Community perspectives
sustain this initiative long-term. From police and
to

What are the most critical factors necessary to
What happens to users?
Why do dealers change their behavior?
What are the long-term outcomes for dealers?
forms?

Does the market get translated into invisible
narratives, and perceptions change?
Do community and law enforcement norms,

Remaining Questions
Problem-Oriented Policing and Open-Air Drug Markets: Examining the Rockford Pulling Levers Deterrence Strategy

Nicholas Corsaro,¹ Rod K. Brunson,¹ and Edmund F. McGarrell²

Abstract
Problem-oriented policing strategies have been regarded as promising approaches for disrupting open-air drug markets in vulnerable communities. Pulling levers, elements of deterrence interventions, which are consistent with the problem-oriented framework, have shown potential as an effective mechanism for reducing and preventing youth, gun, and gang violence. This study examines the effect of a strategic, pulling levers intervention that was implemented by law enforcement officials in Rockford, Illinois, to address drug markets in a high-crime neighborhood. The initiative builds on a similar effort developed in High Point, North Carolina, and represents an extension of pulling levers that was originally developed in Boston. The impact evaluation uses a mixed method of quantitative hierarchical growth curve models and qualitative interviews with residents. Study findings suggest that the Rockford strategy was associated with a statistically significant and substantive reduction in crime, drug, and nuisance offenses in the target neighborhood. Results from this examination have implications for both research and public policy.

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Since the mid-1980s, a number of criminal justice interventions have been introduced in response to a surge in drug-related offenses (Mazerolle, Sooie, & Rombouts, 2006, 2007). There is considerable variation in law enforcement approaches (Weisburd & Eck, 2004), however, and this extends to strategies that target drug markets and related offending. Problem-oriented policing initiatives are directed at specific issues and rely on a host of proactive tactics in an effort to address the underlying causes of crime in varying community contexts (see Goldstein, 1990). This study evaluates a problem-oriented policing strategy used by the Rockford Police Department (RPD) to combat open-air drug markets and related offending in a high-crime neighborhood.

Drug Law Enforcement Strategies

An abundant body of research exists with regard to policing strategies designed to disrupt the flow of illegal drugs in open-air markets. Mazerolle et al. (2007) found that interventions aimed at reducing narcotic activity offer promise in terms of effect. Often-used aggressive policing tactics that rely extensively on crackdowns (e.g., arrests, sweeps, and saturation) in high crime neighborhoods have produced mixed results, however (Bynum & Worden, 1996; Wood et al., 2004). Prior investigations consistently indicate that, at best, crackdowns have a short-term effect (Best, Strang, Beswick, & Gossip, 2001; Smith, Davis, Hillenbrand, & Goresky, 1992; Smith, 2001). Thus, successful interventions directed at drug offenders in high crime communities require more than identification and arrests.

The literature indicates that the most successful drug market interventions have relied on problem-oriented policing approaches, which involve a variety of tactics designed to tackle problems in specific contexts (e.g., supply-side reductions, improving police-community relations, and nuisance abatement efforts). The use of these strategies has yielded reductions in crime and problem behaviors associated with drug markets in Chicago, Illinois (Coldren & Higgins, 2003), Jersey City, New Jersey (Mazerolle, Ready, Terrill, & Waring, 2000; Weisburd & Green, 1995), Oakland, California (Green, 1995; Mazerolle, Price, & Roehl, 2000; Mazerolle & Ransley, 2006), and San Diego, California (Clarke & Bichler-Robertson, 1998; Eck & Wartell, 1998).

A meta-analysis of drug law enforcement evaluations conducted by Mazerolle et al. (2006) concluded that problem-oriented policing tactics appear to be the most effective approach when dealing with drug crime, incivilities, and overall offenses than were community-wide policing, hot spots policing, and standard
(i.e., unfocused or reactive) policing. Similarly, recent research relying on simulation techniques comparing the experimental conditions of random: patrol, hot spots policing, and problem-oriented policing found that the latter approach was the optimal strategy for disrupting street-level drug markets, reducing crime, and minimizing harm, regardless of the drug being trafficked (Dray, Mazerolle, Perez, & Ritter, 2008).

Although problem-oriented policing tactics seem to hold promise for minimizing criminal offenses associated with drug markets, few studies have specifically examined the utility of the “pulling levers” problem-oriented approach (see Kennedy, 1997) in an open-air drug market setting. To date, a majority of pulling levers strategies has focused on reducing violence and gang-related crime. The pulling levers intervention appears adaptable in terms of affecting youth, gang, and gun crime in a number of large U.S. cities; thus, it is reasonable to hypothesize that pulling levers can also be used as an approach to reduce nongang-related drug crime.

**Pulling Levers: Combining Focused Deterrence and Social Support**

Problem-oriented policing strategies have also been suggested as effective tools for preventing violence, in particular when targeted at gang-involved offenders (Decker, 2003). In response to the huge increase in firearms violence in the late 1980s and early 1990s (Blumstein & Rosenfeld, 1998), a large number of criminal justice agencies began experimenting with focused deterrence strategies often referred to as “pulling levers” (Braga, Kennedy, & Tita, 2002; Braga, Kennedy, Waring, & Piehl, 2001; McGarrell, Chermak, Wilson, & Corsaro, 2006; Weisburd & Braga, 2006). The multistage approach consists of diagnosing a specific crime problem, convening an interagency working group of criminal justice personnel, conducting research to identify patterns of chronic offenders and criminal networks, framing a specific response to law violators that uses a variety of sanctions as a coercive approach to stop continuing illegal behavior, providing social services and community resources to targeted offenders, and directly and repeatedly communicating with offenders so that they understand why they are receiving special attention (Braga, Pierce, McDevitt, Bond, & Cronin, 2008; Kennedy, 1997, 2006). The first pulling levers intervention was implemented in Boston and has since been recognized as an effective strategy for reducing violence, firearm offenses, and youth homicide (Braga et al., 2001). For example, pulling levers has been replicated, with promising results, in other U.S. cities including Baltimore, Maryland (Braga et al., 2002), Cincinnati, Ohio (Engel, Baker, Tillyer, Eck, & Dunham, 2008), Chicago, Illinois (Papachristos, Meares, & Fagan, 2007), High Point, North Carolina (Coleman, Hollon, Olson, Robinson, & Stewart, 1999), Indianapolis, Indiana (McGarrell et al., 2006), Los Angeles, California (Tita, Riley, Ridgeway,
Grammich, Abrahamsen, & Greenwood, 2003), Lowell, Massachusetts (Braga et al., 2008), Minneapolis, Minnesota (Kennedy & Braga, 1998), and Stockton, California (Braga, 2008; Wakeling, 2003). At the national level, Dalton (2002) described how the pulling levers framework has been applied in a large number of U.S. cities and federal districts through the Strategic Alternatives to Community Safety Initiative and Project Safe Neighborhoods.

**Summary and Research Implications**

Although the promise of problem-oriented policing strategies has been well-documented as a successful law enforcement approach to combat illegal-drug markets (Mazerolle et al., 2006, 2007), and pulling levers deterrence initiatives have been regarded as promising problem-oriented policing strategies to reduce gang violence (Braga et al., 2008; Decker, 2003), very little research exists examining the capacity of pulling levers to combat open-air drug markets that are not directly driven by violent gang members. The first law enforcement agency to use pulling levers in response to persistent street-level drug markets, beyond those driven by gang members, was the High Point Police Department in North Carolina (Fratibutt, Guthings, Hunt, & Loggins, 2006). Information about the High Point campaign gained the attention of RPD administrators. Further, officers from Rockford traveled to High Point to get a better understanding of the specific processes that were necessary for replication.

The purpose of this article is to assess the utility of pulling levers as an effective response to open-air drug markets in a distressed Rockford, Illinois, neighborhood. This study contributes to the drug law enforcement literature and pulling levers research by examining the utility of pulling levers as a specific response to drug sellers in drug hot spots. Although pulling levers has largely been implemented and evaluated on its ability to reduce firearms and violence, its usefulness beyond these contexts is unknown. Our results provide insight into whether the pulling levers campaign holds promise as a viable strategy for combating open-air drug markets.

**Method and Study Setting**

We employed multiple data collection and analysis methods in this study. Specifically, we used narratives and observational data with criminal justice officials to measure program implementation, RPD crime statistics to measure programmatic impact, and in-depth interviews with residents from Delancey Heights (the target neighborhood) to triangulate both process and impact data.²

Activity (i.e., process) data were collected through narratives, interviews, and observations with law enforcement officials, prosecutors, and social service providers in an effort to capture detailed information on program implementation.
Specifically, we examined the extent to which the Rockford initiative adhered to the tenets of the pulling levers theoretical framework (see Braga et al., 2001; Kennedy, 1997).

Offense (i.e., impact) data include all crimes reported over a 2-year period, which were aggregated into a monthly format from June 2006 through June 2008. Crime data in Rockford are submitted and conform to the National Incident-Based Reporting System maintained by the Federal Bureau of Investigation and offer distinct advantages for both policy analysis and criminal justice research, at least compared with data submitted to the traditional Uniform Crime Report system (Maxfield, 1999). Crime data were operationalized as composite measures of violent and nonviolent offenses that occurred from the first through the last day of each month. Offense data from RPD are more reliable than conventional calls for service data because immediately following their investigations, officers enter detailed information concerning incidents into a computer system mounted in their patrol cars, allowing for improved cross-validation. In addition to employing pre- and postintervention analyses in Delancey Heights using growth curve models, we also modeled changes in citywide offense trends once the target area was subtracted from the city total for general trend and comparison purposes.

We used qualitative, in-depth interviews with 34 adults in Delancey Heights to complement the narrative, observational, and quantitative data. The interviews lasted approximately 40 minutes to 1 hour. Participation in the study was voluntary and participants were paid $25 and promised strict confidentiality. The in-depth interviews were semistructured and consisted of open-ended questions intended to elicit detailed information about participants’ perceptions of and experiences with crime and disorder in Delancey Heights (prior to and following the initiative). The interviews were not audiotaped. Members of the research team, however, meticulously recorded responses by hand. Furthermore, painstaking attention was paid to accurately capture study participants’ statements verbatim. We analyzed the data through numerous readings of participants’ accounts and were careful that the concepts developed and themes that emerged illustrated the most common (and salient) patterns of residents’ descriptions in the target neighborhood. This was accomplished using grounded theory methods involving searches for and highlighting of deviant cases (Strauss, 1987). Finally, we attempted to strengthen the reliability of the data by asking participants about their perceptions and encounters multiple times during the interview.

To place the present pulling levers intervention strategy into context, we provide descriptive information for both Delancey Heights and the city of Rockford. Table 1 displays key demographic characteristics of residents and households in the target community as well as the overall city. Descriptive indicators of neighborhood context include the total population, percent male, percent White,
median home income, average educational attainment of inhabitants, and measures of residential stability. These data, taken from the 2000 U.S. Census, were aggregated from block groups in the target neighborhood and the overall city. Delancey Heights accounts for roughly 1.7% of the Rockford population and is generally one of the more distressed neighborhoods within the city.

Variables

Table 2 displays the offense data that were aggregated to create measures of violent and nonviolent outcome variables. In terms of the violent crime variable, nine offenses were selected to create an overall index measure. Violent offenses were aggregated from homicides (< 1%), rapes (1.5%), kidnappings (< 1%), robberies (11%), and simple and aggravated assaults (86.6%), which made up the majority of violent crimes. Similarly, nine crimes comprised the nonviolent offenses measure, which was a composite of drug-related incidents, nuisance crimes (including prostitution and vagrancy), and property offenses. Nonviolent offenses included 63.1% property damage, 15.9% drug and drug equipment violations, and 21% of nuisance crimes (including prostitution, curfew violations, vagrancy, and disorderly conduct). Identical selection criteria were employed for both the target neighborhood and citywide offense variables.

The intervention variable, seen in Table 3, captures the pulling levers intervention. In Delancey Heights, treatment was measured as a dichotomous variable (0 = pre-May 2007, 1 = May 2007 and beyond). Specifically, May 2007 was treated as the postintervention date because it was during this month that RPD (a) arrested a number of violent offenders who were involved in open-air drug trafficking, (b) conducted the pulling levers notification meeting bringing together community leaders and key criminal justice officials to speak with nonviolent drug sellers, and (c) worked with community development officers to improve neighborhood conditions by issuing citations for a wide range of code violations. In all, these efforts resulted in 11 months of preintervention and
Table 2. Description of Violent and Nonviolent Offenses in Rockford

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Violent Offenses (offenses against persons)</th>
<th>Nonviolent Offenses (nuisance, drug, and property offenses)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Murder</td>
<td>Stolen property</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nonnegligent manslaughter</td>
<td>Destruction of property</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rape</td>
<td>Vandalism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kidnapping</td>
<td>Drug/narcotic violations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abduction</td>
<td>Drug equipment violations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unlawful restraint</td>
<td>Prostitution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Robbery</td>
<td>Violation of curfew</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aggravated assault</td>
<td>Vagrancy and loitering</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Simple assault</td>
<td>Disorderly conduct</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3. Descriptive Statistics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>Minimum</th>
<th>Maximum</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Violent offenses</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>299.5</td>
<td>298.5</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>700</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nonviolent offenses</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>482.4</td>
<td>475.2</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>1225</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intervention measure</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>0.28</td>
<td>0.453</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Target neighborhood</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>0.50</td>
<td>0.707</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

14 months of postintervention data for the target neighborhood. In the next section, we describe process and impact results of the pulling levers intervention employed by Rockford officials in Delancey Heights.

Results

Implementation and Process Assessment

The Rockford pulling levers intervention strategy generally followed the High Point Drug Market initiative (Frabutt et al., 2006) and involved the following three stages: (a) identification, (b) notification, and (c) resource delivery. The identification stage was a data-driven procedural analysis used by RPD to determine the appropriate neighborhood and individuals for the intervention (see Kofias et al., 2006). The notification stage consisted of a two-part process: (1) a targeted investigation that lasted several months and led to the arrest and focused prosecution of seven chronic, violent offenders in Delancey Heights; and (2) a targeted investigation and publicly delivered message of zero-tolerance to five suspected dealers who were given an opportunity to participate in a “last chance” program that afforded them access to a variety of social support services.
(i.e., a pulling levers notification) because of their limited and nonviolent criminal histories. The resource delivery stage provided these five offenders with positive support mechanisms that were specific to each person's situation—a critical component of the mixed deterrence and social support strategy (Cullen, 1994; Tyler, 1990). In addition, RPD and cooperating agencies worked extensively to improve the quality of life for residents in the target area through order maintenance policing efforts. Thus, the stages of the Rockford strategy were consistent with the pulling levers framework (Kennedy, 1997). A detailed summary of the action plan and the pulling levers process component is displayed in Appendix A.

Impact and Outcome Assessment

The ultimate goal of the Rockford pulling levers strategy implemented in Delancey Heights was to reduce criminal offending, interrupt open-air drug markets, and make the once high crime community more inhabitable. The purpose of the following analyses is to assess the impact of the initiative by examining whether changes in crime patterns occurred after implementation.

As an initial step, percentage differences were examined with regard to the changes in violent and nonviolent offenses for the target neighborhood, the remainder of Rockford, and the overall city both before and after the intervention. Because the number of pre- and postintervention periods is not equivalent, the average percentage change in the number of offenses per month across the city is displayed below. Table 4 shows that the target neighborhood experienced an average decline of 24.10% in nonviolent and a 14.29% reduction in violent incidents between the pre- and postintervention periods. Comparatively, from a general trend perspective, the remainder of the city also experienced a decline in both nonviolent (−9%) and violent crime (−2.3%). Ultimately, a decline in both violent and nonviolent offenses occurred in the city of Rockford before and after May 2007. It is also apparent that the decline throughout the remainder of the city was not as extensive (in terms of magnitude for either offense type) and that the decline in both violent and nonviolent crime for the entire city was influenced by specific declines in the target neighborhood.

Growth Curve Estimates

The empirical models presented here examine repeated crime data in a monthly format from June 1, 2006, to June 30, 2008, in the target neighborhood and the remainder of Rockford. The use of a mixed model is appropriate for the current data and is well suited to the specific research questions here because the stochastic process in a hierarchical model can be specified using repeated observations nested within a neighborhood or city (Raudenbush & Bryk, 2002). Specifically,
Table 4. Changes in Nonviolent and Violent Offenses in Rockford Before and After May 2007 Call-In

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Nonviolent Offenses per Month (preintervention)</th>
<th>Nonviolent Offenses per Month (postintervention)</th>
<th>Percentage Δ</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Target neighborhood</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nonviolent</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>-24.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Violent</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>-14.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Remainder of city</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nonviolent</td>
<td>944</td>
<td>859</td>
<td>-9.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Violent</td>
<td>567</td>
<td>554</td>
<td>-2.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall city</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nonviolent</td>
<td>1013</td>
<td>881</td>
<td>-13.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Violent</td>
<td>588</td>
<td>573</td>
<td>-2.55</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5. Hierarchical Generalized Linear Modeling Fixed Effects Growth Curve Estimates and Standard Errors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Nonviolent Offenses</th>
<th>Violent Offenses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Coefficient</td>
<td>SE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 1 only models</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intercept (β₀₀)</td>
<td>0.078**</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intervention (β₁₀)</td>
<td>-0.250*</td>
<td>0.120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multilevel models</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intercept (β₀₀)</td>
<td>0.078**</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intervention (β₁₀)</td>
<td>-0.010*</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Target (β₁₁)</td>
<td>-0.020*</td>
<td>0.011</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p < .10, **p < .05, ***p < .01.

simple linear models as well as maximum likelihood count regressions assume mutual dependence in the error estimates. In time-series data, the observations at adjacent points in time are highly intercorrelated, or autocorrelated, and thus, the Hierarchical Generalized Linear Modeling (HGLM) framework is appropriate for this analysis.

HGLM is used to assess within-neighborhood changes in both violent and nonviolent crime from June 2006 to June 2008 by relying on a Poisson sampling model with a correction for overdispersion and the neighborhood population as the exposure variable. In this case, the monthly offense counts were treated as repeated measures nested within the target neighborhood at Level 1. Including the population as the exposure variable means that the dependent variable is interpreted as a crime rate outcome for both violent and nonviolent crime.
(Raudenbush & Bryk, 2002). In addition, the intervention measure was group-centered to create a unique intercept and slope for the target neighborhood. Group centering a time-varying covariate at Level 1 provides an unbiased estimate of the change effect between the independent variable (X) and violent crime within the neighborhood, which is the focus of this study (see Xie & McDowall, 2008).

The unconditional random effects baseline models for both violent and nonviolent incidents indicated significant variation in crime trends within the target neighborhood as well as the remainder of Rockford (p < .01 for both sets of models). Table 5 displays the conditional models where the intervention variable was included as a Level 1 covariate. The intervention measure captures the specific change in the target neighborhood to assess whether there was significant within-neighborhood variation in local offenses after the pulling levers intervention. Because the remainder of the city did not receive the intervention, the measure is always a zero, thus isolating the estimate of the intervention effect to the target neighborhood. Nonviolent crime in Delancey Heights reduced by roughly 22.2% (per 1,000 residents) following the May 2007 pulling levers intervention, and the decline was statistically significant (p < .05). Although violent crime also reduced in the target community following the intervention (-8.7%), the decline was not statistically significant (p = .33).

We next examined whether the changes in both violent and nonviolent offenses experienced in Delancey Heights were significantly different (i.e., above and beyond) from crime changes in the remainder of the city over the same period. The application of multilevel models is useful in this instance because estimates obtained from Level 2 variables indicate differences across (i.e., between) the units at Level 1. In this case, we used the same intervention variable for both the target neighborhood and the remainder of the city (0 = pre-May 2007 intervention, 1 = May 2007 and beyond) to create a viable comparison. Target designation, a Level 2 measure, distinguished the Delancey Heights neighborhood from the remainder of the city (0 = remainder of the city, 1 = target neighborhood). The slope of the intervention measure at Level 1 was thus modeled as a function of the target designation at Level 2 (i.e., a cross-level interaction effect). The results indicated that nonviolent crimes in the target neighborhood reduced at a marginally significantly greater rate (p = .07) than nonviolent offenses in the remainder of the city following the May 2007 pulling levers intervention. Violent crime in the target area also declined at a greater rate when compared with the remainder of the city, but the difference was not statistically significant (p = .41). Both sets of HGLM models yield similar and consistent results: Nonviolent incidents in the target neighborhood experienced a significant decline after the implementation of pulling levers, whereas violent incidents also declined but not to the level of statistical significance.

To visually display the results seen in the HGLM estimates, nonviolent crime trends were standardized (per 1,000 residents) for the target neighborhood and the remaining city (please see Figure 1). The target area experienced a decline
from 10.8 nonviolent offenses per 1,000 residents before to 8.3 nonviolent offenses after pulling levers was implemented in May 2007. Comparatively, the remainder of Rockford experienced a reduction from 6.8 nonviolent offenses to 5.9 nonviolent offenses per 1,000 residents over this same period. Figure 1 also indicates that the decreases in the nonviolent offenses within the target area occurred a few months after the intervention and have since remained relatively proximate to nonviolent offense rates seen in the remainder of the city. Thus, an observed lag in the reduction of nonviolent offenses and the observed statistical effect occurred after the early summer months following program implementation. Although this lag was included in the parameter estimates in the growth curve models, it was not specifically isolated using this approach. Although not displayed here, we also used the Autoregressive Integrated Moving Average (ARIMA) identification procedure to identify and isolate the lag effect, which was statistically significant ($p < .01$). Data obtained from interviews with residents cross-validated the lag-effect finding, which we note in the next section.

Resident Interviews

The majority of study participants report being very pleased with the RPD intervention and tout it as an innovative crime-reduction strategy. For example, several participants noted that they have seen reductions in crime and incivilities in Delancey Heights following the intervention. For instance, Ted remarked, “Now the people who walk down the street aren’t outsiders trafficking drugs. Now [when you see people outside] it’s residents from this community. Outsiders don’t come in and cause problems anymore, at least not as much as they did before.” Similarly, James stated, “We used to have ‘trash pickup’ days every couple of months to make the neighborhood look good. We’ve had to cancel several of those because we just don’t have the amount of trash in this neighborhood as we used to. And that’s a good thing.” And finally, Mary explained,
I wouldn’t say it’s one hundred percent better, but it’s a heck of a lot better. There are a lot less dealers, hookers, and noise around here than there used to be. It’s been a long time since we have seen something bad happen, like a shooting. The big difference around here is at night; it’s just a lot more peaceful at night now.

These statements highlight that residents in Delancey Heights have noticed a tangible change with regard to drug dealing, crime, nuisance offenses, litter, and incivilities in the neighborhood.

In terms of specifying when the positive changes occurred, a majority of Delancey Heights residents identified the period when RPD publicly announced its intervention efforts. Furthermore, study participants consistently attributed the observed crime reduction in their neighborhood to increased police presence and shorter response times. This perception was consistent among both heavily involved and disengaged neighborhood residents. For example, Williams, who attended the pulling levers community notification, noted,

It took several months after the call-in before we saw real impact. There were some remaining drug dealers in the neighborhood that refused to leave because this was their turf and they were going to stay. Police were able to eventually drive them out, but it took a few months.

Similarly, Carla, a resident who was uninvolved in the pulling levers call-in, remarked,

Things changed for the better when police got the dealers out of here. Really, when police boarded up [an abandoned building], locked the gates to it, and put up a camera, things got a lot better around then; maybe a little after that. After the dealers couldn’t find anywhere else to go, this place has just been a lot better.

It is also important to note that as time has elapsed since the intervention, a number of participants expressed dissatisfaction with what they considered poor police response times. They were especially troubled because according to them, they enjoyed appreciably quicker response times during the earliest period of the intervention. And in their view, the police department no longer showed the same level of commitment to Delancey Heights. Jason’s comment illustrates this point. He reported, “There’s a perception among residents in this neighborhood that police [no longer] make us a priority when we call. We’d like to know why this is, especially since problems in this neighborhood used to be a priority.” Likewise, Jan said, “Police response takes longer now than it used to. For a long time, police were always here and were so quick to respond to our calls. Now they seem to care less about what
goes on here than they used to and that is something they should address." There were other underlying issues and concerns that the interviews seemed to uncover.

Although participants remarked that the most blatant forms of open-air drug dealing had dissipated, they noted that many remaining dealers had simply adapted to enforcement efforts and now sold drugs more covertly (i.e., inside cars and residences rather than on the street). Sheila commented, "We have less dealers than we used to, but the ones we still have are also different. They don't sell out on the street anymore but rather in their cars. Now they have to be sneaky about it." In agreement, Kendall noted,

I think the dealers that have been able to avoid getting caught try hard not to bring too much attention to themselves. People who used to sell drugs here sold to outsiders who were coming in, bringing attention to themselves. We don't have those types of dealers anymore, out in the street.

And finally, Kim advised, "I know there are still people here who deal. But it's not 'in and out' anymore. People who are selling drugs now are doing it out of their homes or in their cars. It's gone, but it's much more out-of-sight."

Although study participants were consistent in the belief that drug crime and related offenses in Delancey Heights had indeed subsided, they desired a continued commitment from RPD to the area.

Discussion

Results from the HGLM growth curve models indicate that Delancey Heights experienced a statistically significant, substantive, and noticeable reduction in property, drug, and nuisance offenses after pulling levers was implemented. This is important given the relationship between these specific types of behaviors and open-air drug markets documented in prior research (Pettiway, 1995; Rengert & Wasilchick, 1989). Comparative statistical analyses reveal that the greater city did not experience a similar effect with regard to changes in crime rates over the same period. Interviews with residents demonstrated that they observed an appreciable transformation in the neighborhood shortly after RPD introduced proactive, strategic, and focused approaches to interrupt the open-air markets that had once flourished in the community. Regardless of their level of involvement with and knowledge of the intervention strategy, the majority of study participants agreed that crime and disorder in Delancey Heights had dropped precipitously as a result of the multijury crime-control effort.

In sum, our findings consistent with previous studies, which indicate that strategies relying on both proactive and reactive policing tactics appear to be extremely promising for reducing drug and related crime (Maieron et al., 2006, 2007; Weisburd & Green, 1995). It is important that RPD and other public officials sought
to strengthen informal social control in Delancey Heights throughout the initiative by involving residents in various stages of the intervention process (Bursik & Grasmick, 1993; Sampson, Raudenbush, & Earls, 1997). Interviews with residents, and in particular with those who were engaged in the pulling levers notification meeting, indicated a heightened sense of awareness and responsibility in terms of cooperating with police to regulate neighborhood behaviors.

In terms of sustainability, once drug, nuisance, and property offense rates declined in the target neighborhood, they remained consistent with those experienced by the remainder of the city. It is not surprising that RPD officials have since implemented additional proactive law enforcement and pulling levers strategies in other high crime, Rockford communities in an effort to replicate the effect seen in Delancey Heights. Resident interviews indicated that many citizens in the target area believed that RPD was not prioritizing Delancey Heights as it did when intervention dosage was highest (i.e., during the implementation of strategies), despite the apparent and sustained effect. In fact, residents feared that RPD had shifted its attention and resources to other problem neighborhoods. As Tyler and Folger (1980) observed, citizens' perceptions of procedural fairness from a criminal justice perspective are directly related to issues such as police response time, regardless of whether quicker responses by law enforcement would actually solve their specific problems. Given that prior research indicates that crime victims want compassion, concern, and sensitivity from law enforcement personnel (see Mawby & Walklate, 1994), it should come as no surprise that residents who greatly appreciate the benefits of enhanced policing strategies (i.e., quicker response times, greater police presence, etc.) struggle with a perceived withdrawal or reduction of those resources once crime rates subside. Further research should be invested in effective "weaning" strategies focused on neighborhood residents' perceptual vantage points as well as on crime rates.

It is interesting that although violent crime in the target area declined following the intervention, it did not reduce at a statistically significant level. A likely explanation is the lack of statistical power given that violent offenses were relatively infrequent in Delancey Heights. As mentioned previously, more than 86% of the violent offenses were classified as assaults. A more detailed analysis should attempt to delineate those physical attacks that were drug market related, such as retaliatory violence as a means of debt collection (see Anderson, 1999) or assaults that occurred in public, in an effort to better understand this phenomenon. It is unfortunate that our data do not allow for a more in-depth investigation of these events. The fact that only nonviolent offenders were included in the pulling levers program also has implications for the lack of a significant violent crime reduction. It is difficult to assess the generalizability concerning the lack of an observed violent crime reduction that has been seen in other pulling levers strategies because the Delancey Heights neighborhood had such a small number of robberies and homicides, which have been the major focus of pulling levers research to this point (Piquero, 2005).
On a related note, the observed gradual or lagged effect on nonviolent crime rates in the Rockford strategy also differs from those seen in prior research. Specifically, some of the initial pulling levers initiatives had an immediate effect, which was seen in Boston, Massachusetts (Piehl, Cooper, Braga, & Kennedy, 2004), Indianapolis, Indiana (Corsaro & McGarrell, 2009), Minneapolis, Minnesota (Kennedy & Braga, 1998), and other sites. Whereas the immediate or “light-switch” effect (see Kennedy, 2006, p. 158) of pulling levers is consistently observed where reducing youth, gang, and gun crime is the target of the strategy, much less is known about how much time should be expected until an effect is observed in an open-air drug market setting. Rather than having an immediate and abrupt effect when dealing with gang offenders, the pulling levers intervention strategy may serve more as a catalyst for change (requiring more lag time before an effect is observed) when directed at open-air drug market offenders. Further research that examines pulling levers in different contexts is vital to our obtaining a better understanding of its utility.

There are a number of limitations to this study that we mention with the hope of informing further research on this topic. First, the pulling levers intervention assessment here is not isolated from the combination of reactive, directed, and proactive/partnership strategies that have been established as successful interventions, which are outlined in Mazerolle et al.’s (2007) systematic review of drug enforcement strategies. In essence, the Rockford intervention could be referred to as “pulling-levers plus” because there were supplemental strategies associated with the antidrug, law enforcement tactics. The effect of a pulling levers intervention strategy without the nuisance abatement and civil remedy approaches that were also included in the Rockford initiative would be extremely beneficial to this line of inquiry. It is certainly plausible that the correlation between the reduction in nonviolent crime in the target neighborhood and the implementation of the pulling levers strategy could be heavily influenced and confounded by the nuisance abatement programs implemented in Rockford. Future studies that examine pulling levers would benefit from a more singularly focused strategy to address this issue.

Whereas the statistical techniques and in particular the HGLM estimates were appropriate for the data used here, Bushway and McDowall (2006) contend that the use of ARIMA time-series analysis is perhaps the most rigorous criminal justice evaluation approach to assess program impact. The data available equate to 25 observation periods for the target area and the overall city, which is roughly half of the recommended number of observations needed to obtain reliable ARIMA estimates (Box & Jenkins, 1976). Despite the low number of observations, we were able to fit zero-order, permanent transfer function ARIMA models for the nonviolent and violent offenses in the target area that met all of the assumptions of time-series analysis. The time-series results were very consistent
with those presented in the Results section above, which indicated a statistically
significant reduction in nonviolent offenses ($p < .05$) and a reduction in violent
offenses that was statistically insignificant. In addition, the quantitative data used
here do not allow us to examine long-term impact change as well as local dis-
placement or diffusion of benefits in contiguous areas (see Green, 1995).

The use of more rigorous, time consuming, and expensive drug offender iden-
tification methods would also strengthen research in this area. For example,
Beckett, Nyrop, and Pfingst (2006) used needle exchange survey data and exten-
sive ethnographic research methods to uncover discrepancies between official
arrest data and the dark figure of crime associated with drug use in open-air drug
markets. Future drug market intervention research would benefit greatly from
approaches such as those used by Beckett and colleagues, especially if collected
throughout the duration of program implementation. In addition, although the
use of a baseline comparison of the remainder of Rockford helps reduce the
concern that crime in Delancey Heights simply went through a natural reduction
(i.e., regression to the mean), a more appropriate methodology would be to use
comparisons between multiple neighborhoods that were consistent in terms of
size, social structure, and crime rates. Officials in RPD maintained that the target
area was unique from all other communities within the city and, thus, a quasi-
experimental analysis of within-city neighborhoods would be somewhat
unreliable. Future studies should draw from the use of more powerful analytical
methodologies including the application of a quasi-experimental or experimental
design to assess the effect of the localized intervention (Cook & Campbell, 1979).

Summary

The statistically significant reduction in nonviolent offenses that occurred after
pulling levers was implemented in Delancey Heights suggests that the extension
of the initiative to drug markets holds promise. On the other hand, the lack of a
statistically significant reduction in violent offenses requires further exploration.
To this point, most of the research on pulling levers has focused on reducing
youth, gun, and gang violence. These prior studies have consistently indicated a
reduction in violent offenses driven by changes in gang-related activity. This
study builds on prior problem-oriented policing research and suggests that the
use of pulling levers, at least in combination with other drug law enforcement
strategies, is not limited to affecting youth violence and gang-related offenses but
also can be adapted to nuisance, drug, and property crimes. Future studies are
needed to assess the capacity of pulling levers both independent of and in addi-
tion to other drug law enforcement strategies for eliminating drug markets in
crime-ridden communities. The results of the Rockford initiative highlight the
utility of such an approach.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategy</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Identification</td>
<td>Research analysts at RPD mapped index offenses, drug arrests, and drug complaints for the entire city.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(February 2007)</td>
<td>Law enforcement officials determined that the Delancy Heights target neighborhood, consisting of two sub-beats, would be the ideal locale for the pulling levers intervention.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mobilization</td>
<td>A narcotics unit officer at RPD supervised intelligence gathering on individuals who engaged in chronic drug dealing in the target neighborhood.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(March 2007)</td>
<td>Narcotics detectives conducted a complete incident review of all known offending in the target area. All reports and contacts with police, including intelligence gathered from cooperating witnesses, were examined. Twelve persistent offenders were identified.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intelligence Gathering</td>
<td>Narcotics detectives made controlled buys from the twelve identified drug dealers over the course of eight weeks. Surveillance equipment was used to record the purchases. And, cooperating witnesses were recruited.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(March 2007)</td>
<td>A multi-agency committee reviewed the cases made against the twelve individuals and relied upon the suspects’ criminal histories (e.g., the number of violent offenses and the total number of offenses) to identify five dealers who would be eligible for the pulling levers meeting.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incident Review</td>
<td>RPD notified residents at a local community meeting that an undercover investigation had been conducted over the past couple of months and that an immediate response was about to take place.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(March 2007)</td>
<td>Within 48 hours of the initial notification meeting, the seven violent offenders who were ineligible for the pulling levers strategy were subsequently arrested and received $500,000 bonds.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Undercover Investigation</td>
<td>RPD made phone calls, and relied upon a pastor at a local church, to notify offenders of the call-in by contacting their families. The police Chief also wrote a letter to each offender guaranteeing they would not be arrested at the meeting. RPD provided assistance for those out of town to ensure their attendance.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(March-April 2007)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>DMI Eligibility Meeting</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>(April 2007)</td>
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</table>

**Appendix A.** Summary of the process indicators of the pulling levers strategy
Appendix A. (continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The Call-In (May 2007)</th>
<th>The offenders, their families, key criminal justice personnel, and community members attended the pulling levers meeting. First, residents spoke of the harm that drug dealing caused in their community. Next, offenders and their families received the deterrent message from multi-agency members that continued offending would not be tolerated. Finally, an immediate needs assessment was made by social support services, followed by a more detailed assessment in the following weeks.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Community Follow-Up (May 2007)</td>
<td>RPD and housing inspectors seized five housing complexes where prior drug offending had been prominent. Social service officials assisted in moving residents who did not previously engage in illegal drug distribution into new homes. Maintenance code citations (e.g., lawn, trash, and poor fencing) were written for violations throughout the neighborhood. A street-sweeper cleaned the streets to symbolize the change that was occurring.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Long-Term Follow-Up</td>
<td>RPD continues routine and saturated patrols in the neighborhood. Community source officers and community leaders maintain communication for up-to-date information on neighborhood issues.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Acknowledgments

The authors would like to thank Chief Chat Epperson, Chief Michael Booker, Sergeant Marc Welsh, Roger Ratze, Kimberly Binder, Becky Bartkowicz, and the citizens of Rockford for their contributions to the initiative in addition to their assistance with the authors' evaluation efforts.

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Notes

1. Community-wide policing focused on drug law enforcement efforts at a broader level than drug hot spots, whereas hot spots policing relied on more traditional methods (i.e., saturation, crackdowns, street sweeps) employed at drug hot spots (see Mazerolle, Soole, & Rombouts, 2006).

2. Pseudonyms are used throughout the article, both for the study neighborhood and for participants.

3. Our interview strategy involved a two-stage approach. First, we interviewed a subsample of participants following a local community policing meeting to capture “engaged citizens” views. Second, we also interviewed “less than involved” neighborhood residents. Equal numbers of participants were drawn from each setting.

4. It is important to note that David Kennedy, considered the architect of the original pulling levers strategy in Boston, worked with RPD officials prior to program implementation to provide guidance concerning the specific tenets of the pulling levers framework.

5. None of the random effects variance components were statistically significant in the conditional models, and thus, all of the estimates were obtained from fixed-effects models (Raudenbush & Bryk, 2002).

6. The decline of 22.2% was calculated by using exponentiation on the logged coefficient, (-.250) = -.778, and subtracting 1.0 to obtain the estimated change between pre- and postintervention.

7. We estimated the following Autoregressive Integrated Moving Average model in the identification stage, which was an appropriate statistical fit to the observed target neighborhood nonviolent crime data: 1(6), 0, 0. Akaike information criterion = 26.0. This indicated a statistically significant trend in the observed nonviolent offense data without the inclusion of the intervention estimate. Results are available upon request.

8. Both violent and nonviolent offenses fit the ARIMA (1, 0, 0) models.

9. Specifically, both of the estimated ARIMA models had mean and variance stationarity and no residuals were statistically significant at key-lags, indicating appropriate model fit.
References


**Bios**

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CHAPTER 3

TRAINING SESSION #2
DAY 2

Appendix 4:
Dealing with the Media

Section A: Rockford – For Some Drug Dealers, A Second Chance Handout

Section B: Rockford Police Chief Vouches for ‘Hug a Thug’ Handout.

Section C: Hempstead: The DA’s Defense Amid Fallout from Plan to Allow Suspected Drug Dealers to Avoid Prison, Rice, Supporters Say It’s Worked Before Handout

Section D: Hempstead: Rice’s Reward is a Strange Drug Deal Handout

Section E: Hempstead: New Program Reforms Drug-Torn Neighborhood Handout

Section F: Hempstead: ABC News Story

Section G: High Point: Novel Police Tactic Puts Drug Markets Out of Business Confronted by the Evidence, Dealers in High Point, N.C., Succumb to Pressure Handout

Section H: Providence: Closing ‘Crack Highway’ Handout

Section I: Milwaukee: How to Let People do Heroes’ Work Handout


Section K: High Point: Sample Op-Ed Handout

Section L: Police & Community Celebrate Successful Lockwood Crime Fighting Initiative with Cookout

Section M: Dealer invited to community and anti-drug meeting arrested the next day.

Section N: Residents Confront Local Drug Dealers Over Community Impact

Section O: Gauging Drug Sweep Success will take time.

Section P: Drug Dealer Intervention

Section Q: Six alleged drug dealers agree to a deal.

Section R: Alleged Drug Offenders Offered a second chance

Section S: Drug Market Intervention

Section T: Middletown Drug Market Intervention

Section U: Program gives Dealer’s 2nd Chance: Non-violent Offenders get help for promise to reform.

Section V: First Significant Sentence in Open-air Drug War
News

For some drug dealers, a second chance

May 18, 2007 @ 07:45 AM

By Sadie Gurman

RRSTAR.COM

ROCKFORD -

Seven of the city's top drug dealers await prosecution, while five others are free.

Instead of jail, they have been offered an ultimatum: Stop dealing or it's off to prison.

The five dealers get a second chance as part of a sweeping drug enforcement strategy police have unleashed on part of the northwest side. It's a collection of proposed crime remedies for the area surrounded by Jefferson Street on the south, Whitman Street on the north, Kilburn Avenue on the west and the Rock River on the east.

Most striking is the "second chance" approach, which connects drug dealers with mentors and profitable labor jobs. The goal is to quash open-air drug markets by coupling pressure from the community with the promise of swift punishment for offenders who fail in their quest to clean up.

Dubbed "hug-a-thug" by skeptics in other cities that have tried it, the approach has enjoyed early praise from some residents in the target area. And Police Chief Chet Epperson is convinced it will work, even though he expects criticism.

"I look at this as an innovative approach to drug concerns that we have," Epperson said. "It's not reactive and it's not a traditional method of policing."

Armed with crime stats and months of homework, police pegged the area as a crime hot spot, then cut to what they consider the source: 12 known drug dealers whose work has spawned a host of other crimes and violence. Seven of them had violent criminal pasts and were shipped straight to jail. Five were deemed "marginals," better suited for a second chance than a prison stay, said Epperson, who invited them into the program with signed letters hand-delivered by area pastors.

Last week, they sat incognito in a room of neighbors, city leaders, school officials, police officers, clergy and their own families, who told them they wouldn't tolerate their crimes any longer. Then they revealed themselves, moving into a room where they watched video footage of their own dealings and sat face-to-face with mug shots of the seven jailed offenders, a vision of their fate if they slip up.

"One person was sweating so profusely, I thought at one point they were going to fall out of their chair," Epperson said. "One person broke down and cried. Very compelling."
He won’t release the names of the second-chancers, saying he’s protecting their privacy while they go through the program. The two women and three men will be monitored by police, parole officers and their mentors — drug counselors who they can lean on for help.

How it works
Officials will keep tabs on the program in 50-day increments. And it won’t end until the strategy yields tangible signs of success: a noticeable drop in crime, a boost in community morale, a trust in police, and eventually new business and a revitalized community.

The community policing effort is a dramatic shift from a former approach, in which officers would arrest dealers after they witnessed drug sales. Those people would enter the revolving door of the criminal-justice system and wouldn’t get out, Epperson said.

"In 2006, we made more arrests than we ever have, but that certainly doesn't seem to stop the drug problem in Rockford. We needed a new strategy, a new approach."

Enter David Kennedy, a professor at John Jay College of Criminal Justice in New York and the architect of the community-involvement approach to drug enforcement. Epperson heard him lecture in August, and it was instant inspiration.

And there is High Point, N.C., one of a handful of cities that have adopted the strategy and a cookie-cutter model for the Rockford effort. For a time, High Point (pop. 96,000) was known as a bastion for violent crime, particularly in its West End neighborhood, Police Chief Jim Fealy said.

Success in N.C.
High Point jump-started the program three years ago, and reports dramatic drops in crime since its inception. The city has expanded the program to three other areas, where it has enjoyed similar success.

Epperson said he hopes to employ the program in another Rockford target area by the end of the year, although he’s not revealing where it will be.

Skeptics of the plan in Winston-Salem, N.C., call it the hug-a-thug approach for its perceived softness on criminals.

"For the people who use the phrase hug-a-thug, I’ll show you a list of 100-some-odd people that we’ve sent away to prison for life," Fealy said. "There’s nothing easy about that. If you have to not only hug a thug, if you have to kiss him on the lips to get him to stop, I’ll do that, too."

Newburgh, N.Y.; Providence, R.I.; and Raleigh, N.C., also employ the plan.

"We have the demographics and the size city that we could really be the model for the approach for other cities," said the Rev. K. Edward Copeland, a pastor who has had a major hand in mobilizing the community in Rockford. "We’re just the right size to get a handle on this and really make it work."

Good for residents, too
Copeland said other aspects of the program are designed to empower residents to report problems without fear of retaliation or, worse, fear of police.

And they should report everything: bad lighting, broken neighborhood-standards codes and other eyesores. Anything
that denotes quality of life.

Bernice Armould, an Indian Terrace homeowner, finds the program encouraging and expects positive results.

"I was elated," Armould said about the first of two community meetings last week. "It is a way to motivate the community, but it's an orchestrated way for law enforcement to attack the problem. If they do their part and we do ours, I don't see why it can't improve."

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News

Rockford police chief vouches for ‘Hug a Thug’

Oct 29, 2007 @ 11:43 PM

By Sadie Gurman

RRSTAR.COM

ROCKFORD -

Less than six months after launching the so-called “Hug a Thug” anti-crime strategy, in which some drug offenders are given a chance to avoid prison, Police Chief Chet Epperson is encouraging other cities to embrace the program.

Epperson joined officials from other police departments and the U.S. Department of Justice Monday in High Point, N.C., where he spoke in support of the program.

Officials from Chicago, Milwaukee and other cities are considering similar initiatives.

The drug program is based on the theory that traditional enforcement methods, such as drug sweeps and on-the-spot arrests, don’t always work. It also hinges on the idea that the criminal-justice system is a revolving door from which many offenders never escape.

Epperson said early results are encouraging. He noted there were 113 criminal offenses reported in the program’s target zone on the city’s west side in September 2006, compared with 86 criminal offenses reported in the same month this year.

The push to expand the program is a show of the Justice Department’s confidence in it, Epperson said.

“Other departments are looking at (the program) and saying, ‘There must be something going on there, and we’d like to be a part of it,’” Epperson said last week.

Municipalities invited to the training were Chicago; Maywood; Milwaukee; Indianapolis; Baltimore; Dallas County, Texas; New Haven, Conn.; Clarksdale, Miss.; and Fort Myers, Fla.

High Point was the first city to sign on to the alternative drug program. Other cities employing the approach include Winston-Salem, N.C.; Newburgh, N.Y.; Providence, R.I.; and Raleigh, N.C.

Rockford police earlier this year singled out five drug dealers who they thought could become productive members of society through mentorship and gainful employment. Those five took a pledge to stay clean or face prison time.

But two were kicked out of the program after subsequent arrests. The three others, Epperson said, are still involved in
the program.

Staff writer Sadie Guzman can be reached at 815-967-1389 or at sguzman@mstar.com.

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The DA's defense Amid fallout from plan to allow suspected drug dealers to avoid prison, Rice, supporters say it's worked before

Newsday - Long Island, N.Y.

Author: MICHAEL FRAZIER; NIA-MALIKA HENDERSON

Date: Jan 10, 2008

Start Page: A.3

Section: NEWS

Text Word Count: 761

Document Text

Note: Quotes: 1) 'It's an outrageous abuse of power. It was not a rational approach to a systemic problem.'- Defense attorney Bruce Barket 2) 'I think the important thing is the community ... bought into this. They are going to be putting pressure on those guys.'- Hempstead Mayor Wayne Hall

The audacious plan to eradicate drugs from a Hempstead neighborhood where they've been virtually intractable stirred strong reactions on the day after it became public.

Opponents of Nassau District Attorney Kathleen Rice's second-chance plan for suspected drug dealers condemned it yesterday, calling it reckless and irrational.

But supporters praised the one-time offer Rice extended to 17 suspects Tuesday. Some described it as a fresh approach to Hempstead's chronic drug problem.

"If she feels there are circumstances in which she can control their future behavior in a way that might result in them becoming contributing members of the community instead of criminals, I hope it works," said Garden City defense attorney Stephen Scaring.

But frequent Rice critic Bruce Barket, another Garden City defense attorney, said there "ought to be an investigation on how these individuals were selected and why other individuals were not included."

"It's an outrageous abuse of power," he added. "It was not a rational approach to a systemic problem."

Brian Griffin, president of Nassau County Criminal Courts Bar Association, said his group is not against diversion programs or "second chances for people," but he said those chances should be given to first-time offenders, not repeat drug dealers.
"Why would you begin this plan with drug dealers, who fuel gangs, who fuel the gun trade, which fuels violence?" he said.

Rice spokesman Eric Phillips said critics reacted cynically to the plan.

"To criticize an initiative designed to make a neighborhood safer and turn lives around shows a total lack of morality, and to think that we don't have a responsibility to think outside the box when it comes to crime reduction shows a complete dissociation from reality," he said.

Rice's plan has its roots in an award-winning program in North Carolina.

The program in High Point, devised by John Jay College of Criminal Law Professor David Kennedy, is designed to enlist the support of the community to put pressure on drug dealers and other criminals to stop.

"Getting it right means a new way of thinking and acting," Kennedy said in testimony before the House judiciary subcommittee on crime, terrorism and homeland security on Feb. 15, 2007. "I am now persuaded that no amount of ordinary law enforcement, no amount of ordinary intervention, and no amount of ordinary prevention will get us what we want and need."

After evaluating five years of drug investigations in Hempstead, Rice's staff contacted Kennedy, president of the college's Center for Crime Prevention and Control. Kennedy told them about the High Point program, which he said in testimony "virtually eliminated overt drug activity ... [and] helped former drug dealers regain their lives."

Kennedy couldn't be reached yesterday for comment.

Rice extended her offer to 17 suspected drug dealers Tuesday night at a town-hall meeting at the African-American Museum in Hempstead.

She told them they would not be arrested if they attended the meeting and agreed to stop selling drugs.

"I think the important thing is the community ... bought into this," Hempstead Mayor Wayne Hall said. "They are going to be putting pressure on those guys."

Rice hopes her plan will help combat drug crime on Terrace Avenue and Bedell Street.

Hempstead attorney Fred Brewington acknowledged the drug problems in the village, but questioned why Rice focused on a block where almost all the residents are black.

"I am certain that there have been persons who are alleged to be engaged in drug activity outside of Hempstead," he said. "There is real concern when we are dealing with these individuals in the largely African-American community and the focus is not also someplace else."
Phillips did not respond directly to Brewington's claim that race is a factor, noting instead that the community is behind the program.

Abstract (Document Summary)

"Getting it right means a new way of thinking and acting," Kennedy said in testimony before the House judiciary subcommittee on crime, terrorism and homeland security on Feb. 15, 2007.
Rice's reward is a strange drug deal

Raymond J. Keating

January 14, 2008

Don't do the crime if you can't do the time.

Well, unless you happen to be dealing drugs in Hempstead village. In that case, rather than doing time in prison, you might get special treatment in terms of job training, education, health, housing and family assistance.

So much for justice and punishing crime. In Nassau County now it's time to reward criminal activity.

Does this make sense to anyone besides Nassau County District Attorney Kathleen Rice? Well, inexplicably, County Executive Tom Suozzi and Hempstead Mayor Wayne Hall are also on board.

Rice's strange drug deal, as Newsday reported last week, was offered to 17 suspected dealers. They were caught on tape selling illegal substances.

All have previous arrests and face prison terms ranging from one year to life. But if they promise not to do bad things again, they'll keep their freedom and get some government goodies, too.

As Rice said, "All you have to do is agree to turn your life around. For those of you who have a need, we are going to make all the social services available to you. You all are going to be fast-tracked."

Wow, what a deal! Apparently, all you need is a rap sheet and a botched drug sale in Hempstead and you can get government assistance faster than those law-abiding suckers.

Critics have received harsh responses. Suozzi was quoted a saying, "The definition of insanity is to do the same thing over and over and expect a different result. The district attorney is trying something new and is trying to address a long-standing problem."

But a strong case can be made that insanity includes rewarding crime.

Brian Griffin, president of the Nassau County Criminal Courts Bar Association, told me last week that his group is "in favor of second chances and diversion-type programs. My problem ... is the concept of starting this type of program with multiple felony offenders on high-level
felony cases, and yet by the same token not offering it to low-level, first-time offenders who aren't even charged with felonies. ... Are these the right people that should have it?" He added, "Drug trafficking and the sale of drugs lead to gang violence, gun violence, drive-by shootings. This is serious stuff." Good points.

But Rice spokesman Eric Phillips declared that critics show "a total lack of morality," as well as "a complete disassociation from reality." Really?

Of course, both morality and reality actually dictate that there must be negative consequences for criminal activity. It's rather simple.

Murder someone and you'll go to prison for a very long time or, in many states, get the death penalty. Peddle drugs, and it's off to the slammer.

Government's first job is protecting life, limb and property. That means preventing crime, catching suspected bad guys and dispensing justice when wrongdoers are found guilty.

There's no mystery to fighting crime. Beef up police presence, get the community involved and make the costs of crime high. The punishment, while proportional to the crime, must be clear and severe. It's all about political will and competence.

Rice has two out of three right. Her plan includes expanded police patrols and community pressure on the drug trade. But it goes gravely wrong when it comes to punishment fitting the crime. There's no punishment here. Instead, as is typical when government goes awry, wrongdoing results in a handout.

Lurking behind this plan seems to be the left-wing belief that poverty causes crime. But most poor people, today and throughout history, aren't criminals. The Rice deal signals that the individual isn't really responsible for his or her actions. That's not a message a district attorney should send.

No matter one's income or neighborhood, people must be responsible for their choices, and government must be responsible for keeping individuals safe.

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New Program Reforms Drug-Torn Neighborhood

High Point Initiative Bridges the Gap Between Police and Civilians, Gives Criminals Another Chance

By KE'YUANDA EVANS and K. MICHELLE SMAWLEY

Aug. 20, 2008—

Since the 1960s, the infamous intersection of Terrace Avenue and Bedell Street and the surrounding six blocks in Hempstead, N.Y., have been home to more arrests, shootings and deaths than just about anywhere else in the state. At times, Terrace and Bedell resembled an open air convenience store for narcotics: merchandise was cheap, plentiful and always on display.

Nassau County District Attorney Kathleen Rice had tried just about everything to curb drug trafficking in Hempstead, even launching an investigation that traced a local dealer back to a Colombian drug cartel.

Police arrested the dealer and, with federal assistance, took down the cartel. But weeks later, he was back on the streets. Rice knew it was time to try something different.

"The answer is not building more jails and keeping the revolving door system of criminal justice going," Rice said. "That's not having the effect of sustained crime reduction."

Thinking Outside the Box

In an effort to rid the neighborhood of drugs, Rice and her office decided to try a radical, but simple, program called the High Point Initiative.

Developed by renowned criminologist David Kennedy, the High Point Initiative was named after the North Carolina city that was the first to try it.

By eradicating open air drug markets and, thereby, eliminating drug-related crime, the program attempts to heal old wounds between urban communities and law enforcement. Kennedy, who directs the Center for Crime Prevention at John Jay College of Criminal Justice in New York City, cites the entrenched distrust of law enforcement, dating back to slavery and the Jim Crowe south, as one reason why dealers and community members are less likely to cooperate with police and traditional drug enforcement tactics.
"So much of this revolves around race, it's our original sin. We've all bitten from that apple. Our country was founded on racial violence," he said.

The High Point Initiative first identifies local drug markets and then builds evidence for criminal cases against drug dealers caught on video surveillance. Next, law enforcement enlists the entire community to participate in the program. A key component of the High Point initiative is community involvement, the theory being that the disapproval of those who matter most to the dealers is a greater deterrent than squadrons of police.

Kennedy says that, unless the community itself commits to addressing the problem, there won't be a significant impact on the drug trade.

Once the community is on board, the initiative holds a large gathering where the community confronts the dealers, reprimands them for their destructive behavior and demands change.

**Tracking Down Drug Dealers**

The Nassau County district attorney's office launched the program with a 10-month undercover investigation. They sent in confidential informants to buy drugs and to learn the identities of the dealers on Terrace and Bedell.

Throughout the course of the investigation, 50 dealers were identified, and the DA's office conducted background checks to see who would be eligible to participate in the program. The vast majority were disqualified because of their violent pasts, but 13 demonstrated potential to change and were offered a second chance.

In a unique collaboration, prosecutors, police and the community teamed up and went door-to-door to seek out the 13 criminals, inviting them to show up at a community meeting. As incentive, the dealers were given freedom and an opportunity to turn their lives around. The round-the-clock mission wasn't easy. Mistrust is common, and many people wouldn't even open up their doors.

Sixty-three-year-old Everett Hairston, who has lived in Hempstead for more than two decades, was one of the first dealers to participate. He was once a successful musician who appeared on the "Dinah Shore Show" as a member of the hit band The Platters in 1976, and played with music greats like Melba Moore, Roberta Flack and Smokey Robinson.

But after retiring from life on the road to raise his children, Hairston's life took a few rough turns. He ended up selling crack out of his apartment, according to Rice.

Hannah Tindall, another dealer from the neighborhood, also agreed to participate in the initiative. Her mother died when she was 10 years old, leaving her to be raised by an abusive aunt, the foster care system, and, eventually, the streets.
Young and impressionable, she began to demonstrate the behavior of the older girls she lived with in group homes: drinking, smoking, cursing and running away.

Tindall, now 26, said that, in her youth, she used to like "hanging out, partying with my friends in the city, just doing irresponsible things. ... I just got mixed up with the wrong people."

At 22, Tindall began dealing crack to support herself and her own drug habit.

'I Cannot Face Another Year'

Less than two weeks later, all 13 of the drug dealers showed up to the community meeting.

They were led into an auditorium where they watched surveillance footage of themselves selling drugs on the corner of Terrace and Bedell. Nearby were mug shots of the other dealers captured on tape who were not fortunate enough to be offered a second chance.

Parents, relatives, preachers, service providers and other community members confronted the dealers head-on and addressed the drug problem in their community.

"I'm at the funeral home late nights with sisters that could have been prom queens, looking like their grandmother's age because they're strung out," said Karl Burnett, an undertaker at a local funeral home.

Others urged the dealers to stop their destructive behavior.

"You need to take advantage of the opportunity," said community activist Reginald Benjamin. "I cannot face another year of seeing young men die on the streets like dogs because you guys are leading them down a bad path."

After hearing from loved ones, law enforcement gave the dealers two choices: give up a life of crime, or go to prison.

'Working Makes Me Feel Good'

A few minutes after the community meeting ended, the police put Terrace and Bedell on lockdown. No one was allowed to enter without their knowledge, and the police made arrests on outstanding warrants for a few dealers who had, until then, eluded law enforcement.

At the same time, the 13 dealers taking part in the program began the process of turning their lives around. The district attorney's office set up counseling sessions with a support group for ex-offenders, called Council for Unity, a type of AA for criminals. They also offered social services and managed to find jobs for six of the dealers in the program.
"Working makes me feel good," Hairston said of his new job at a local community center for the elderly, where he works as a janitor. "'Cause I always say, the more you do, the more you're able to do."

As for Tindall, she now works in her first-ever full-time job with benefits.

The High Point Initiative has been successful in eight other cities across the country -- so successful that the Department of Justice has authorized funding for 10 additional towns to sign on. It may take several more months before the success of the program in the village of Hempstead can be fully measured, but so far, things look hopeful.

Two of the dealers from Terrace and Bedell have been arrested for single crimes committed after joining the program. The district attorney's office needs more resources to successfully run the program, and, most importantly, they need jobs for the reformed dealers.

Now, several months after the community came together to rid their neighborhood of crime, the streets of Hempstead are hardly recognizable.

"I think Terrace looks a lot different today than it's looked in a long time," said Eddison Bramble, president of 100 Black Men of America, Inc., a group that seeks to improve quality of life and educational opportunities for African Americans. "It looks beautiful -- people seem happier and more comfortable walking down the street."

In a place where drug deals once overwhelmed the community, kids are now outside playing. And for the first time in a long time, the residents have something to be hopeful about.

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New Intervention

Novel Police Tactic Puts Drug Markets Out of Business
Confronted by the Evidence, Dealers in High Point, N.C., Succumb to Pressure

Some Dubbed It Hug-a-Thug
By Mark Schoofs
September 27, 2006
Page A1

HIGH POINT, N.C. -- For over three months, police investigated more than 20 dealers operating in this city's West End neighborhood, where crack cocaine was openly sold on the street and in houses. Police made dozens of undercover buys and videotaped many other drug purchases.

They also did something unusual: they determined the "influentials" in the dealers' lives -- mothers, grandmothers, mentors -- and cultivated relationships with them. When police felt they had amassed ironclad legal cases, they did something even more striking: they refrained from arresting most of the suspected dealers.

In a counterintuitive approach, police here are trying to shut down entire drug markets, in part by giving nonviolent suspected drug dealers a second chance. Their strategy combines the "soft" pressure from families and community with the "hard" threat of aggressive, ready-to-go criminal cases. While critics say the strategy is too lenient, it has met with early success and is being tried by other communities afflicted with overt drug markets and the violence they breed.

Overt drug markets -- street-corner dealing, drug houses, and the like -- constitute one of the worst scourges of poor communities. Such markets foment violent clashes between dealers, as well as robbery by addicts desperate for drug money. Property values suffer. Businesses and families move out -- or avoid moving in. Many residents who remain feel under siege. Police often rely on sweeps -- mass arrests of street-level dealers -- to eradicate drug-related crime. But those rarely provide more than short-term relief. In High Point, police believe that the combination of extensive investigation of the entire market and community involvement has helped solve the problem.

In May 2004, after accumulating evidence in the West End, police chief James Fealy invited 12 suspected dealers to a meeting at the police station, with a promise that they wouldn't be arrested that night. Encouraged by their "influentials," nine showed up.

In one room, they met with about 30 clergy, social workers and other community members who confronted them with the harm they were doing, implored them to stop dealing, and offered them help. The suspects, however, "were slouching in their seats and one guy even seemed to be dozing off," recalls Don Stevenson, pastor of a local congregation, the First Reformed United Church of Christ. "Their attitude was, 'This is just another program and it will blow over.'"

Then the alleged dealers moved to a second room where they encountered a phalanx of law-enforcement officials: police, a district attorney, an assistant U.S. attorney, and representatives of the federal Drug Enforcement Administration and the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms, and others. Arcund the
"It's the hottest thing in drug enforcement," says Mark A. R. Kleiman, a University of California, Los Angeles professor who specializes in illicit drug issues and isn't involved in the project. Room hung poster-size photos of crack houses that had been the dealers' headquarters. In front of each alleged dealer was a binder, laying out the evidence against him or her. There were even arrest warrants, lacking only the signature of a judge.

The law-enforcement officials made an ultimatum: stop dealing or go to jail. Several suspected dealers with violent records had already been arrested and were facing maximum charges. The same fate, officials emphasized, awaited anyone in the room who returned to dealing drugs. The district attorney promised to seek the maximum possible sentences, and the assistant U.S. attorney threatened to bring federal charges, which, he stressed, don't allow for parole. Police from surrounding areas warned them against trying to relocate operations, noting that their names were flagged on statewide law-enforcement computers.

Rev. Stevenson recalls that the alleged dealers "seemed to be paying a lot more attention."

The West End street drug market closed "overnight" and hasn't reopened in more than two years, says Chief Pealy, who was "shocked" at the success. High Point police say they have since shut down the city's two other major street drug markets, using the same strategy.

Police in neighboring Winston-Salem, N.C., as well as Newburgh, N.Y., have deployed the strategy with success, and word is spreading. Encouraged by the National Urban League, which wants to see the approach replicated nationwide, police departments in Tucson, Ariz., Providence, R.I., Kansas City, Mo., and elsewhere are gearing up to try it.

Some police and prosecutors object to the approach.

"Why not slam 'em from the beginning and forget this foolishness?" says Karen Richards, county prosecutor in the Fort Wayne, Ind., area. The Urban League tried to convince her and the Fort Wayne police to try the strategy, but Ms. Richards didn't support it. She draws a distinction between addicts, who she believes should get social support, and dealers, who she believes deserve incarceration. "Drug dealers are drug dealers," she says. "They won't have an epiphany and end up as model citizens."

In Winston-Salem, many officers at first dubbed the initiative "hug-a-thug," though few do so now that they've seen it in practice.

In High Point, the West End neighborhood had been a major drug market for almost 15 years, with 16 known crack houses operating at the start of the initiative. A traffic jam began almost every afternoon, as buyers, many destined for homes in the suburbs, converged on the area seeking crack, according to residents and police.

Charlie Simpson, who owns and operates a radiator-repair shop in the West End, says he frequently saw drug dealers "on all four corners, selling drugs out of their pockets." The dealing drove away business "because women were afraid to come, men didn't want to bring their wives, plus they didn't want to leave their car overnight."

The neighborhood of modest clapboard bungalows became the city's crime capital. Lucille Denns, 89, who has lived in the West End for half a century, says that before the initiative, she suffered three break-ins within a year and a half, and she stopped sitting on her porch for fear of getting robbed.

After the West End initiative, violent crime -- defined as murder, rape, robbery, aggravated assault, prostitution, sex offenses, and weapons violations -- dropped. More than two years later, violent crime remains more than 25% lower in the area, according to police statistics. Since the initiative, there hasn't been a single murder or rape reported in the West End. "I don't know exactly how to phrase it," Mrs.
Dennis says, "but you just don't see as many people riding around doing nothing."

It isn't clear how well such an approach would work in big cities, which have much higher absolute numbers of crimes. High Point has about 90,000 residents and Winston-Salem has 190,000. In Kansas City, a city of about 500,000, Police Chief James Corwin says, "Will it work in Kansas City? I don't really know." His police department has almost finished the undercover investigation of a drug market it has targeted.

The initiative hasn't eradicated illegal drug use -- and it doesn't aim to. "This is not a war on drugs," says Chief Fealy. Rather, he says, the goal is to shut down overt drug markets because "street-level dope-dealing is what drives a significant amount of crime."

The police had been trying to drive dealers out of the West End for years. "We were actually doing a sting every month in [West End] making dozens of arrests," says High Point Assistant Police Chief Marty Sumner. "But the market persisted."

It's a pattern seen nationwide. In a report published last year by the American Enterprise Institute, authors David Boyum and Peter Reuter point to government statistics that show arrests per dollar of cocaine and heroin sold in the U.S. soared tenfold from 1981 to 2001. Moreover, the percentage of arrests that led to incarceration also shot up; in 2001 more than half the inmates in federal prisons were convicted of drug crimes, up from just 5% in 1981. Yet, during that same two-decade period, the street price of cocaine and heroin, measured in constant dollars, dropped by two-thirds, suggesting it isn't more difficult to deal. Indeed, the authors estimated that the risk of arrest per individual cocaine sale is less than one in 15,000.

When police do sweep in, Chief Fealy says, they often capture "targets of opportunity" -- dealers who are easy to nab. Hardened dealers expect dragnets, so they rarely conduct sales themselves or have significant amounts of drugs in their possession.

Drug dragnets can actually worsen the problem, because some residents resent the heavy-handed tactics, which can inflame racial tensions. Many community members "wonder whose side are the police on," says Janet Zobel of the National Urban League. Either out of a sense of futility or suspicion, many residents stop cooperating with the police.

The High Point strategy was the brainchild of David Kennedy, a 48-year-old professor at New York's John Jay College of Criminal Justice. In the 1990s, when he was at Harvard University, Mr. Kennedy helped develop Boston's anti-gang strategy, a community-involvement approach credited with drastically reducing violent crime.

But the drug initiative was a much harder sell. Mr. Kennedy says he had been trying for more than five years to convince police departments across the country to try it. When Mr. Kennedy first approached Winston-Salem, "We all told him he was crazy," says Police Chief Patricia Norris. Mr. Kennedy says he would ask, "When do you think what you're doing now is going to start working?"

Chief Fealy took to the idea the first time he heard it in 2003. He came to High Point from Austin, Texas, where he had been assistant chief and commanded the security detail for then-Gov. George W. Bush.

Before his job interview in High Point, Mr. Fealy drove around the city and was struck by the open drug dealing. "It was just so blatant and in-your-face," he says. Poring through crime statistics, he saw "well over 60% of our homicides were directly drug-related, and almost 100% of our person-on-person robberies." He decided to give Mr. Kennedy's idea a try.

First, police crunch data to find the "hot spots" most plagued by violent and drug-related crime. Then they engage in months of undercover research to understand the local drug market and identify the players -- big and small. Police are accustomed to spending months undercover only to nab a major criminal, such as an organized-crime boss. "So putting three months' work into investigating 20 corner rock dealers" normally would be considered a waste of time, Assistant Chief Sumner says.
But there is a payoff. "A market is something that requires a large number of actors," says Mr. Reuter, who is an economist as well as an illicit-drugs expert. "If you can get all the actors out, you can disrupt the system."

Randy Dejournette, one of the alleged dealers invited to come to the second-chance meeting at the police station in 2004, says "everybody's gone" from the streets in the West End -- and that's one reason he says he doesn't deal now. "I'm not going to go out there by myself and sit on the corner and look dumb."

The High Point police knew who were the lookouts, the runners, the petty dealers and the big wheels. Analyzing the overall market led them to suppliers they might not have found otherwise. Assistant Chief Sumner points to Kevin Cotton, a six-foot-two man with a tattoo that read "thug life," who was a major source of drugs in a neighborhood targeted by police. An informant told them that he not only supplied dealers, but robbed and intimidated them. He "controlled the market," Mr. Sumner says. But because he didn't live in the area, "we probably never would have focused on him." Police made enough undercover buys to warrant federal charges, then arrested Mr. Cotton because they felt his record was too violent for him to be offered a second chance. He's now serving 20 years in federal prison.

Arresting violent offenders is one key to making the initiative work. It removes the dominant actors in the market and sets a powerful example. But the other key is that police refrain from arresting suspects who haven't become hardened, violent criminals. These are often young people -- Mr. Dejournette, for example, was 19 when he was invited to the second-chance meeting. For them, police try to implement a community-wide intervention, choreographed to send three clear messages: If they return to dealing, they'll go to jail; their community will help them turn their lives around but won't tolerate drug crime any longer; and the police and community are working together to combat dealing.

At the second-chance meeting, police lay out their evidence in a deliberately theatrical way. The Winston-Salem police edited hours of undercover surveillance footage into a short video that showed each suspect making at least one sale. "Raise your hand when you see yourself committing a felony," the prosecutor told the suspects, according to two people who were there. They started raising their hands, and "that was a thing of beauty," police captain David Clayton recalls. "They knew we had 'em."

Alleged dealers are told that they have been put on a special list. "Every one of my assistants has your name," the district attorney told the suspects at the West End meeting. "And if they don't prosecute you as aggressively as they can, I'll fire 'em." Even the public defender -- who would likely represent them in court -- warned that the cases were so tight there would be virtually nothing he could do to help them.

Immediate enforcement bolsters that message. The three suspected dealers who didn't attend the West End community meeting were arrested the next day. One person who attended the meeting but tried to sell drugs days later was also arrested. Police and community groups advertised the arrests by posting fliers throughout the neighborhood with pictures of the suspects.

The threat of going to jail is coupled with a message of support from locals. Jim Summey, pastor of the West End's English Road Baptist Church and a leader in the community's antiohrine crusade, sums up the message: "We are against what you're doing, but we're for you."

Mr. Dejournette recalls, "We wasn't expecting that....It did make an impression on me."

So did something deeply personal: the fact that his mother, Annette Dejournette, was, in her words, "disappointed," "ashamed" and "hurt" by her son's actions. She convinced him to attend the meeting even though he had been afraid it was a ploy to arrest him.

Ms. Dejournette works as a clerk in a thrift shop. Money is tight, and often the electricity or phone will get cut off, her son says. "Momma be sitting back crying and stressing, and that make me want to go back outside [on the streets] and really do something to stop my momma from crying, but she the one who talks me out of it."
The fact that the police are giving nonviolent dealers a second chance has encouraged community cooperation. West End residents have been increasingly calling police to report minor offenses, such as truancy or drunkenness. Ms. Dejournette says she went up to several police officers and city officials and "thanked them for trying to help my son."

The Winston-Salem neighborhood where the approach was launched last year has proved tougher. The area, centered on the Cleveland Avenue Homes housing project, has fewer community institutions, such as churches, than West End does. Turnover in its public housing is extremely high. Mattie Young, 78, president of the Cleveland Avenue Homes residents' council for almost 18 years, says the initiative eradicated open drug dealing during the first four months. But since then, she says, it has begun to creep back, especially at night.

Police captain David Clayton says that much of the new dealing may be due to one "very dangerous individual" recently identified by residents, whom police are seeking. Still, comparing the year before the initiative to the year after, major property crimes, such as robbery and burglary, dropped by 35%, according to police figures.

In the three neighborhoods where High Point has implemented the initiative, a total of 40 alleged dealers attended the second-chance meetings. Since then, six have been arrested for dealing. Another 10 have been arrested for various other crimes, from robbery to possession of marijuana. The rest -- 24 out of 40 -- have stayed clear of the law, police say.

After a dispute with his boss, Mr. Dejournette lost a job with the city parks department. Now, he says, "I fill out applications, but I never get that call back." He works odd jobs, many through a brother who does construction, but he doesn't make the $200 a day he says he made running errands for dealers. In April, Mr. Dejournette was arrested but not charged for a nondrug offense, so he is "teetering on the edge," as Assistant Chief Sumner puts it.

Latisha Fisher, 32, of Winston-Salem, says she had been dealing drugs on and off since she was 15. After going to a community meeting and seeing herself on a police undercover videotape, she took her second chance. Her first job was at a fast-food restaurant. The pay: $6.50 an hour. "I toughed it out" for eight months, she says. "My church and family helped me." This summer, she landed a job on an assembly line manufacturing earth excavators, making $8.50 per hour.

Yon Weaver, a High Point city employee who helps ex-offenders or suspects find jobs, says only 10 to 15 companies in the area are willing to hire people convicted of a crime. Of the 40 suspected dealers called in to the community meetings, about 10 contacted his office for assistance. He knows three have found jobs. Some suspected dealers have simply dropped out of sight. Police say they don't think dealers merely relocated, because no new drug hot spots have emerged since High Point's three markets closed.

Rev. Stevenson says the alleged dealers "are still God's people, and I want them to do well and have productive, law-abiding lives." But noting that two murders took place within a block of his church before the initiative, he doesn't gauge the effort's success by whether dealers turn their lives around.

"It sounds a little ugly," he says, "but my first priority is the community."
Closing 'crack highway'

01:00 AM EST on Sunday, March 11, 2007

By Amanda Milkovits

Journal Staff Writer

Providence police take a man into custody last month for an outstanding warrant violation after stopping the car in the neighborhood.

PROVIDENCE

The sun was setting behind the multifamily houses and housing projects on a bitter winter afternoon as police Lt. George Stamatakos drove through his boyhood neighborhood in Upper South Providence. He was born in a mansard-roofed house on Pine Street and lived in the neighborhood until he was 14. Even back then, in the 1960s, he said, children growing up in the Lockwood neighborhood had to be street smart.

As a rookie on his first tour and now as the lieutenant commanding the district, Stamatakos has seen drugs bring crime, gun violence and murder to this neighborhood, which hugs Route 95 in the South Side. After more than 26 years on the job, Stamatakos has become frustrated as he's seen how police stings clear the streets of drug dealers for just a short reprieve.
Up in the Lockwood Plaza high-rise on Lockwood Street, Barbara Neal sits in the living room of her apartment as her granddaughter fixes her hair. Framed pictures of her 10 children, 27 grandchildren and 12 great-grandchildren cover the walls. She's been here six years. All she wants is to feel safe.

She remembers drug dealers rushing her car as she left for work. She'd change her route, but the dealers were everywhere, at any time. "You'd slow down for the stop sign, and they'd run up to you -- 'Yo, Yo, you want something?'" Neal said.

William Fletcher has hustled these streets. He was 9 when he started hustling in the Chad Brown projects across the city. His father was gone, his mother died. No one gave a damn about him, he said, so he found ways to survive.

"At 9, what are you going to do when there's no food in your house, and no one to feed you, and you're not going to let your siblings starve?"

Now 30, Fletcher was still hustling. He didn't think much about the future. He never thought he had one. "In your mind, you think you're somebody important," he said, "but the people in the street don't look at you for who you are. They look at you for what you've got. The only thing you worry about is, are the police coming to get you?"

He ended up working Lockwood, where dealers have owned the street corners for a long time. They brazenly clustered in groups outside the Lockwood Market and N&H Grocery around the corner. They roamed up and down Pine Street -- a tree-lined street with old houses that became known as "crack highway" for the drug dealers who trolled it and the customers who came off Route 95 looking for their fix.

There was a moment last July when a man pulled up to Fletcher in the Lockwood neighborhood looking for drugs. Something didn't feel right. Fletcher shook off the feeling.

He didn't know that the police had caught him on surveillance video -- him and 103 other drug dealers across the city. The hammer of the law came down on all of them last fall, on convicted felons, on small-time dealers, on drug dealers carrying guns, on teenagers just getting into the business.

It was the biggest drug bust in Rhode Island's history. But it was more than just a sting.

Tied into this citywide sweep was a unique initiative to clean up the open-air drug dealing in the Lockwood Plaza neighborhood. The initiative, which is being tried in several other cities in the country, hinges on an unusual partnership among the police, the residents in the neighborhood and a small, select group of drug dealers.

The streets of Lockwood have been quiet for four months now. But this is a neighborhood that's seen decades of hard times. It's too early to
know how long the hard-won peace will last.
PROVIDENCE IS ONE of six cities in the nation that are trying this unusual initiative, at the recommendation of the National Urban League.
The program is called the High Point Initiative, named for the small North Carolina city that used the pilot program on a ghetto in its West End nearly three years ago. The police there tried it for the same reason that Providence is testing it now -- because nothing else stopped the plague of drug dealing in the poorest neighborhoods. The idea came from a college professor who helped produce Boston's anti-gang project in the mid-1990s. But it took several years for David Kennedy, head of the Center for Crime Prevention and Control at John Jay College of Criminal Justice in Manhattan, to convince any police department to give his anti-drug dealing initiative a try. "Overt, chaotic public drug-dealing is one of the most destructive things a community can have," Kennedy said, "whether there's somebody standing on the street corners or in the apartments, it doesn't matter."
The drug markets bring crime and violence into communities that are already struggling, Kennedy said, and police efforts to curtail the dealing, such as drug sweeps, usually cause distrust in the community. At the same time, children in the neighborhood are lured by the fast money of drug dealing -- and real jobs are seen as the path of suckers.
His solution incorporates what the police are already doing, with something they've never tried before.
The police start by going after the street-level drug dealers and their hierarchy in the worst drug-plagued area, or "beachhead." The next step is unusual: The police select a few nonviolent offenders, the dealers who are young and have the potential to be rehabilitated. Instead of arresting them, the police give the dealers a second chance and turn them over to the community groups, such as the Urban League, which provide jobs, education and counseling. The approach encourages the community to trust the police, Kennedy said, which leads residents to work with the police to prevent more drug dealers from returning. The dealers with a second chance serve as an example to the younger generation.
His initiative attracted the National Urban League, which invited Kennedy to its annual conference in the summer of 2005. He was on a community policing panel with Providence Police Chief Dean M. Esserman, whose department had been recognized as a model.
IT TOOK A YEAR before the Providence Police Department agreed to try the High Point Initiative, which is also being used in Winston-Salem, N.C., Kansas City, Mo., Tucson, Ariz., and Newburgh, N.Y.
Kennedy, the Urban League, and High Point police officers visited Providence several times to explain the concept, and several high-ranking Providence officers went to High Point to observe. "We were open to it because we were tired of being a narcotics-arresting machine," said Esserman, who knew Kennedy from when the professor was at Harvard University's Kennedy School of Government. "And there's something compelling about a second chance." The Urban League of Rhode Island was eager to try it. "It seemed like an opportunity to transform the neighborhood," said Luis Aponte, an administrator at the Urban League and a Providence city councilman. "The conditions were also ripe. We had the presence of a police chief who demonstrated the willingness to work with the community, and the Urban League was often called in to be a conduit between the Police Department and the community."

However, in the beginning, none of the Providence police were buying the idea. When Kennedy explained it for the first time, "we were all skeptical. It didn't make any sense," Stamatakos said. "We said, 'You're not giving us anything concrete, anything we can grasp.' " Sgt. William Dwyer and others questioned the logic of being lenient on drug dealers. "Originally, I never thought about giving somebody a second chance. I was always, 'Lock them up. Put them in jail,' " he said.

During a visit to High Point, Lt. Thomas Verdi, head of the Providence police narcotics unit, was struck by how different High Point was from Providence. The North Carolina city, 20 miles southeast of Winston-Salem, is half the size of Providence, and the ghettos there have more green space. "They don't have the housing developments, the high-rises. They don't have the [housing] projects like us," Verdi said. "They don't have the gang problems we do. We have dozens of 'beachheads.' "

But the High Point police said the problems were the same -- drug dealers five deep on corners, gunfire, prostitutes, robberies and murders. After the initiative in May 2004, the decade-old drug markets closed and haven't revived.

Finally, the Providence police signed on, for the same reason. "Doing something is better than being skeptical and doing nothing," Stamatakos said.

The police decided to tie the initiative into an aggressive drug investigation that Vardi and the narcotics unit had been working on since early last year. The detectives were going after the drug-dealing networks across Providence -- from the street dealers to those supplying the drugs. By the time the months-long investigation ended last fall, the detectives had caught 104 drug dealers, seized 4 kilos of cocaine and grabbed 4 handguns.
The dealers were arrested all across the city, but a third had been caught in one neighborhood -- the Lockwood Plaza and surrounding streets in Upper South Providence. It was no surprise to the police or the residents.

THE NEIGHBORHOOD IN Upper South Providence has traditionally been home to working-class families and immigrants -- a community that has produced governors, judges, lawyers and political leaders. Superior Court Presiding Judge Joseph F. Rodgers Jr. was born on Dudley Street, and spent the first 26 years of his life in the neighborhood. "I would not have wanted to have been brought up in another state or any other city than South Providence," Rodgers said. The years have been hard on the Upper South Side. Construction of Route 95, which opened in 1964, ripped through a chunk of the neighborhood, taking down homes and a school, and dividing the South Side from downtown. The defection of a Greek church and the 1960s race riots drove many residents to the suburbs. Rodgers also blames the repeal of the residency clause, which required police and firefighters to live in the city, for causing an exodus.

"I can remember people not feeling safe anymore in the 1960s," said Stamatakos. When the Greek church moved, "my family and others wanted to be holdouts ... but it was a dangerous area, you had to be street smart."

Today, amid the colorful old homes and fenced pocket yards of the public housing complexes is the busiest open-air drug market in the city. A few city blocks attract the most attention from the police. But because the neighborhood is home to mostly Hispanic and black residents, white police officers have been seen as outsiders.

Route 95 has given drug customers easy access to the neighborhood. Crossroads Rhode Island is at one end of the neighborhood and Amos House at the other. The homeless and drug addicts are customers and a perfect cover for dealers trying to blend in, the police said. Smaller children in the neighborhood are used as lookouts and runners.

The youngest crack cocaine dealer ever arrested in Providence -- 12 years old -- was caught in the neighborhood. Teenage boys have been murdered here, often over drugs. Rodgers estimated that in the last 10 years, he's presided over trials for at least 10 murders that occurred within one tenth of a mile from where he grew up.

The crime has driven residents indoors and some even send their children away in the summer to keep them safe.

"There are so many children stuck in these homes, so many elderly stuck in these homes, so many people going to work, and they're all held down by just a few drug dealers," said Robert McCutcheon, an administrator in the Department of Corrections who grew up in the neighborhood.
AS THE POLICE PLANNED their extensive drug sweep, the Urban League of Rhode Island started to build the safety net that would sustain the handful of dealers selected for a second chance. President Dennis Langley and Aponte knew the Urban League had to address the reasons the dealers were involved in crime in the first place -- supporting a family, lack of a job and education, feeding a drug habit. The Urban League pulled together local religious leaders, social service agencies, school officials, political leaders, businesses and medical providers. The agency asked for services from some and for job opportunities from others.

Meanwhile, the police kept their investigation confidential. Only they would decide which neighborhood would be selected and which drug dealers would be eligible for the second chance.

When the investigation ended, Maj. Stephen Campbell, Verdi and Assistant Attorney General Bethany Macktaz reviewed the criminal records of the dealers caught in the sting. Of the 104 arrested or wanted for drug dealing, 60 were convicted felons, 47 were violating probation, parole or bail, and 19 were habitual offenders.

They rejected anyone with a violent criminal record or caught with a gun. They looked at the youngest dealers, those with otherwise clean records, and those with a chance to be rehabilitated. The list was narrowed to seven boys and men, ages 14 to 30, who'd all been dealing in the Lockwood Plaza neighborhood.

They were dubbed "The Lucky Seven."

CHIEF ESSERMAN WROTE letters to the Lucky Seven inviting them to a meeting at the police station, promising they wouldn't be arrested if they attended.

The police and members of the Urban League personally delivered the letters. The police expected to find what they usually found on drug raids -- houses strewn with trash and drug paraphernalia, and families who knew or condoned their children's drug dealing. Instead, the officers found parents working, a father who was a minister, a mother working two jobs.

"One officer said to me, 'My God, what are they doing different from us?' " Langley said.

One mother told the Urban League she'd given up on her son: Take him, I can't do anything with him. Another parent said in disbelief, I call the police all the time on those drug dealers -- and he's one of them.

A hard-working mother in the neighborhood was stunned that her nearly 16-year-old son was selling drugs. Not my son! she insisted to the police in her well-kept apartment. I'm on him all the time. But the boy confessed. He wanted expensive sneakers and his family couldn't afford them. He hid the sneakers at a friend's house.
"I don't think he had a sense of how wrong it was," Campbell said. "Is it the kid's fault, too, with all of the ways that kids are led to believe they need the clothes, the designer shoes, the jackets? Sometimes a kid gets swept up in all of this and doesn't realize until he's older that this isn't as important as it was at 16."

Fletcher heard from relatives and an ex-girlfriend that the police were looking for him. He met them in a parking lot. Expecting handcuffs, Fletcher walked away with the letter.

THE LUCKY SEVEN and their families were ushered into a room at the Providence Public Safety Complex. They were first met by clergy, community leaders and social services representatives, who told them their dealing was destroying the neighborhood. They also were offered help.

Then, the seven were ushered into the auditorium and seated in the front row. Behind them were poster-sized mug shots of the 26 other drug dealers from the Lockwood neighborhood who were under arrest or sought by the police. Those were the "ghetto celebrities."

"Is this something I want to live up to?" Fletcher asked himself. "No."

Law enforcement from Providence, the state, the federal government and corrections filled the room. The surveillance videos were played and the dealers were asked to acknowledge when they saw themselves on the screen -- dealing drugs.

"It was shocking to me," Langley said later. "These were young guys whose future was terminated for something stupid."

When Fletcher saw himself on the screen, he started laughing. The cops gave him furious looks.

But he was laughing at himself. He was remembering that moment in the street, thinking he was "just chillin" with the customers, but he was caught on tape by the police.

"You think you're the slickest person in the world, and you see yourself and you have to rethink yourself fast," said Fletcher, who apologized to the police chief for laughing. "How stupid was I to think I could do this?"

The dealers were told the police had the evidence and unsigned arrest warrants for each of them. Then they were told, "Tell us what you want."

They could go back to the corner and sell drugs and go to jail. Or they could take the second chance.

All seven took the deal.

LANGLEY AND APONTE, who is running the initiative here in Providence, quickly realized that the seven needed help in areas that were basic to mainstream life. Some needed driver's licenses. Some needed Social Security cards. Some needed help with housing and utilities. Some needed to be taught how to apply for a job.