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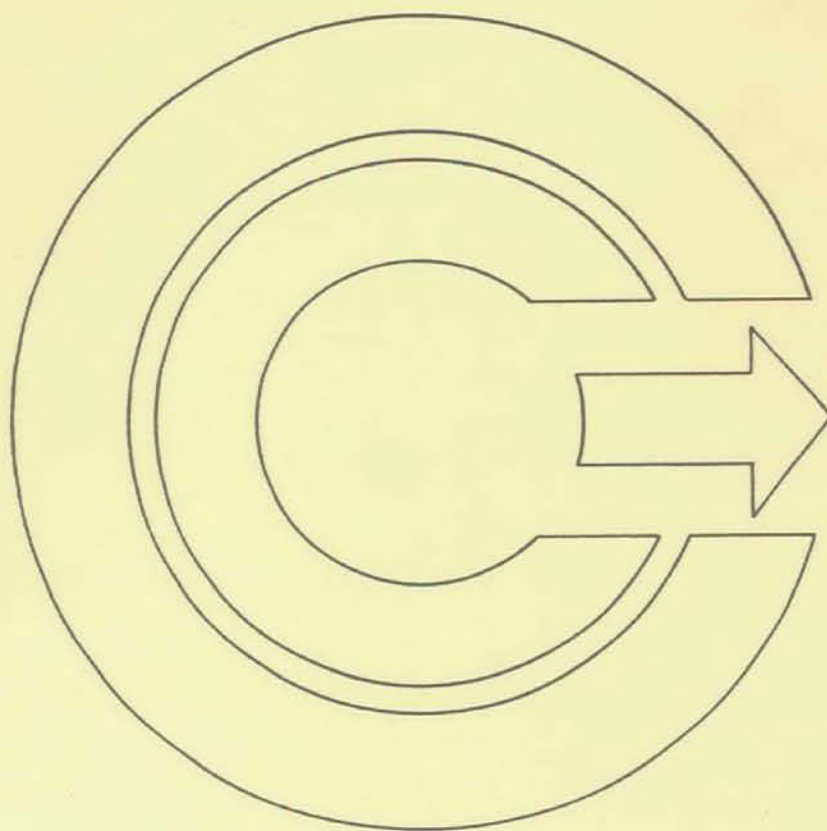
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A Qualitative Review
Of The
Riverborne Community
Safety Office Project

Prepared by

J.L. Roy

May 31, 1985

Final Report

ABSTRACT

This report provides a qualitative assessment of the Riverborne Community Safety Office, which was established as a "demonstration project" in Neighbourhood Crime Prevention.

The assessment was based on a review of available literature on the Riverborne Community Safety Office Project and a series of fifteen field interviews with individuals, agencies and organizations with whom it has had contact.

Specific recommendations are outlined to assist other community groups in establishing Crime Prevention projects targeted towards social development and community enhancement.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Special thanks are extended to representatives from the following agencies and organizations, in recognition of their time and cooperation:

Age and Opportunity Centre Inc.
Alcoholism Foundation of Manitoba
Augustine Outreach
Department of the Attorney General
Fort Rouge Parent/Teacher Council
Neighbourhood Watch Participants
Osborne Merchant's Association
Probation Services
Project Prevention
Riverborne Development Association Inc.
Seniors Community
University of Manitoba (Dept. of Sociology)
Winnipeg Police Department (Crime Prevention Unit)
Youth Justice Committee

Special appreciation is also extended to the Consultation Centre in Saskatoon, for their prompt and courteous assistance throughout the review.

J.L.R.

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I.   INTRODUCTION

In recent years, interest in Neighbourhood Crime Prevention has accelerated. There are numerous programs now operating, through which the police and the community work together in the prevention of crime. However, few of these programs have been fully documented, and even fewer have been subjected to formal assessment and/or evaluation.

The Riverborne Community Safety Office (RCSO) was established as a "demonstration project" in August, 1982. After three years, a formal review of the project was conducted. This study has not been structured as a quantitative evaluation, rather it has taken the form of a qualitative assessment.

Literature on the Community Safety Office was reviewed and representatives from various agencies and organizations having had contact with the project were interviewed. These individuals were selected to provide a variety of experiences and perspectives. They were questioned on the nature and extent of their contact with the RCSO, and were also asked to identify strengths and weaknesses of the project. The information gained from the interviews, supplemented by external references, led to the development of a number of recommendations which may assist other community groups establishing similar programs. The results of the 1985 assessment and the recommendations it has provided, are presented in this report.

II.   THE RIVERBORNE COMMUNITY SAFETY OFFICE:

Project Origin

A door-to-door Provincial election canvass in 1980 brought to attention a significant fear of crime in the Fort Rouge area of Winnipeg. Residents expressed concern for both personal safety and property protection. In response to this problem, Lloyd Axworthy, M.P. obtained funding from the Department of the Solicitor General to establish a "demonstration project" for community crime prevention.

A Community Safety Sub-Committee was established by the Riverborne Development Association Inc. (the sponsoring agency for the project). This Sub-Committee drafted an initial proposal calling for crime reduction in the Fort Rouge area through educating and organizing the public to avoid crime-provoking situations. Two-way communication between the Safety Office and the community was emphasized.

On the basis of the Sub-Committee's proposal, three-year funding was obtained to establish a project known as the Riverborne Community Safety Office (RCSO).

Area Description

The target area encompasses two of Statistics Canada's census

tracts (011 and 012). It is bounded by the Red and Assiniboine Rivers, Cockburn Street and Corydon Avenue.

According to the most recent census (1981), this area has a population of 10,635 people, residing in 6500 private dwellings. Over ninety percent of these dwellings are rented. (For comparison purposes, the city-wide figure is

approximately forty-one percent).

Demographic statistics also indicate one-third of this area's families are headed by single parents and twenty percent of the total population are senior citizens.

Goals and Objectives

The RCSO was established "to demonstrate the benefit of encouraging community participation in neighbourhood action programs that are designed to reduce the growing incidence of crime against person and property in the Fort Rouge Area".

Two primary objectives were identified as priorities for the RCSO: (1) To initiate projects that will get the community involved in creating and operating its own crime prevention program; and (2) To create an atmosphere of security and neighbourhood integrity that will reduce the cause of the present fear for person and property.

Within this framework, the role of the RCSO was defined as a

"community catalyst" -- a vehicle to provide resources and support for the collective mobilization of groups and individuals within the target neighbourhood.

Project Development

The project's initial funding included an allocation for hiring a full-time liaison officer. This individual's efforts were supplemented by several short-term workers obtained through special government employment programs, and a broad spectrum of volunteer support and services from the community itself.

The RCSO operates from a store-front office located in the heart of the target area. The office, which was established to facilitate two-way communication, made the project's resources more accessible to the community members and organizations.

Throughout its duration, the Safety Office Project has also accumulated a large inventory of resources on various crime prevention and social development programs. These materials have supplemented many activities and seminars organized within the community.

Since its inception, the RCSO has pursued a mandate of facilitating neighbourhood development and has served as a liaison, a resource centre and in some cases, a "catalyst" for community action. The next section of this report outlines specific examples of activities and programs which will serve to

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illustrate the nature and extent of the Safety Office's
involvement within the target community.

Progress To Date

In the three years since it was established, the RCSO has
developed and maintained contact with numerous agencies and
organizations working toward social development and community
enhancement.   (A representative sample of these groups can be
referenced in the 'Acknowledgements' section of this report).

With the cooperation and assistance of countless individuals,
the Safety Office was able to coordinate and promote a wide range
of activities and programs. The examples listed below outline
areas where a substantial contribution was made or a unique idea
was implemented.

"Alternative   Choices"   is   a   community
restitution/reconciliation committee established in 1983.   It
focuses on three main concepts: (1) Encouraging youths to accept
responsibility for their behaviour, (2) Including the victim in the
process of youths resolving problems created by their offences,
and (3) Involving the community in the resolution of minor
offences by youths.   The RCSO receives referrals from Probation
Services and then presents and allocates cases to committee
members. As of August 1984, 84 referrals had been received.

The RCSO has also been instrumental in promoting the Winnipeg

Police Department's Neighbourhood Watch program within the target area. Riverborne Safety Office staff provided resource support, arranged meetings and generated interest in this crime prevention program. To date, the response has been very positive.

Several public workshops and seminars have also been held in the neighbourhood, for which the Safety Office has served as a resource base and liaison. Topics for these seminars have included child abuse, family violence, person and property protection, drug and alcohol abuse, etc..

Close cooperation has also been maintained between the RCSO and the "Special Tranportation Service" for Seniors. The latter of these projects is a demonstration project funded by the Federal Department of Transport which seeks to address special transportation needs and concerns in the Seniors' community.

A special Canada Day celebration was organized by the Safety Office, as well as a "Thank-You" celebration held in June to recognize community participation and the contribution of volunteers. Both of these activities served to draw the residents of the community together.

One final example pertains to a unique solution to the problem of vandalism. A speaking engagement in a local school prompted students to transform a graffiti-covered wall into an "artistic masterpiece" -- a mural of children playing. The students soon developed pride in "their wall" and no signs of

graffiti have defaced it since the "transformation".

It is important to note that the list of activities and programs presented here is not exhaustive, rather it was designed to provide a sample of the range and scope of activities a project of this nature can undertake. For further details on these and other programs, the interested reader should consult the interim reports produced by the Riverborne Community Safety Office project.

III. STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES

The comments which follow focus on the strengths and weaknesses of the Safety Office Project, as perceived by individuals and organizations with which it has come into contact. The information presented here was obtained from a series of fifteen field interviews which were conducted during the course of the review.

There were some very positive comments, particularly from those who have had a great deal of direct involvement with the Safety Office Project. The office was praised as a resource centre, for distributing information, and for having the ability to put individuals and groups into contact with appropriate agencies regarding special issues and problems. In some cases, having the support of an organization (ie., Riverborne) made it possible to accomplish what an individual could not. In this respect, one group commented they would be "lost without Riverborne".

A positive impact on crime fear was evident, although difficult to assess. Increased feelings of security were largely credited to organization of the Neighbourhood Watch Program within the area. Involvement in Neighbourhood Watch appears to have increased awareness in the community and improved communication among neighbours.

The Safety Office Project was also commended for helping to establish the Special Transportation Service and for publicizing crime prevention tips for seniors. To a limited extent, seniors are beginning to feel more secure within their neighbourhood, as evidenced by the fact that some are venturing out alone more frequently than they had previously.

The Alternative Choices Committee has made a definite contribution and is considered an "ally" to the probation operation. The Safety Office is an asset in this regard because it is _in_ the community and is therefore closer to the problems than outside professionals. Its staff is able to provide more time to each case than a probation officer can, and they also have the potential to be very innovative.

In general, the Community Safety Office has created a number of very good activities, some of which will continue after the project ceases. This is particularly true for those programs with other support groups, such as the Police Department (for Neighbourhood Watch), and the Manitoba Association for Seniors along with Age and Opportunity (for senior's programs). .

Overall, it appears people within the Riverborne community are starting to express their concerns, whereas previously they had not done so. The Riverborne Community Safety Office was cited as instrumental in this change.

On the negative side, a number of weaknesses were identified during the field interviews. There were varying reports pertaining to the perceived profile obtained by the Community Safety Office. Almost everyone interviewed agreed that awareness was "activity-centred" and was therefore much lower for the community at large as compared to target groups. It was estimated that very few people (including some having had direct contact) are aware of the project's goals and objectives.

One comment which kept recurring throughout the interviews was that "too much had been attempted too fast." More dramatic results may have been attained if the neighbourhood had been saturated with one activity at a time. A more thorough needs assessment (perhaps an in-person survey to provide a higher response rate than that obtained by the RCSO's mail-out survey) accompanied by an on-going process of monitoring and evaluation would have identified this issue much sooner and would have greatly facilitated the project's focus and development.

The area which yielded the most conflicting opinions concerned the ratio of paid staff to volunteers. In this regard, a few people cited resource contraints as a weakness. However, there was considerable support for the idea that "more could have been accomplished with less." With greater financial constraints, the project would have been more dependent on volunteers and natural community leaders. This in turn would have contributed to greater "community ownership", support and involvement.

In addition to these comments and concerns, several excellent recommendations arose during the field interviews. These will be discussed in the next section of this report, along with some very broad recommendations for community based crime prevention.

IV.   GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS

The following sections outline a series of recommendations for establishing and maintaining community-based crime prevention programs. These recommendations are a product of the ideas presented during the field interviews for the RCSO review, and assorted reference materials on the topic of crime prevention in general. They are intended to provide a general framework which may be adapted to suit the unique characteristics of any target neighbourhood.

Needs Assessment

Perhaps the most critical, and often neglected stage in the development of community-based projects is a formal and thorough needs assessment. All too frequently, programs are applied which do not address a community's particular problems and concerns. The needs assessment may take a variety of forms. Some of the more common approaches include a door-to-door or mail-out survey, a search of census tract statistics (which provide information on demographic statistics in the area), discussions with community leaders and organizations and research of actual crime statistics in the area. If a survey is used, it should be designed to include potential evaluation components. This will facilitate project monitoring and assessment in the event that a follow-up survey is conducted. Regardless of the method chosen to assess the community's needs, it is essential to ensure that the

information is gathered in a systematic and objective manner.

Targeting

The success of any project depends on how effectively it addresses the identified needs of the community. This is determined to a large extent by appropriate targeting of programs and activities.

This "targeting" may take a variety of forms. It may involve focusing on particular community groups such as homeowners, seniors, youths, single parents or ethnic communities; predominant crime problems such as vandalism, theft or assault; or any one of various local patterns and activities unique to each neighbourhood.

The factors contributing to crime and fear of crime may vary significantly, even within a small geographic area, and inappropriate targeting can have substantial repercussions. A program designed to address "not-existant" needs will not only have little effect on actual problems and perceptions, it may also damage the credibility and reputation of the project itself and its sponsoring agency.

Program Development

Program development will vary considerably from one group to another. However, some general principles applicable to any

community-based crime prevention program are discussed below:

During early stages of the project's development, positive contact should be established with existing organizations and natural community leaders. Their involvement and support is crucial to the project's success. If it is not secured, they become potential opponents which may later hurt the project's image and undermine its effectiveness. Furthermore, existing community organizations offer _permanence_ to the objectives of a temporarily funded project and may also be able to share staff and resources.

In the process of establishing linkages or networks, it is important to avoid two common pitfalls. The first of these pertains to political partisanship or affiliation, which has the potential to divide the community. For the same reason, situations which may lead to competition between the crime prevention project and other organziations should be avoided.

Where possible, maximum use should be made of volunteers. This will instill a true "community ownership" for the program and will ensure its continuation after funding ceases. Although opinions vary as to the role of paid staff in community development projects, it appears that the more successful programs _facilitate_ the efforts of natural leaders and human resources within the community. With a large pool of paid staff, there is always a risk of doing too much "to" a community instead of encouraging residents to do _for themselves_ and each other. In

addition to providing special skills, volunteers will also lend stability and commitment to the program that cannot always be attained through paid staff.

Maintaining Interest

Crime prevention programs must be structured for durability. It is easy to generate initial enthusiasm, but maintaining that interest can be a challenge.

One main component of program maintenance is recognition of volunteer efforts. Other key factors include feedback on program effectiveness and ongoing two-way communication. Questionnaires (on a limited basis), community events, personal contacts, regular newsletters and follow-up meetings provide a sampling of existing maintenance techniques.

Monitoring and Evaluation

Sooner or later (particularly with short-term funding), the question will arise as to whether or not the project is having its desired effect. Anticipating this request at the onset of the project will greatly facilitate subsequent monitoring and evaluation.

Monitoring is straightforward, and basically involves recording program activity information such as number of meetings held, attendance, materials distributed, signs posted, etc..

Evaluation may tend to be somewhat more complex, since it concerns the systematic assessment of the program's impact on crime problems and other identified crime prevention goals. Evaluation designs may vary considerably with the situation and resources available, and it may often be necessary to contact outside professionals to assist in completing the task.

Any effort invested in monitoring and evaluation is more than amply rewarded by the effectiveness and credibility it provides for the program, a critical feature particularly when scarce resources must be allocated. Formal assessment also contributes substantially to program improvement and re-direction.

V.   SYNOPSIS

With the growing number of community based crime prevention programs and the ever-present competition for scarce resources, the need for effective program development intensifies. Documentation of demonstration projects provides new groups with a broad framework of ideas and approaches, along with problems and pitfalls to avoid. Information sharing will therefore facilitate the development of more effective programs, and will reap benefits at all levels of community crime prevention.

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General Recommendations for
Neighbourhood Crime Prevention
Projects

Prepared by

J.L. Roy

Winnipeg, Manitoba
June, 1985

The following paper outlines a series of recommendations for establishing and maintaining community-based crime prevention programs. These recommendations are a product of ideas presented during field interviews for a review of a particular community safety office, and assorted reference materials on the topic of crime prevention. They are intended to provide a general framework which may be adapted to suit the unique characteristics of any target neighbourhood.

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