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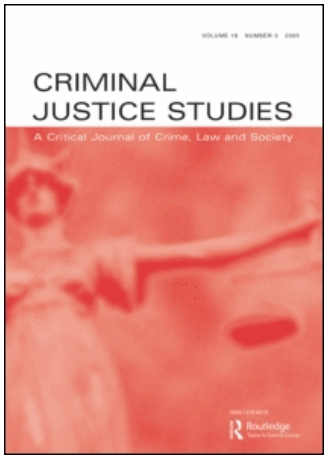

Criminal Justice Studies
A Critical Journal of Crime, Law and Society
Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:
http://www.informaworld.com/smpp/title~content=t713400035

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Online Publication Date: 01 September 2007
To cite this Article: Farkas, Mary Ann and Jones, Richard S. (2007) 'Community Partners: 'Doing Doors' as a Community Crime Prevention Strategy', Criminal Justice Studies, 20:3, 295 - 312
To link to this article: DOI: 10.1080/14786010701617698
URL: http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/14786010701617698

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Criminal Justice Studies,
Vol. 20, No. 3, September 2007, pp. 295–312

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Community Partners: 'Doing Doors' as a Community Crime Prevention Strategy

Mary Ann Farkas & Richard S. Jones

Research shows that strengthening social networks in neighborhoods is key to addressing the social disorder that breeds crime. However, citizen involvement in crime prevention partnerships presents a challenge in high crime areas. The use of intermediaries as an organized strategy to work with residents, law enforcement, and various community agencies and organizations has been introduced as a way to mitigate the problems of mobilizing urban dwellers and as a means to bridge the gap between the interests of the various constituents. The Community Partners Program is a community organizing and outreach initiative that uses intermediaries 'doing doors' as its primary approach. This paper will present the findings from interviews with 22 Community Partners working in targeted, high crime urban neighborhoods. The roles, perceptions, and experiences of these 'Partners' are described in detail. The findings suggest that using intermediaries may be a promising strategy for crime prevention partnerships.

Keywords: Community Partners; Community Organizing; Crime Prevention; Crime Prevention Partnerships

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ISSN 1478–601X (print)/ISSN 1478–6028 (online) © 2007 Taylor & Francis
DOI: 10.1080/14786010701617698

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Introduction

Locally oriented, community-based crime prevention efforts have proliferated across the country. Citizen involvement in crime prevention has widespread support from law enforcement, the media, the general public, the federal government, and academia (Rosenbaum, 1987, p. 103). There is a growing recognition that stronger community cohesion and social organization in a neighborhood will result in stronger informal social control and ultimately affect criminal activity (Donnelly & Kimble, 1997). Rosenbaum (1987) maintains that high levels of crime, incivility, and fear of crime may be attributed to the erosion of informal social control processes. The basic theory is that the prevalence and interdependence of social networks in the neighborhood will result in greater attention toward local problems, the increased ability to recognize strangers, and the greater likelihood of guardianship behaviors (Donnelly & Kimble, 1997; Sampson & Groves, 1989; Skogan, 1986). Moreover, research indicates that communities with high levels of acquaintanceship and organizational activity have lower rates of crime and delinquency (Sampson & Groves, 1989).

Even though residents may have the capacity to control group level processes and visible signs of social disorder (Sampson, Raudenbush, & Earls, 1997), the development of informal social control may be a particular challenge in disadvantaged and crime-ridden urban neighborhoods. The most difficult communities to organize are low-income, transient, high crime, inner-city neighborhoods (Schneider, 2000; Skogan, 1989; Skogan & Maxfield, 1989). These urban areas may experience a high degree of social disorganization characterized by residential mobility (Sampson et al., 1997) which results in mutual distrust, hostility, and antipathy between newcomers and long-term residents (Skogan, 1989). Furthermore, residents typically do not own their own homes, or their own transportation, or have access to better services, and thus may not have a 'stake' in their community (Roman, Moore, Jenkins, & Small, 2002).

Grinc (1994) found that residents in urban areas expressed little desire to become involved in crime prevention or control because of apathy, fear of retaliation, poor pre-existing relations between police and the residents, the ambiguous role of citizens in community policing, and intragroup conflict between community leaders and other residents. Programs requiring public meetings and overt cooperation and organization efforts may be less successful because of fear of retaliation by drug dealers and neighborhood toughs among residents (Conly & McGillis, 1996, p. 37).

The use of intermediaries or liaisons has been introduced in some crime prevention programs to address the challenges of organizing residents in urban neighborhoods. The intermediaries work to establish relationships with residents in their assigned areas and to gain their confidence, trust, and respect (Holden, 2002). Research indicates that relation-focused organizing based on shared values and emotional ties produces more meaningful and lasting outcomes (Robinson & Hanna, 1994; Speer & Hughey, 1995; Speer, Hughey, Gensheimer, & Adams-Leavitt, 1995). The hope is that community members will be more willing to share information about criminal activity with a trusted third party. Communication and service links between the residents and law enforcement, and community agencies and organizations are also fostered by intermediaries.

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In particular, intermediaries work to improve residents' perceptions and attitudes toward police. The present study will explore the use of intermediaries in mobilizing community residents to become partners in crime prevention and neighborhood revitalization.

Background

In 1998, the city of Milwaukee launched the Safe & Sound Initiative based on a successful evaluation of its Weed and Seed pilot program.[1] The Safe & Sound Initiative is an example of a community-based, collaborative anti-crime strategy and community revitalization approach. The Initiative has three major components: the High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area (HIDTA), the Safe Places Program, and the Community Partners Program. The HIDTA component is a joint local, state, and federal initiative to investigate and prosecute individuals engaged in drug trafficking, gang-related crime, and other criminal activity (Holden, 2002). The Safe Places element consists of a network of youth centers, called 'Safe Places,' in targeted neighborhoods that provide children and teens with places to go to after school, evenings, weekends, and in the summer. Safe Places offer tutoring, homework assistance, job skills training, drug abuse counseling, and structured activities. Finally, the Community Partners Program is the community organizing and outreach component.

Research on community-based crime prevention initiatives indicates that individual components that are having a strong impact need to be delineated (Holden, 2002). Although the Community Partners component is thought to play a central role in galvanizing and empowering residents to build safer communities, research is noticeably lacking with regard to the role and use of intermediaries within criminal justice crime partnerships (Roman et al., 2002).

One study (Zevitz, 2002) did employ citizen focus groups to evaluate the Community Partners Program. Interviews with 400 community members revealed favorable perceptions of the Partners' job performance, an acceptance of the Partners as members of the community, and evidence of resident involvement in anti-crime activities. The findings concluded that Community Partners as

> a corps of trained and salaried community organizers—being neither an arm of official law enforcement nor part of a community-based organization embroiled in conflict over turf issues and scarce funds—may be best equipped to bridge the gap and catalyze a collective response to crime and disorder. (Zevitz, 2002, p. 144)

Thus, there is some evidence that the use of intermediaries may be effective in organizing urban dwellers for crime prevention efforts and neighborhood improvement.

The present study builds upon and extends this research by exploring what Community Partners do, and how they do it, through interviews with those actively involved in this crime prevention approach—the Partners themselves. The strategies used by the Partners to initiate and maintain relations with residents, law enforcement, and community agencies and organizations are important in order to understand community-based crime prevention and to explore this strategy of community mobilization.

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The Community Partners Program

The Community Partners Program assigns intermediaries known as Community Partners or 'Partners' to each of 20 targeted, geographical high crime areas[2] in the city of Milwaukee. Within their designated neighborhoods, the Partners provide leadership and act as intermediaries in coordinating and communicating with law enforcement, community residents, and community agencies and organizations, including churches, block clubs/watches, and area businesses. Though the Partners serve as intermediaries, they also act as motivators, organizers, and relationship builders. Meeting face to face with neighborhood members (referred to as 'doing doors') is a strategy used to gather information about their community. The Partners learn about the problems from neighborhood members and what the residents perceive as solutions. This personalized contact is also intended to infiltrate the apathy, antipathy, and fear of urban dwellers and to mobilize these residents to participate in problem identification, resolution, and crime prevention in their communities.

The activities of the Community Partners are quite diverse. They may be seen canvassing and distributing leaflets and information regarding job fairs, city services and programs, and crime notices. They may give presentations at the Police Academy, meet with neighborhood block watches or resident associations, and organize or hold a community event, such as a neighborhood clean-up, a health and welfare fair, and a cultural heritage fair, and also provide candy or prizes for youth activities at the Safe Places. The Partners interact with a wide variety of individuals, community liaison police officers, vice officers, HIDTA personnel, the Mayor, and other city personnel and community organizations to address the concerns in their assigned neighborhoods. For example, they may call the city department to forward citizen complaints regarding abandoned cars, rats, or other public nuisances. Each Partner must make a mandatory 40 neighborhood contacts per week, however, they are given a great deal of flexibility in how they organize their time and activities. Since each neighborhood is different, the Partners are encouraged to use their own individual strengths and resources to help address the problems facing their project areas.

Methodology

Data for this study on the Community Partners Program was collected from an evaluation of the Milwaukee Safe & Sound Initiative conducted between 1998 and 2001 (see Jones et al., 2002). The purpose of the present study is to explore the perceptions, experiences, and approaches of those individuals working as Community Partners in the 20 targeted areas.

Subjects

The majority of the Community Partners were residents in the targeted neighborhoods, although they did not reside in the specific area under their direct responsibility (Safe & Sound website). All 20 Community Partners, and the two Partners who served

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in a backup or support capacity, agreed to be interviewed for the study. The subjects consisted of 13 African Americans, nine Caucasians, two Hispanic, and one Hmong Partner. Thirteen of the Partners were male. The Partners reflect the ethnic/racial diversity of the neighborhoods in which they work (Jones et al., 2002). Their ages ranged from 22 to 49 with a median age of 28. The Partners were typically college-educated with degrees in criminal justice, social work, sociology, and theology. One Partner held a master's degree in criminal justice and two Partners were ordained ministers. They reported prior work experience as counselors, community organizers, and ministers. Four Partners had worked with the original Weed and Seed Project prior to becoming a part of the Community Partners Program. The newest Partner had been on the job for only one month and the Partner with the longest tenure had six and one half years of experience. The median number of years working as a Partner was three years. According to Jones et al. (2002), turnover among the Partners has been minimal, due in part to individual control over their work environment and good pay and benefits when compared to other community organizing positions.

Methods

The research design for this component of the study was qualitative. We were interested in capturing the essence of the work of Community Partners through their descriptions and observations of their activities. The design incorporated the use of multiple data sources and a variety of research methods to increase the validity and reliability of the findings. Qualitative data was gathered from several sources including field observation, detailed job descriptions, daily logs and records, and in-depth interviews.

Field observation included walk-a-longs and participation in other activities associated with the work of Community Partners. Walk-a-longs provided the opportunity for researchers to evaluate the general conditions, as well as the unique problems, of the different neighborhoods. Also, researchers were able to ask questions as they observed the neighborhood organizing process and the dynamics between the Partners and neighboring residents. Attendance at the Mayor's neighborhood crime commission meetings provided input regarding the concerns of the residents and interactions between residents, Partners, and city officials. Another area of data was the content analysis of three years' worth of weekly and monthly reports filed by each of the Community Partners. These reports consisted of daily logs of activities and the identification of neighborhood problems and possible solutions.

Finally, in-depth interviews were conducted with all 22 Community Partners. To increase the validity of the interview questions, field notes from the walk-a-longs and neighborhood crime commission meetings provided the basis of their content. Interviewing guides were prepared to assure that the same questions or issues were explored with each interviewee. Within the broad context of these subject areas, interviewers were free to explore, probe, and make use of spontaneous follow-up questions that elucidated and illuminated a particular topic. Partners were asked to discuss the purpose of their work, how they approached their job, and to describe their relations with the police, neighborhood residents, and other community entities.

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The interview data was collected, transcribed, and analyzed for recurring themes. The researchers were able to identify an assortment of themes (e.g., roles of the Partners, work activities, sources of frustration and satisfaction in their work, relationships with neighborhood residents, community agencies and organizations, and law enforcement, concerns for their personal safety, and the perceived impact of the Program on their assigned neighborhoods). Coding categories were developed to correspond to these themes. The interviews were then coded using the ETHNOGRAPH qualitative data analysis program. Interrater reliability was established by having each researcher code the same set of interviews independently. The results were then compared with the objective of at least 0.80 interrater agreement.

Results

Findings from the interviews, walk-a-longs and neighborhood crime commission meetings with the Community Partners underscored the distinct characteristics of urban, disadvantaged neighborhoods and the challenges faced by those who try to organize and involve residents in crime prevention efforts. Official statistics found that violent crime dropped from 1997 to 2001 by 43% in the 20 pilot sites (Jones et al., 2002) and all of the Partners could point to successes within their neighborhoods. Not all were as highly visible as the arrests of the Lopez family[3] on the Southside, but nonetheless, each partner derived satisfaction from seeing marked improvement in some parts of every neighborhood.

> I have seen some of the drug houses closed down. I've heard neighbors saying it's not nearly as bad as it used to be. I would like to see more improvement, but I do get success stories from the neighbors. I'll go back into a neighborhood, and the guys, or the drug dealers that used to hang around certain blocks, they're gone. Then when I am talking with the neighbors, they're like 'those guys don't hang out there no more cause we call all the time.' Part of what I try to do is to empower residents to call, no matter what, keep on calling the police, keep on calling the police. So, I've seen many changes but not nearly enough.

Community Partners were also in agreement that their respective neighborhoods still experienced significant criminal activity in certain locations and had what Skogan (1990) referred to as persistent 'social and physical disorders.' Nearly every partner could identify hot spots, or areas of their neighborhood that continued to pose problems for community members. Displacement of crime within the targeted neighborhoods was also mentioned in the interviews. The most intractable types of crime reported were drug dealing and prostitution.

> It's frustrating … on Cherry Street for all six years they have had three or four drug houses and we have closed one or two of them and bam, they pop up with their cousins and their neighbors right away. We have a house that has been selling drugs for years and they can't get rid of them. I can't figure out why they just can't get rid of them for good. It is just ridiculous.

* * *

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> Prostitution—there is a little ring that they do [a loop]. They start from the North side, they go up on the 16th or 17th street viaduct, go up, go up on Lincoln, come down to either 11th or 2nd and they go back down and do this round. They're [prostitutes] resourceful.

Still of grave concern were gang-related killings in some of the neighborhoods. Many residents attributed these killings to drug dealing and territorial disputes, however, some individuals felt it was disrespect (see Anderson, 1999).

> People kill for different reasons now, it is not always drugs and territory, sometimes it's just because you disrespected me, you looked at me funny, you stepped on my foot, you 'dissing' me, that's what the young people say. So some of it they felt was drug-related, territorial, but some of it was just no reason.

Along with the criminal activity, social and physical disorders were also reported to the Partners. Common social disorders consisted of behaviors such as loitering, panhandling, urinating in public, and public drinking. Trash, broken beer bottles, abandoned automobiles, and rundown houses and businesses were characteristic of physical disorders in many of the neighborhoods. 'Slum lords' contributed to the neighborhood disorders and drug activity by not maintaining their properties and by renting apartments for cash without conducting background checks. Despite efforts by various city agencies, police, prosecutors, and building inspectors, little had been accomplished on this front.

Irregardless, the Partners indicated that progress had been made through citizen reporting and neighborhood cleanups and they derived great satisfaction from the small victories, such as closing down a drug house and stopping stores from selling quart bottles of beer. As one interviewee responded:

> I have seen a lot of changes. People have started calling me and telling me that this house was making noise, they aren't putting their garbage up on time. The street sweeper didn't come this week. They will call for the simplest stuff now. The streets are much cleaner now.

According to the Partners, there was still cleanup work to be done and neighborhood members still needed to monitor their communities for these types of social and physical disorders.

Community Partners and their Roles

Community Partners assumed a variety of roles in order to carry out their job tasks. They were asked to describe their work approach and their relations with neighborhood residents and businesses, law enforcement, and other government officials or organizations. The Partners varied their style or adapted their approach to suit individuals, circumstances, or to accomplish certain objectives.

Five roles were characterized in the interviews and these roles were not mutually exclusive: 'crime fighter,' 'resource broker,' 'community mobilizer,' 'empowerer,' and 'intermediary.' These five roles were actually ways of 'doing doors' which the Partners asserted was their main strategy to implement the Community Partners Program. The Partners made a total of 25,500 contacts in 2001 (Jones et al., 2002).

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Most Partners described their official role as a 'crime fighter,' consistent with the organizational rhetoric of the Safe & Sound Initiative. The informational literature on the Initiative is replete with references to 'crime-fighting.' In fact, Safe & Sound is described as a 'community based anti-crime fighting initiative whose main goal is to reduce crime' (Safe & Sound website). The following excerpts are illustrative of this crime-fighting theme:

> Our job, we are an anti-crime program. What we do is go door to door in the neighborhood that we've been assigned and we talk to residents regarding safety. That can entail we, as their liaisons, to report crime if they don't feel safe in doing so, or we also give them measures on how to report crime. We always ask them to keep themselves safe, the first and foremost thing, not to be obvious … We also give them drug abatement information, the telephone number to them, and of course they can report to us also. We also help them form block watches, and help them maintain the block watches … We've been doing a really good job as far as making ourselves visible, allowing people to know that there is hope, and being consistent with them, cause that's really important.

* * *

> Well, my main job is to, as I see it, is to engage residents in neighborhoods that are of high volume of crime in order to kind of give them an avenue in which to feel empowered. Meaning to let them know that I'm out there working on their behalf, as a resource, but also as a reporting individual. What I find is that oftentimes residents have a fear factor involved in where they reside as far as maybe drug dealers or just violence, and they are afraid to report anything. If you present yourself as a means to report for them, I find that they oftentimes will talk more to me than they might to the police or to other avenues that maybe they've reported before and haven't seen action or things of that nature.

Community Partners need to keep their 'eyes and ears open' for signs of criminal activity in order to gather intelligence for law enforcement. They may even conduct their own stakeouts to videotape crime or other neighborhood problems.

Obviously, one problem with being at the forefront of crime fighting is the danger that it presents when 'doing doors.' The Partners spoke of having a target on their backs, as being a visible, but unarmed, crime fighter. Most had experienced situations that were frightening or risky. A respondent described a situation that he found himself in one day.

> When I first started I kind of got myself into a situation that wasn't real safe. In the morning we were going to go out and do some doors and we had to meet at a specific location at a specific time … and I probably got there a half hour early. I was sitting where we were going to be doing doors and it was a pretty rough area and when I was sitting in my car, probably six or seven individuals came out of the house and were kind of curious as to what I was doing or why I was sitting there. So they kind of surrounded my car a little bit and one person came up to my car and asked me what I was doing and I felt scared … I realized that when you are going into a neighborhood to make sure there are going to be other partners there at the same time … try not to get there too early … the more community partners you have in an area the safer it will be.

Situations like these were handled routinely by the Community Partners while 'doing doors.' As a result, the Partners have made it their business to learn about the hot spots

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in their areas and the people living and working in their neighborhood. They acknowledged that the best information they received was from the personalized relationships they had with residents. They have also developed a number of self-protective behaviors, such as the strategy of switching roles (pretending to be handing out resource information rather than crime fighting), 'doing doors' in pairs or small groups, 'blending in,' and using cover stories. Some examples:

> Of course you feel that you are a target, I wouldn't sit here and deny that. I think that is why my appearance has changed. I have started to dress down, even more so, because for awhile I stood out. But now I look more like everyone else in the neighborhood.

* * *

> They [a group of males] asked me what I was doing here and luckily I had some information … I can't remember what it was but it was sitting on my seat and I informed them … I think it was a job fair or an employment fair that was going on and I just said 'Hey, I'm just out here waiting for some co-workers and we're just out here promoting a job fair … Are you guys interested in employment?' It kind of diffused the situation a little bit and the guy said his cousins or brother was and he took the flyer and kind of backed off a little bit and told the other guys that I was okay.

The Partners spoke of the fear that is always in the back of their minds, but they emphasized that they would not let fear stop them from doing their jobs.

Resource broker

Community Partners also perceived their role to be that of a resource broker. In this capacity, they would make information available to residents about resources, agency contact numbers, and the phone numbers of police and city officials. Examples would be the provision of information on code compliance and information about different programs, such as food, home improvement, youth employment opportunities, and safe places for their children after school.

> Yeah, we do much more because when we go out into the community we usually have our resource bags … that's what we call them—the Community Partner bags. In them is not just information about crime, it is Cease Fire and do they want to report a drug house and things like that, but it's also about child care, it could be some kind of community events they got going on, it's just a lot of different things. I would say that a majority of our time we try to focus on crime but we also give the residents personal things that might lend them a hand … you know, classes and programs or whatever.

* * *

> Well, basically what I do is I go to the neighborhoods and I knock on the doors, and talk to the residents about any kind of safety concerns that they have in their neighborhood. I also offer resources to them. I give them an opportunity to report any kind of crimes, drug houses, and any kind of problems that they are dealing with in their neighborhoods. I try to help them as much as I can and also even on a personal level, not just the crime in the neighborhood but any other problems that they are having even among themselves. I try to help them, hook them up with different resources that might be able to help them.

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The following are specific examples of Partners 'hooking residents up with a resource.'

> There's an older gentleman, I think he's about 70. Everyone has passed away in his family and his home needed improvements. We have a program here, the Harambee Ombudsman Project, and he was able to get new siding and upgrades to his home.

* * *

> The prevention program which Harambe now offers, which is Fresh Start, helps youth looking for employment. Four young ladies ended up graduating who were definitely on the wrong track. If you would see them now, they're just great.

Every Community Partner indicated that the most important things that they did in this role was 'talking with residents, having face-to-face contact, and relating to people'. Developing trust and connecting with community agencies and organizations was also key. Four of the Partners recounted the difficulty in getting some of these agencies to collaborate.

> But the thing with the agencies, the only reason some of these agencies work together is because I'm in the middle, otherwise they wouldn't give each other the time of day.

> Initially when I started as a Partner, I felt there was a lot of duplication [of services] happening, simply because no one was willing to first work together. I think over time, as they were able to see that we have a common goal and that we can approach it together and have more results, it has become more of a supportive effort of one another. That really works, that's helpful.

Most partners felt their relationship with the Safe Places in their designated areas was particularly important for the welfare of neighborhood youth. They circulated flyers to help advertise the activities being held at the Safe Places to neighborhood members. Three Partners also mentioned that they provided special services for the Safe Places, such as conducting a safety seminar, directing a craft activity, or counseling the kids.

The resource broker role was a role that the Partners derived great satisfaction from. They took enormous pride in helping a wide range of people—youth, the elderly, homeowners, business owners, and people from diverse cultures. The Partners spoke of gathering information about a specific problem or need in a neighborhood and then taking the initiative or encouraging residents to find a solution. The following excerpts illustrate this sense of satisfaction experienced through resource brokering:

> The reward I get is the person whose life is better because of me. What keeps me going is the fact that I enjoy being in a position where I can offer suggestions, I can help them [residents] work on issues, cause things do get solved, you just have to be persistent and patient.

* * *

> Just to have a person come and say 'thank you,' I appreciate it. It means a lot, you can see the effect of your suggestions. A homeowner gets a roof fixed or a basement drained that was flooded or a family is able to purchase a home—that's a good thing.

Thus, the resource broker involved information dissemination, the identification of appropriate resources, and solving a variety of problems for community residents.

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Empowerer

The empowerer role was perceived as critical to encouraging residents to take ownership of their neighborhood and to assist in solving crime-related problems. The Partners spoke of their goal of not only helping area residents, but empowering them to 'do for themselves.' This encompassed not only equipping community members with the necessary organizing skills, but also building their confidence.

> The most important thing that I can do for residents—develop neighborhood leadership. I have been doing this work for so many years, and with a wave of the hand, Community Partners could be gone and I know that. So my hope is to have something a little more substantial by training people in the neighborhood to take over for us.

* * *

> I was doing a lot of work with them [residents] to help them understand the process on how to report things whether it's illegal activity or calling for garbage collection or vector control, or abandoned buildings. The most positive thing for me was just seeing progress they made—realizing that they had gained this knowledge and that they know how to use it and they can do it by themselves now. We had drug houses closed on that block and the residents had direct involvement with the process, so that to me is a victory among others. I think it is empowering people and that's what I am here for.

The Partners consistently mentioned this goal of empowerment for neighborhood residents. One Partner explained that 'Our goal is to work ourselves out of a job.' They realized that the Community Partners Program would be terminated at some point and they wanted the residents to feel empowered to continue their work.

Community mobilizer

The community mobilizer role was characterized as convincing residents and business owners of their 'stake' in a safe neighborhood and then motivating them to participate in crime prevention and community cleanup. This might entail urging residents to report criminal activity or social and physical disorders, inviting residents to a neighborhood crime commission meeting, or helping them form a block watch. Many Partners felt that this was their most difficult role because of citizen reluctance and hesitation to 'get involved.' Reluctance was attributed to fear and mistrust of Community Partners, fear of retaliation, mistrust and lack of faith in the police, and apathy. Residents were wary of the Partners because they did not really understand their role, their relationship to the neighborhood, and their relationship to the police. Community members were skeptical about whose interests the 'partners' actually represented and whether they were simply another branch of the police. As one Partner explained:

> I think a lot of that comes down to people feeling threatened. Within these blocks everyone pretty much knows each other … you are a new face and they do not know what you are doing. They [residents] may come off in an aggressive way to try to scare you or to try to get it out of you what you are doing. If you go as a group of Community Partners, that causes them to feel alarm because they don't know if we are the police … chances are they are doing illegal activity and they want to protect that.

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Fear of retaliation for reporting crime was a major worry expressed by neighborhood residents. The Partners described resident accounts of bricks being thrown in their windows, intimidation, and threats. Citizens also indicated a mistrust and fear of police, particularly from among certain people of diverse cultural backgrounds.

> The unique thing about this area is that there are a lot of families, there's Dominicans over here, there's Cubans here. In these kinds of countries, law enforcement is the enemy, so that stigma comes here. They are afraid of getting beaten up.

Cynicism regarding police concern and their responsiveness to calls was also conveyed to the Partners. Residents complained of lengthy waiting periods for police to arrive and of no response at all by police.

> I think that they [residents] don't really trust the police, that they are going to keep the information anonymous. I've heard stories from residents that someone will call and hope to keep it anonymous, and then the police will show up at their door [for more information].

> It's really difficult talk to someone when their biggest concern deals with police response. They say, 'We call the police, we had a fight over here, and the police didn't show up for two hours or whatever it was.'

Despite the frustration with law enforcement and poor police service, residents were encouraged to keep calling so that there was documentation of their calls. They were instructed to write down the dates and times they contacted police, police arrival time, and the names of the officers.

Another activity that comprised the community mobilizer role was to develop block watches and to meet with established clubs. Some partners found this task to be a daunting prospect.

> We ask them would you like to participate in a block club. Right away sometimes the response is like they get startled. It is almost like it's a fear for them, especially when you ask them to be the block captain.… Some do say yes, yes, yes, then when you call them back and try to get them organized they're saying no, because the thing is with the neighborhood these days is in the old days it used to be where you knew your neighbors, and you had a good relationship. I think what warns people off from forming block clubs is the fact that they feel like the bad guys are going to be coming to the block meeting and therefore they don't feel comfortable to speak the things they want to speak, because they want to tell on the people that's there and a lot of times the block clubs have meetings in their homes and people don't want strangers in their homes … so I think there is a lot of fear and they feel like it's not going to do any good.

Another partner expressed similar frustration in getting a block club started in his area.

> People have the misconception that everyone who joins a block club/watch has to go walking down alleys, walking the neighborhood, go firsthand face-to-face and tell on everybody if that's the case. And then I kind of tell people, wait a minute, all you have to do is do what you are doing now. In their driveway, looking out the window, you do that anyway, just jot down some things that you happen to see that are abnormal and pass them forward. When we come together we have information that we didn't have before, and that's the major difference. You don't have to walk the alley. If there is a group that wants to do it, fine, but that's not something that is required.

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Nonetheless, the greater majority of Partners claimed that their efforts to mobilize and organize residents were meeting with some success. They stated that not only do they have more block watches and neighborhood associations in their designated areas, but many of the groups are strong and self-sufficient. This was clearly evident at the Mayor's crime commission meetings. Neighborhood associations and block clubs came armed with detailed lists of complaints, with addresses, etc. And, each agency represented by the Commission was required to respond to each complaint at the next meeting.

Intermediary

The intermediary role consisted of serving as a go-between for residents and law enforcement, and as an intermediary for neighborhood residents and different agencies and organizations throughout the inner city. An important part of this role was to gain the trust of area residents by developing personalized relations with them. As an intermediary, Partners carried out a wide variety of tasks, including alerting residents to a special police operation or a crime problem or trend, soliciting information about criminal activity from residents, voicing the worries of residents too afraid to contact police, and alleviating citizen concern over police service.

> We're a community partner liaison as far as law enforcement, and as far as getting information to the police department. We try to get as much information as we can regarding the possible activity, gang related activity, and gun related activity. We try to get information and send it back to the police department. We also like to tell them that the Milwaukee Police Department is working hard trying to serve residents. Sometimes residents feel that the police are not doing as much as they should, and you are trying to let them know that they have priorities … For example, if a resident is complaining of loud music or someone playing basketball in their front yard … the police might not show up for an hour or two … We let them know that police have certain obligations … it's not like they don't want to work with them, we let them know that.

> I explain to residents that police are here to work for their safety and protection … You give them the perspective that it is their brothers or sisters or neighbors or relatives somewhere out there that they're just trying to protect. I see my role as one to assist and help police in helping residents understand and perceive the police in a better way.

The Partners also acted as screeners with regard to citizen complaints. They filtered out matters that could be handled in an alternative fashion rather than calling the police (Jones et al., 2002).

The most frequent police contact was maintained with community liaison officers (CLOs) within each of the Milwaukee police districts. The CLOs are police officers who are designated as contact points for the Partners. The frequency of interaction varied from Partner to Partner, as did the formality or regimentation of the contact. They were just as likely to meet CLOs informally at various meetings and events that take place in the neighborhood, as well as making phone contact once or twice a week. Four Partners kept a monthly meeting with the CLO. One reason for the variability has to do with the fact the one partner may have three different police districts within their area. Many Partners viewed their relationship with the CLOs in positive terms:

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> I see it as we're like allies. A lot of times we can deal with places and they can't, or at least we can get a lot of, probably more information … I work with District 7. We even have meetings where we sit down and discuss what's going on. We got a good working relationship with the people.

However, the Partners expressed concern over negativity toward police. A sense of exasperation was felt in first encouraging residents to report crime and drug activity to the police, and then to later be forced to explain why their problems had not been solved more quickly.

> The residents don't understand why the drug houses are not being closed down. The police drive by, they say, and they see drug dealing and they don't do anything. We try to defend the police when we are out there talking to the residents. We try to make them understand that it's not that simple. You just can't go and make a bust; there is a procedure that you have to go by. Sometimes when you try to break it down for them, they feel a little bit better, but they just really think that police aren't doing their jobs.

* * *

> That's the thing that really gets at you, you encourage residents to make the call to the police. And then the police don't respond, or at least do not respond as quickly as the residents would like. So then I have to explain how the police dispatch process works and also how information must be collected over time to close down a drug house. It is hard for many of them to understand why things can't happen more quickly. So, much of my job is actually being a cheerleader and encouraging the residents to continue to fight even when it doesn't appear that anyone is listening.

Community Partners understood the importance of ongoing communication with law enforcement, particularly the CLOs in their neighborhoods. The following comment is illustrative:

> I see some of my Partners who have not had a relationship with the Captains or CLOs in their area and it is rough for them. They don't get the outcome, the people don't come … you don't get the trust of the residents. And they [residents] are the individuals who are going to make the changes happen. You could go door-to-door forever. But if the residents don't buy into it, it's not going to change.

Partners must also work to establish and maintain mutually satisfying relationships with community organizations. Relations with Safe Place staff have been a challenge for the Partners. Although several Partners spoke of good relations with Safe Places, others complained of non-existent or very weak relationships, being excluded from activities, and an overall lack of understanding about the roles and responsibilities of Community Partners (Jones et al., 2002).

> One of the problems with Safe Places is the schools do not like the outside kids. They like to have their own kids in their own programs. The reason for that is because they have more control over those kids and can threaten those kids. The only control over outside kids is to basically kick them out. So I think it is time to reorient their staffs to be inclusive … why should I be out in the neighborhood recruiting kids for their program when they are going to turn them away at the door anyway?

The Partners felt that there needs to be more collaboration and communication with Safe Places regarding the goals of community crime prevention. This would help

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identify the roles and responsibilities of each member of the partnership and resolve any misunderstandings.

Community Partners were also expected to attend a variety of meetings and this was viewed with some displeasure.

> I could go to four or five meetings a day if I wanted to, there's that much stuff going on. Some of them are important but some of them are just mid-management type of stuff … So, I'm not saying that it is not valuable but if there is so many of them … to discriminate which ones to go to and which ones to pass by … that's a challenge.

Whether it was crime commission or block watch meetings, meetings with new service providers or elected officials, most felt that much of their time was spent away from their single most important activity: knocking on doors and interacting with residents.

The Partners' Evaluation of the Community Partners Program

Community Partners were asked to evaluate their program and to offer suggestions for improvements. The Partners unanimously agreed that the overall Safe & Sound Initiative was an effective crime strategy with great potential. They also believed that their program played a major role in carrying out the main goal of the Initiative—to fight crime. As one respondent maintained:

> I don't believe a lot of activity that's going on would be known without Community Partners and outreach, just knowing what's going on in that block. I don't think that the reporting would be as high and I don't think the follow up would be as high.

The Partners also felt that they played an important role in helping law enforcement more fully understand resident concerns and in educating community members about police roles and responsibilities.

With regard to law enforcement/community relations, a few Partners called for more police as 'beat cops' who walked or rode bicycles in the neighborhoods. The beat cops would be more familiar and accessible to residents and develop more personal relations with residents and business owners. They explained that this would improve relations between the police and community denizens and create a visible police presence.

Another suggestion by several Partners was to decentralize police services by dividing the neighborhoods into smaller districts. They mentioned how the size of their target neighborhoods made it difficult to develop personalized relations with residents. In addition, they felt decentralizing would allow police officers to become more involved in the community. More effective communication with law enforcement was also an important concern. Community Partners wanted more information about special police operations so that they could alert residents to be careful and so that their own safety was not jeopardized. They also emphasized the continuing problem of slow police response and lack of response to citizen calls. Communication was needed to better understand why this was happening.

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Discussion

The Community Partners have taken a leadership role as an intermediary in crime prevention partnerships. Partners assert that the effectiveness of their program is dependent on the personalized relationships that they have established and the trust and rapport they have built with neighborhood residents. They reported much success in their efforts to mobilize residents. Many neighborhoods are now forming their own block watches and resident associations. However, there are still neighborhoods in which the Partners struggle to motivate community members. They stressed that these relationships take time to build and require an ongoing investment of time.

'Doing doors' was their major strategy to develop relationships, learn of criminal activity and neighborhood problems, promote social networks, and to deliver information about crime problems/trends, police operations, and community resources. Their approach to 'doing doors' required an intimate knowledge of their neighborhood including an assessment of criminal activity, problem residents, and physical and social disorders. In neighborhoods with hot spots, Partners learned to be much more cautious and safety conscious when 'doing doors.'

Problems with sustaining the initial commitment to partnering for crime prevention and with ongoing communication have surfaced among some of the various neighborhood constituents. All of the Partners believed that trust and a willingness to work together are vital elements to keep the partnerships going with law enforcement and neighborhood agencies and organizations. Respondents reported decreased communication and information from law enforcement. Some attributed this to a fear that Community Partners were encroaching on their crime control function or as simply a desire to relinquish some of the 'community work' of policing. As a Community Partner remarked:

> Ways to strengthen the program would include better relationships with police. We [Community Partners] are not police officers. We are just trying to assist them, so they don't need to be intimidated or see us as a liability.

The reluctance of some community agencies and organizations to include Community Partners in planning and implementing neighborhood activities and events was also mentioned by some interviewees. This was viewed as 'drawing boundaries,' defining the scope of their service territory.

> The most frustrating aspect of the job is dealing with the different attitudes of people, not necessarily residents, but collaborators. It hasn't always been easy to help people understand about working together … If we work together we can be more effective, that's kind of the viewpoint. I noticed a lot of people had hidden agendas, a lot of people had things that they felt were more important and just trying to create that common goal was a struggle for a long time … They would kind of distance themselves from me.

However, most Community Partners acknowledged that they needed to develop personalized relations with neighborhood agencies and organizations, as well as area residents. Perhaps one Partner said it best:

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> We have to have a personal relationship with these agencies. It is important to organize residents and law enforcement, as well as the pastors and other community leaders and staff, to make this partnership idea work.

Crime is a complex, persistent problem and the solutions are equally complex. The Community Partners Program as a crime prevention strategy in high crime areas warrants further examination. Mobilizing community residents into a force able to 'take back their streets,' is an enormous challenge. Most residents have developed strategies to protect themselves and a neighbor or two, but to bring about significant change on a larger scale warrants a much greater degree of organization. Research has shown that strengthening social networks is the key to addressing the social disorder that breeds crime. The use of an intermediary in an organizing capacity to build informal social control shows much promise.

Further research is needed to investigate the most effective use of intermediaries in crime prevention partnerships. Research needs to examine the process of developing personalized relationships among all constituents and why trust and rapport may be the ingredients for productive community organizing and involvement in some situations and not in others.

Notes

[1] The Weed and Seed Program, sponsored by the Department of Justice, was piloted in 36 cities across the country. The Program involves an effort to both arrest and prosecute criminal offenders (weeding) and to develop services and resources to reduce risk factors associated with crime (seeding) (Conly & McGillis, 1996, p. 24). Milwaukee was awarded a federal grant in the early 1990s to implement a pilot Weed and Seed Initiative in three areas in the city.

[2] The neighborhoods were selected because they have been plagued by a variety of social problems, including the highest percentage of unemployment in the city, the greatest incidence of reported child abuse and neglect, the highest rate of teen pregnancy, prolific street gang activity, and widespread availability of guns and drugs (Zevitz, 2002, p. 128).

[3] The Lopez family was a violent drug ring terrorizing residents in an eight block neighborhood on the Southside of Milwaukee. The family owned a chrome plating business (where over 1 million dollars was laundered), more than a dozen houses and apartments, two dozen cars, and an arsenal of 46 weapons (McBride, 2001).

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