come out from behind locked doors. This created an environment ripe for the kind of neighborhood mobilization that other neighborhoods take for granted. The results?

- ▶ According to local teachers, there were reduced truancy rates from local schools.
- ▶ According to a 1995 Cal State study, more than 80 percent of residents surveyed reported higher levels of satisfaction and lower levels of fear.
- ▶ In 1994 the Sacramento Association of Realtors voted the area the "most improved neighborhood."
- ▶ Both police reports and resident surveys showed that there was a reduction from 216 violent crimes in 1992 to 96 in 1995, and a 64 percent reduction in police calls for service.

The results of this community justice strategy have lasted. Today, eight years later, these neighborhoods remain places where public safety has been restored. Bringing New Helvetia and River Oaks back from the brink is precisely what community justice initiatives attempt to create – opportunities for restoring not just order, but a sense of community. That is something the formal justice system cannot achieve.

Note that, in community justice, the traditional criminal justice system may be used – but only in a targeted fashion, like the zero-tolerance enforcement that officers Bickel and Dieckmann employed to

tackle open-air drug markets and gang activity. It is not simply a return to the cop-on-the-beat. It is more about attending to the community-building aspects of public safety.

The community justice approach does not only apply to residential neighborhoods. It has also been used in troubled downtown commercial areas. For example, starting in 1995 officers Steve Scully and Bill Bongle applied problem-oriented policing tactics to the Broadway business district in Green Bay, Wisconsin. The area contained retail shops, restaurants, parks, schools and a homeless shelter that had been a notorious high-crime hotspot for years. There were violent crimes, assaults, disorderly conduct and drug activity, as well as property crimes.

Scully and Bongle were assigned to the area and found not only environmental deterioration and decay in the neighborhood, but also a lack of pride by local residents and business owners. Storefronts were run down, maintenance was poor, and there was an overall feeling of apathy – ideal conditions for crime to flourish. The area was a hangout for chronic alcoholics with health problems who were frequently hospitalized by emergency services. Drunks from a few of the more than 30 local taverns were continually arrested for disorderly conduct. The area was a mess.

The officers began forging relationships with local residents and business owners, and began an education campaign to get everyone working together. They convinced local citizens to attend bar license hearings at city hall, in order to hold negligent bar owners more accountable. Limited enforcement was used in the neighborhood, often to help some of the chronic alcoholics get treatment for their alcoholism. Bar managers were better trained in how to properly manage their businesses, and they were held accountable for this by local residents and civic politicians at the license bar hearings at city hall. A small number of the worst area bars were closed, and Scully and Bongle watched to make sure the relocated bars did not simply move problems elsewhere in the city (they did not). Soon the media began publishing the message that "Broadway is on the rebound," and local residents began to get more involved in civic activities.

The city government spent \$3 million on improved streetscaping, which included new sidewalks and better lighting in the dark alleyways. Drug dealers could no longer ply their trade in concealment and were more vulnerable to police patrols.

Volunteers Hold First-Time Juvenile Offenders Accountable

When Crystal*, a Sacramento teenager, was caught shoplifting, neighborhood residents (not the court system) held her responsible for the crime. A group of community volunteers, with guidance from the Sacramento Probation Department, worked out a contract to help the teen turn her life around. Local organizations, such as Sacramento Neighborhood Housing Services, serve as the venue for community service projects required by the contracts.

For starters, Crystal spent her spring break working at the Elk Grove Convalescent Hospital. Surrounded by patients who were near death, Crystal said she realized how precious her life was and "how soon I will be looking back on it instead of ahead. The last thing I want is to be full of regrets. So I decided my life started then."

She also wrote a 1,000-word essay on how shoplifting had affected her life and set up a plan to repair broken relationships with family members. Most important, Crystal agreed to meet weekly with an adult volunteer for encouragement and accountability.

"This person stuck by me and believed in me more than anyone," said Crystal. "She was the only one who knew that stealing wasn't part of me. ... Over the past six months I have made a complete turnaround in my attitude, my aspirations and my conscience."

Restorative Justice Pays Dividends

The idea of diverting first-time, nonviolent juvenile offenders into community corrections is nothing new. Juvenile diversion programs peaked in the late 1970s. Then came the wave of violent gang- and drug-related offenses in the late 1980s and 1990s. On average, probation officers nationwide supervise more than 40 juveniles at a time – some as many as 200 – according to the U.S. Department of Justice. Many probation officers have little or no time to pay attention to kids charged with minor offenses when it's their first brush with the law.

In recent years, the courts and probation officers have welcomed community volunteers to share in the responsibility of resolving the problems of juvenile delinquency, since this approach benefits young offenders as well as communities while reducing court costs. Renewed interest in diversion comes at a time when the idea of "restorative justice" is gaining credibility in the criminal justice field in the U.S. and abroad. (See article on page 21).

Many of the programs, in California and elsewhere, are celebrating remarkable results. The community program orchestrated by the Sacramento Probation Department reports more than a 90 per-

cent success rate at preventing youth from repeating offenses and savings of \$580,000 in court costs. A program at the San Joaquin County Probation Department boasts an almost 100 percent success rate in keeping kids out of court and jail. With its accountability program, the San Bernardino County reduced court congestion and saved taxpayers more than \$1 million yearly.

Community's Role

In Sacramento, 12 boards with more than 200 city and county volunteers are involved in helping young people in trouble. Since the program began in 1996, more than 550 juveniles completed the program successfully.

The city police, the county sheriff, the district attorney, citizens, churches and various nonprofit groups – all are involved in making the program a success.

Sacramento Neighborhood Housing Services is among the organizations providing opportunities for community service. For example, for more than a year the NHS has plugged participants into neighborhood cleanups and painting projects that help out the elderly and people with disabilities.

"By the time they're done with their project, they may complain a little about the work involved, but they feel good about what they've accomplished," says Lalin Santini, community development officer for the Sacramento NHS. "There's also a new sense of ownership in the community. For example, after they've done a cleanup project, they are less likely to litter."

Santini also observed that the participants come from similar backgrounds. "We haven't had a kid yet who had both parents in the home. And we've also found that some of the kids are new immigrants who have faced a lot of teasing at school and are not adjusting well to a new environment."

Anne Wells, a probation officer with the Sacramento Probation Department, likes what she sees. "It's truly amazing to watch how people in the community bond with the kids. We currently have 12 boards and more than 200 adult volunteers involved from 40 neighborhoods in Sacramento, and the volunteers can't get enough of the program. If there's a way to keep kids out of jail, this is it."

The success of Sacramento's Neighborhood Accountability Board has received national recognition. The Sacramento County Probation Department recently accepted the New American Community Award from the National Council on Crime and Delinquency.

—Tom Austin

* Name changed to protect minor.

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These crime-prevention-through-environmental-design improvements added to the overall effect. The changes had a magnetic effect on area businesses. New businesses began pouring into the area. By 1998, 35 new businesses had moved into the Broadway neighborhood, creating 410 new jobs in the area. Today there has been more than \$8 million in public and private investment since the project began. The most dramatic improvement has been a 58 percent reduction in calls for police service in the area from 1993 to 1998, and a further 69 percent decrease in calls for disturbances.

In these two examples, police officers took the lead. But in many cases, community justice starts with and involves community leadership. One example is the New York City La Bodega program. It is designed to get offenders off drugs and strengthen the resources for families in high-problem neighborhoods on Manhattan's Lower East Side. La Bodega aims to build the community up by reinforcing parochial controls, and thereby prevent crime in the long run. La Bodega, which is housed in a former crack house, works with the families of men who are in prison on drug offenses. Operating with an advisory board of local residents, La Bodega initiates non-law-enforcement programs that the residents determine are needed to deal with the problem of drugs. These programs include supports for children of drug-involved families and crisis-intervention and long-term support for residents.

The vanishing sense of community

The dominant response today – putting more cops on the street to put more criminals in prisons for longer and longer periods of time – has created an environment that diminishes community involvement in the small number of neighborhoods where it is most heavily focused. Our justice system not only diminishes community involvement, but it also diminishes private and parochial controls.

In 1997, in Frenchtown, a neighborhood (population 2,500) in Tallahassee, Fla., over 40 residents were sent to prison and another 40 returned from prison. More than one out of eight males aged 20 to 40 living in the Brownsville section of Brooklyn, N.Y., were sent to prison in 1998. It has been estimated that 8,000 Hudson County, N.J., children experienced their male parent go to jail in 1995, alone.

When the numbers being cycled through the system reach such high proportions, there are negative consequences for neighborhood life. Families are

broken up and men and women who were parents and providers are removed from those roles. There is no doubt that some of those adults were problems for their close relations. But most of them, even those who were problem residents, were also resources for some of those who live in their neighborhoods.

What can we expect from the continued over-reliance on formal controls in the criminal justice system? Unequal justice, for one thing. Rates of incarceration and arrest are not equally distributed among minorities in our population. One 1997 Department of Justice study by researchers Thomas Bonczar and Allen Beck concluded that males of color are six times more likely to receive a prison term during their lifetimes than white males. They also found an African-American child born today has a 27 percent chance of going to prison at some time, which is reinforced by other studies showing 7 percent of all African-American males between 20 to 40 are in prison – in some neighborhoods this number approaches 25 percent.

Another thing we can expect is further physical division in our society. Today, not only are many of our citizens hiding behind walls in gated communities, but communities and families are being destroyed through incarceration. The high rate of removal of mostly young males for drug offenses or property crimes, for example, harms neighborhoods. If preventing young people from committing crimes involves greater involvement with fathers, brothers and uncles, then many children are being separated from and denied a critical element that is necessary for their proper social development. Having a criminal record also makes it more difficult to obtain good employment, which further hinders the ability of families to function in a productive way.

The challenge for our neighborhood renaissance

What is needed is to strike a better balance between criminal justice and community justice in these crime-stricken communities.

Society must look at new ways to reform the criminal justice system towards community justice and rebuilding our neighborhoods from within. What society must do in years to come is rebuild not only the physical neighborhood with approaches like crime prevention through environmental design, it must also rebuild a strong sense of community – in part, by employing community justice strategies like restorative justice and problem-oriented policing.

Community justice stands as an alternative to the

traditional, criminal justice system. Because the latter is so closely tied to the pursuit of public safety, some will naturally conclude that community justice places a reduced priority on neighborhood safety. This is wrong. Community justice does tackle public safety, albeit differently than traditional justice. Community justice seeks to achieve a qualitatively

different brand of safety. Far from being indifferent to public safety, community justice approaches the issue with a very different, but coherent, philosophy. Community justice is not a panacea, but it constitutes a well-defined, effective and humane approach to a problem definitely in need of new approaches. ■

Neighborhood Safety with Risk Focused Policing

by JIM BUEERMANN

Charles Handy, the renowned management guru, business-school professor and social theorist, states in one of his books, *The Age of Unreason*, (Harvard Business School Press, 1989) "The world that our parents knew is not the world we live in today; nor is our world any sure guide to the way our children will live and love and work. We live in an Age of Unreason when we can no longer assume that what worked well once will work well again, when most assumptions can be legitimately challenged."

Police departments across the country are taking credit for today's decline in crime, attributing it to everything from an increased presence of officers on the street and the advent of community policing to mandatory sentencing laws. And academicians have added a number of factors such as the growing economy, stabilization of the drug trade, aging "baby boomers" and periodic truces among warring street

gangs to the list of possible factors linked to declining crime.

Put aside for the moment your beliefs and arguments about what is responsible for current declining crime rates in many countries, because Handy is right: "...we can no longer assume that what worked well once will work well again."

The prevention of crime in the 21st century needs to be about much more than mandatory sentencing, and more and more police operating in traditional roles. Likewise it needs to be about much more than enhanced lighting, bars on windows and locks on doors and gated communities.

Why not stick with what seems to be working? In the next five to eight years this country will realize a 30 percent increase in its adolescent population. Based on that prediction, many criminologists believe there will be an explosion of crime, proving these currently declining rates simply the "calm

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