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# CRIME PREVENTION

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# A Change in Philosophy is the Roadmap to Crime Reduction

By Lt. Kathleen Carey, PIO,  
Newport News, VA Sheriff's Office

The 21st century is information driven and powered by technology, and if law enforcement wants to keep up, it must find new ways of doing business if it expects to have a lasting impact on community safety. It is not enough to analyze statistics and conclude that crime is 'down' or that crime is 'up'. Law enforcement must look to see how crime is 'different'.

You might see on paper a reduction in crime: homicide, rape, robbery, aggravated assault, burglary, larceny, auto theft, and arson. But tell that to the person whose neighbor was burglarized or to the mother whose son was murdered, and they will offer a different perspective. Numbers don't necessarily measure the safety and security that a community feels.

In 2008, the Rockland County, New York District Attorney Thomas Zugibe used that philosophy to develop a comprehensive integration of law enforcement, prosecution, and community partnerships. Intelligence Led Community Policing, Community Prosecution, and Community Partnerships, or IL3CP, fostered improved communication between the community, the police force, and the prosecutors of Rockland County. The objective of IL3CP is to effectively deal with the crime problem and find solutions to it. Since its inception in 2008, IL3CP has shown itself to be an effective model in this suburban county located fifteen miles northwest of Manhattan. But would it work elsewhere?

Grant funding from the U.S. Department of Justice and from the Office of Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS) was obtained to expand the IL3CP model to three pilot cities: Mesa, Arizona; Saint Paul, Minnesota; and Newport News, Virginia. Grant money will be used to replicate and evaluate the IL3CP model and develop a toolkit that can be used elsewhere.

Initial implementation of the model does not require any additional staff or funding





for the Newport News Commonwealth's Attorney's Office, the city police department, nor the Newport News Sheriff's Office. The challenge is to take existing personnel and engage them in prevention and intervention. Howard E. Gwynn, Newport News Commonwealth's Attorney, said he had been looking for ways for his office to be more proactive in the community, "Prosecutors by our nature are reactive folks. A crime is committed. Police arrest somebody. The person appears on the docket. And then, and only then, do the full resources of our office get engaged. So having a proactive mindset is totally different."

The first step in implementing IL3CP was to select a project site on which to concentrate before rolling out the initiative citywide. Marshall Courts was chosen for a few reasons. First, "that community has viewed itself as historically neglected," said Gwynn. "I wanted to show that we heard them and that we are certainly interested in making that community better." Marshall Courts is the city's largest public housing complex managed by the Newport News Redevelopment and Housing Authority with funding provided by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. Crimes associated with drug distribution, robbery, assaults, and property crimes are the most common incidents in Marshall Courts. Quality of life crimes including loitering, littering, and disorderly conduct are also common in the community.

Another reason that Marshall Courts was named the project site was because it has an established infrastructure linking children and families to community partners. There is a Boys and Girls Club on the property and a local church has adopted the

community. The intent is to build upon the existing structure. Community partnership, after all, is one of the 3 CPs.

What makes the initiative attractive to Sheriff Gabriel A. Morgan is its different approach to crime reduction, "I believe the essence of the program is helping the community to heal itself." The community will be the barometer of its success. Morgan explained, "Normally we (government/law enforcement) tell the community what they need, and 'oh by the way, burglary is down 10%, so you should feel safer.' The new philosophy requires that we listen to what they need."

The Commonwealth's Attorney's Office has made significant and radical changes, not only in organization, but in overall philosophy. The result has been improved communication with the residents whom they serve and with the police officers on whom they rely for successful prosecutions. Until this year, his office was organized as having three trial teams, a violent crimes team, a drug team, and a juvenile team. Gwynn explained why they restructured, "I wanted to get the prosecutors in my office into the community so in a real sense they are that community's prosecutor." Now they have teams assigned to each of the three police precincts, even sharing office space with the police. The south, central, and north precinct teams prosecute every case that comes up in their precinct, with the exception of juvenile cases which require a specialist.

This opened up a whole new dialogue and understanding between justice system partners. Prosecutors go to lineups; they go to roll call; they go on ride-alongs. Police officers are readily available to answer questions that a prosecutor might have. In turn, officers can learn directly from the prosecutor what kind of information and evidence they need to ensure a conviction. The two sides are more synchronized and cohesive. Additionally, citizens are getting to know their neighborhood prosecutor in a meaningful way. This unique partnership should help to build trust.

The Sheriff's Office has also enhanced its role in the criminal justice system. Remember the first two words in the IL3CP initiative are 'intelligence led'. "We have ramped up the collection of gang intelligence in the jail," Morgan said of the Sheriff's Office role. Critical information is gathered and shared with the local police department's gang unit and organized crime bureau as well as with other police departments and federal agencies across the region. "Most of what happens on the street, that information usually filters back into the jail. We intercept those communications, whether it be through the mail and/or telephone calls, or visitation." He cited a recent newspaper article that highlighted how such intelligence ultimately led to the prosecution of a gang related murder.

Both the Sheriff and the Commonwealth's Attorney acknowledge statistics are necessary indicators but caution not to rely solely on them. For one, drug offenses are not tracked as index crimes or Part 1 crimes by the traditional Uniform Crime Reporting system, yet they are "the engine that drive the vast majority of crime that takes place in any urban area," said Gwynn. "Seventy percent of all incarcerations are said to be tied in some form or manner to drugs," added Morgan.



*Newport News Commonwealth's Attorney and Sheriff Gabe Morgan adopt a non-traditional approach to reduce crime.*





*Public housing community called Marshall Courts selected at the IL3CP project site in Newport News, VA.*

Another caution: false perceptions when looking at just statistical numbers. For example, if this initiative is as successful as they believe it can be, one of the byproducts will be residents making more phone calls to police and reporting more crimes. “If you just look at the numbers, you’d think crime was up. It may look like the community is going backwards when really the opposite is true. Because now the community has so much confidence in the system that they want to be a part of it and make reports that they didn’t make in the past,” said Gwynn. Community cooperation will initially result in more criminal cases before they fall off.

Numbers alone don’t tell the complete story. The true measure of success comes when members of the community begin to feel safer. “We’re talking about changing ways of life. That’s not something that’s going to happen quickly,” said Morgan. “In this society, everyone wants a microwave fix. Pop it in the microwave and it’s done in minutes. This is a slow cooker. We recognize that. We will make immediate changes, but the long term effect is when the community becomes vibrant again.” ✨