

Community Policing: Perspectives from the Field

John Riley

Like many other departments, the Anchorage Police Department is moving from an emphasis on traditional law enforcement practices toward community-oriented policing, an approach that relies on officer-initiated efforts to reduce crime and public disorder. Community policing is a philosophy of policing that requires police officers to act with increased levels of autonomy and professional discretion to solve problems and to develop partnerships with the community.

While community policing promises an expansion of the professional role which will be appealing to many police officers, it also requires experimentation with major changes in the way in which officers and their departments think about and organize their work. A successful transition to community policing requires fundamental changes both in the way officers are encouraged to think about their work and in the way that work is organized and facilitated by administrative superiors. Because changes in philosophy and organization are key elements in the transition to community policing, it is appropriate to begin to evaluate these efforts by focusing on the subjective orientation of participating officers. Officers who do not perceive genuine opportunity for change within their departments are unlikely to successfully implement the kind of changes posited by community policing. Police departments must convince their patrol officers that it makes sense for them to take community policing seriously, if a successful transition is to take place. In this context, administrative decisions about organization, resource allocation, and the promotion of individual officers shape the understanding of patrol officers in important ways.

Evaluation of small scale projects, such as the one undertaken by Anchorage's Community Action Policing Team in Mountain View, plays an important role in the development of community policing and can provide police administrators, policy makers, and the public with important information as the department moves toward citywide implementation of community policing in the near future. This article focuses on the perceptions of patrol officers involved in the initial implementation of community policing in Mountain View. Because their perceptions are critical to the successful implementation of the project, it is important that they be taken into account in any effort to improve and extend community policing in Anchorage.

Evaluation

Between May and July 1997, Justice Center researchers interviewed 28 of the 31 officers associated with the Anchorage Police Department's community policing project. The Justice Center interviewed both current members of the team and former members now on other assignments. The interviews were intended to help identify problems and possible solutions associated with the transition to community policing. Structured interviews using open ended questions elicited individual information on the officers' professional experience, their project participation, daily routine, perception of the community, and training. Officers were also asked to identify issues that seemed important to them in their work on the community policing team. The interviews ranged in length from 30 minutes to three hours, with an average length of one and one-half hours.

Planning and Coordination

Problems associated with planning and coordination which characterize the beginning of any organizational change were among the most frequently expressed concerns of the officers interviewed by the Justice Center. The majority of the officers indicated a need for greater and more detailed organizational planning prior to the initiation of projects such as this. A few were extremely critical when asked about the organization of the project. Several officers indicated that they felt a "lack of direction" and one veteran officer responded to a question about the team's structure by saying, "There isn't any." While most of those interviewed were less critical than this, many indicated concerns about planning that caused them to question the strength of the department's commitment to the project.

Many of those involved would have liked a clearer articulation of the project's goals, greater attention to issues of training and orientation for new team members, and clearer standards of evaluation for team members. The majority of the officers interviewed could not give a consistent department definition of community-oriented policing. When asked how their department defined community policing many officers responded by saying "I don't know" or "I have no idea." When asked about the department's expectations and performance evaluation standards, similar and sometimes identical responses were common. Some

officers suggested that without a clear definition community residents might also find it difficult to adjust to the changing orientation of their police force.

A need for improved coordination between community police officers and representatives of other local, state, and federal agencies was another recurrent theme expressed by Anchorage's community police officers. In the first 18 months of the project, officers frequently found themselves working with representatives of city government, federal agencies like Immigration and Naturalization, and other public and private organizations. Some of this work involved a level of frustration and inefficiency which might have been avoided through better formal coordination of efforts. Several officers have been involved in working with the city in municipal building code enforcement and traffic management, for example. Because patrol officers themselves are not always in the best position to enlist cooperation from organizations that may



Alaska Justice Forum

Editor: Antonia Moras

Editorial Board: Cassie Atwell, Allan Barnes, Robert Congdon, Richard Curtis, Robert Langworthy, Lisa Rieger, John Riley, Nancy Schafer, Lawrence Trostle, Darryl Wood
Typesetting and Layout: Melissa S. Green

Justice Center, Robert Langworthy, Director

Alaska Justice Statistical Analysis Unit, Allan Barnes, Director

Published quarterly by the Justice Center and the Alaska Justice Statistical Analysis Unit at the University of Alaska Anchorage, 3211 Providence Drive, Anchorage, AK 99508; (907) 786-1810; fax 786-7777; Internet address ajjust@uaa.alaska.edu; World Wide Web <http://www.uaa.alaska.edu/just/>

© 1997 Justice Center,
University of Alaska Anchorage
ISSN 0893-8903

The Bureau of Justice Statistics, U.S. Department of Justice, provides approximately thirty-five per cent of the funding for this publication.

The opinions expressed are those of individual authors and may not be those of the Justice Center or the Bureau of Justice Statistics.

The University of Alaska provides equal education and employment opportunities for all, regardless of race, color, religion, national origin, sex, age, disability, or status as a Vietnam-era or disabled veteran.

place law enforcement interests as a low priority, commitment to collaboration from administrative leaders in the private and public organizations involved is necessary.

Support for Community Policing

In spite of concerns about planning and coordination, members of the team were nearly unanimous in crediting the program with improving the situation in Mountain View. While the project was only a little more than half completed when the interviews were begun, the majority of those interviewed felt that the community had benefited from police efforts to address the problems associated with gangs, drug dealing, prostitution, and other issues of public order. Most of the participating officers found something of value in their experience with community oriented-policing, and many expressed strong support for its underlying philosophy.

This support was, in general, linked to three themes: a desire for professional development, a desire for detailed knowledge of the assigned service area, and an interest in problem solving. These themes had some appeal for all of the officers interviewed and substantial appeal for those who expressed the greatest interest in community policing. Those who expressed the most favorable attitudes toward this project usually indicated an interest in opportunities for acquiring professional experience and skills. Because team officers provide a wide range of police services in their assigned service areas, they were able to gain experience in a variety of areas including investigations, interviewing, community relations, warrants, search procedures, traffic control, crime prevention, and intervention with juveniles. Mountain View was an attractive assignment to some of the officers because persistent and serious crime problems represented a challenge. For one officer, Mountain View was "a target-rich environment," offering many opportunities to make arrests for serious offenses. As another officer said, "If I can make it there, I can make it anywhere." Participation in the Mountain View project permitted relatively new officers to do things and to master skills that typically come more slowly in the careers of officers with traditional assignments.

Those officers who expressed favorable attitudes toward the project were also more likely to be interested in getting to know the neighborhood where they work. This is particularly important in neighborhoods like Mountain View, where few of the assigned officers have lived, attended school or church, or participated in activities which are not related to their work as police offic-

ers. When asked to compare Mountain View to the communities where they now reside, officers indicated that there was "no comparison" or used phrases like "night and day" to describe the difference between Mountain View and the South Anchorage and Eagle River neighborhoods where most of them live.

"Getting to know the neighborhood" means different things to different officers, but most officers who express support for community policing focus on geography, personalities, and community resources. The project has placed officers in relatively long term assignments in a small service area, allowing them to learn the streets quickly and thoroughly, to learn about the "problem people" who take up a large portion of the workday, and to learn about the resources available to people experiencing problems within the community. The officers believe this knowledge translates into improved intelligence capability, more effective law enforcement efforts, and better community relations.

Those officers who indicated the greatest support for community policing were also more likely than other officers to express an interest in innovative problem solving. This reflects a frustration with traditional patrol-based assignments which many officers believe allow too little time to address too many problems. Assigned to regular patrol duties, officers may spend entire shifts going from call to call with little time to do more than take a report or make an arrest that they know will only temporarily alleviate the problem. The officers, who refer to this problem as "chasing the radio" or "the tyranny of 911," indicated an appreciation of the way in which scheduling flexibility and an emphasis on partnerships allow more follow-up and more opportunity to "encourage people to solve their own problems."

Whether the policing project in Mountain View is actually facilitating the development of lasting solutions to problems and reducing unnecessary repetition in calls for service is an open question. It is clear at this time that a majority of the officers participating in the project find it useful to have more time to follow-up on calls for service in innovative ways. They are now trying to address cases that have not proven amenable to traditional law enforcement solutions through landlord education efforts, enforcement of city codes, and programs in the schools. Officers have also extended their efforts to off-duty projects such as those intended to improve housing for the elderly or to provide recreational opportunities for juveniles. Officers who have left the team to take on new assignments feel that their work in Mountain View helped them to develop new skills and innovative approaches to the problems they face in their new assignments.

Officers expressed the belief that widespread involvement in public affairs is a critical component of an orderly community and that traditional policing strategies have had little to offer in this area. They feel community-oriented policing allows officers to work to build a sense of community by modeling responsible public involvement. While it is too early to be certain of the success of these efforts, it seems clear that the experience gained in Mountain View has some benefit for the entire city.

Have the officers found genuine opportunity to improve service in the Mountain View project? While concerns about the implementation of community policing are widespread, a sense of enthusiasm for more involvement with the community emerged from these interviews.

John Riley is an assistant professor with the Justice Center.

New Director for Justice Center

Dr. Robert Langworthy became the Director of the Justice Center in July. Before joining the University of Alaska Anchorage Langworthy was a member of the faculty in the Division of Criminal Justice at the University of Cincinnati. From 1995 to 1996, while on a leave of absence from the University of Cincinnati, he served on the National Institute of Justice project management team for research on the Community Oriented Policing program.

During his tenure at the University of Cincinnati Dr. Langworthy developed the doctoral program in criminal justice and directed it through the approval process of

the Ohio Board of Regents. He is the author of three books and numerous articles on justice issues and has served on the editorial boards of several journals, including *Justice Quarterly*. Among his publications is *The Structure of Police Organizations* (New York: Praeger, 1986). He received his doctoral and master's degrees in criminal justice from the State University of New York at Albany and a master's in geography from Mankato State College. His areas of research include police organization, police use of force, evaluation of police stings and the spatial analysis of crime.

Mountain View
(continued from page 1)

to the U.S. Department of Justice was first drafted in 1993 but the grant was not definitively awarded until 1995. The Community

Action Policing Team (CAP) project opened in the Mountain View neighborhood in fall 1995.

The program has been put in place in the part of Mountain View bounded by the Glenn Highway, Davis Park, McPhee Av-

enue, and Meyer Street. This area corresponds roughly to U.S. Census Tract 6 for Anchorage (Figure 1). (Census Tract 6 also includes the area east of the Mountain View project, between Post Road and Fifth Avenue.)

The Mountain View neighborhood is poorer than other areas of Anchorage. According to 1990 Census data, the mean household income for the census tract, \$20,488, was the lowest among Anchorage census areas, and the area also had the highest number of households on public assistance. Most residents of Mountain View—82 per cent—rent rather than own their residences, while in Anchorage as a whole only 47 per cent of residents live in rental units. The median value in 1990 for an owner-occupied housing unit in Mountain View was \$58,700, while for the city it was \$109,700. In 1990 the area contained more vacant housing units and more boarded-up units than any other census tract in Anchorage.

A drive in the area reveals that many of the buildings, particularly the apartment buildings, are cheaply constructed and poorly maintained; however, interspersed with the rundown buildings are numerous well-maintained homes, many with established gardens. According to census data, housing units—whether apartments or houses—are small: 71 per cent have four rooms or less. In contrast, only 41 per cent of the dwellings in Anchorage as a whole have so few rooms.

It is a common police view that the prevalence of inexpensive rental housing in Mountain View and the transience of residents make some crimes more feasible and more frequent.

The area population is younger than that of the city in general: 64 per cent are under 30, with 31 per cent younger than 18; 50 per cent of the general Anchorage population are under 30 and 29 per cent under 18.

The racial and ethnic identity of the neighborhood is also much more diverse. In Anchorage as a whole 81 per cent of the population is white, while in Mountain View 53 per cent of the population is white; 13 per cent, black; 25 per cent, Native American; 5 per cent, Asian or Pacific Islander; and 4 per cent of another racial origin.

The Mountain View neighborhood also presents a linguistic mix not encountered as much elsewhere in Anchorage. On signs for businesses and on bulletin boards in churches and public meeting places information is often presented in several different languages. According to information assembled by the Anchorage School District, students at William Tyson and Mountain View Elementary, the two elementary

Table 1. Anchorage Police Department Calls for Service, North Mountain View (Police Service Area 4D), October 1994-September 1996*

	Oct 94 to Sept 95	Oct 95 to Sept 95		Oct 94 to Sept 95	Oct 95 to Sept 95
Major violent crimes	743	627	Other crime-related	6,321	6,590
Homicide	2	3	Weapons offense	299	197
Sexual assault	26	25	Weapons offense—information	1	1
Sexual assault in progress	0	1	Offense against family	110	103
Sexual assault—information	3	4	Offense against family—information	4	2
Robbery	87	60	Disorderly conduct	55	79
Assault	623	532	Disorderly conduct—information	1	0
Assault with weapon	1	1	Prostitution	65	101
Assault—information	1	1	Prostitution—information	0	2
Major property crimes	872	869	Sex offense	30	29
Burglary	133	158	Sex offense—information	6	4
Burglary in progress	20	11	Escape/resisting	17	11
Theft	545	574	Stalking	4	1
Theft—information	0	1	Gambling	0	4
Stolen vehicle	159	109	Gambling—information	0	2
Arson	15	15	Juvenile	249	307
Arson—information	0	1	Juvenile runaway	84	87
Other property crimes	353	301	Gang-related	1	2
Vandalism	322	266	Prior case follow up	1,093	1,260
Vandalism information	1	0	Field interview	479	886
Forgery and counterfeiting	15	19	Alarm call	193	160
Fraud	7	9	Hold up alarm	0	1
Stolen property	7	7	Bomb call	2	0
Stolen property information	1	0	Suspicious	630	629
Traffic related	2,449	3,344	False report	23	36
Traffic stop	1,474	2,317	Locate	558	319
Traffic incident	554	655	Security check	91	69
Traffic accident	147	138	Warrant service	563	633
Traffic accident with injury	7	5	Warrant service—information	0	4
Hit and run	141	75	Assisting other agency	125	121
Hit and run with injury	2	0	Violation of city/state regulations	93	96
Traffic code violation	124	154	Civil problem	453	418
Disturbances	2,420	2,327	Missing person	100	83
Disturbance	1,890	1,819	Mental subject	39	47
Miscellaneous noise/disturbance	463	482	Animal call	45	31
Disturbance with weapons	67	26	Illegal alien	3	1
Alcohol and drugs	1,421	1,283	Illegal alien—information	0	1
Driving while intoxicated (DWI)	79	85	Other offense	831	807
Driving while intoxicated (DWI)—information	1	0	Miscellaneous	74	56
Liquor laws	23	24	Other calls for service	1,553	1,864
Drunk	349	458	Public assist	1,183	1,553
Drunk—transport	144	155	Medical assist	163	154
Drugs	637	404	Lost and found property	103	84
Drugs—information	188	157	Found property	34	16
			Lost property	0	1
			Noncriminal death	60	53
			TI track	1	0
			Duplicate set of nos. drawn	9	3
			Total	16,132	17,205

* "Calls for service" are requests for police assistance. The final disposition of a call may not always match the type of call initially received, and the type of call does not represent the total number of charges or victims for each call. The figures exclude unfounded calls.

Source of data: Anchorage Police Department

schools located in the area, come from homes where the following languages are spoken: Samoan, Tongan, Hawaiian, Polish, Spanish, French, German, Creole, Tagalog, Indonesian, Tamil, Laotian, Khmer, Hmong, Yup'ik, Tlingit, Cupik, Inupiat, and English.

The neighborhood covered by the CAP program is primarily a residential area, with businesses along the southern edge: restaurants, pawn shops, liquor stores, a plumbing store, a clothing store, and facilities for check cashing and long distance phone calls. No banks, medical or dental practices are located in the neighborhood, although a health clinic organized by the Concerned Citizens of Mountain View and the Anchorage Latino Lions opened in March 1997 in the Mountain View Resource Center.

The neighborhood is served by two People Mover bus routes: one makes a circuit along Mountain View, Lane, Parsons and Bragaw and then continues downtown, past the former Alaska Native Medical Center; the other goes along Mountain View and connects with the Glenn Highway. The bus lines are an important means of transportation in the area because many residents lack private vehicles.

In addition to Mountain View and William Tyson Elementary Schools, Clark Middle School and Bartlett High School also serve the area. The Mountain View branch of the public library is in Clark Middle School.

The neighborhood contains a number of churches of different denominations and a community recreational center on North Price. Parks of different sizes dot the area. They are well maintained, with swings and other play equipment, benches and waste receptacles, but they have also been common sites for drug dealing. The Anchorage Police Department chose to establish its Mountain View substation across opposite Duldida Park, at the corner of Hoyt and Thompson.

According to the Anchorage Police Department, the substation—a small wood frame cottage, painted a bright, startling blue—was formerly a crack house which had been forfeited in a drug operation. The Anchorage Police Department obtained the building from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development and made the necessary repairs and security changes to convert it to a police substation. Corner street signs in blue with the word *Police* have been placed above the ordinary green street signs which mark the intersection of Hoyt and Thompson. Since October 1995 the substation has been the geographic focal point of the community policing project. A number of blue and white Anchorage police

	1995	1996		1995	1996
Major violent crimes	6,495	5,909	Other crime-related	76,991	76,215
Homicide	31	23	Weapons offense	2,055	1,548
Sexual assault	365	327	Offense against family	805	798
Robbery	874	621	Disorderly conduct	775	758
Assault	5,225	4,938	Prostitution	493	573
Major property crimes	17,846	15,531	Sex offense	359	277
Burglary	3,044	2,664	Escape/resisting	124	140
Theft	12,458	11,095	Stalking	58	35
Stolen vehicle	2,216	1,667	Gambling	16	12
Arson	128	105	Juvenile	2,501	2,679
Other property crimes	6,235	5,215	Juvenile runaway	1,861	1,822
Vandalism	5,192	4,242	Prior case follow up	11,658	11,976
Forgery/counterfeiting	449	395	Field interview	4,520	6,108
Fraud	489	482	Alarm call	8,746	8,706
Stolen property	72	68	Hold up alarm	121	129
Embezzlement	33	28	Bomb call	96	69
Traffic related	52,614	67,263	Suspicious	7,595	7,542
Traffic stop	28,608	39,712	False report	258	257
Traffic incident	10,478	12,995	Locate	7,537	6,394
Traffic accident	8,790	9,543	Security check	2,350	1,892
Traffic accident with injury	178	170	Warrant service	5,313	5,728
Hit and run	2,993	2,912	Assisting other agency	1,595	1,785
Hit and run with injury	7	8	Violation of city/state regulations	1,227	1,101
Traffic code violation	1,562	1,923	Civil problem	3,806	3,313
Disturbances	15,785	16,070	Missing person	794	883
Disturbance	12,406	12,725	Mental subject	414	425
Miscellaneous noise disturbance	3,167	3,172	Animal call	384	345
Disturbance with weapons	212	173	Illegal alien	15	16
Alcohol and drugs	9,452	10,568	Other offense	10,316	9,959
Driving while intoxicated (DWI)	1,375	1,679	Miscellaneous	1,199	945
Liquor laws	478	478	Other calls for service	24,174	24,249
Drunk	3,402	3,811	Public assist	17,694	18,711
Drunk—transport	1,507	1,898	Medical assist	2,195	2,113
Drugs	2,690	2,702	Lost and found property	1,701	1,484
			Found property	364	302
			Lost property	17	8
			Information call	1,482	870
			Noncriminal death	721	761
			Total	209,592	221,020

This does not include the total number of calls for service. Calls for service are received from outside designated patrol areas but still within the Municipality of Anchorage. These numbers also exclude all "unfounded" calls for the areas.

Source: Anchorage Police Department, Annual Statistical Report, 1995 and 1996

cars are usually parked in the street in front of the substation.

Policing in the Community

Before the development of the community policing program, north Mountain View was part of a broader APD service area patrolled by cars on a shift schedule. In general, one or two patrol officers per shift worked in the service area containing Mountain View. For a number of years the police department and the media have described Mountain View as a high crime neighborhood, mentioning the prevalence of open street drug dealing and prostitution and the high number of calls for service received by APD. In particular, police officers and community activists refer to summer 1995, just before the CAP program began,

as a time of exceptional disruption, with the sound of gun shots on the streets regularly reported.

The project received \$1.5 million for three years from the Office of Community Oriented Policing Services in the U.S. Department of Justice. The money has been used primarily to fund the fifteen officer positions assigned to the project. In addition, the services of the ordinary car-based patrol unit for APD Service Area 4, which contains the project neighborhood, and those of other APD divisions such as the detective unit and technical services are available. The level of staffing for the community policing project area is close to three times the ordinary level placed in a much larger service area.

Please see *Mountain View*, page 6

Mountain View (continued from page 5)

The funding proposal described a policing plan which would entail a “shift to prevention strategies, with emphasis on public interaction and officer problem solving at the street level,” and it outlined a plan which would encourage health and social service agencies to place personnel in the police substation to coordinate efforts more clearly and to serve neighborhood residents more readily.

A later document entitled “Neighborhood Policing Operation Plan,” describes the mission, goals and specific responsibilities of members of the Community Action Policing Team. This plan was assembled by the lieutenant and sergeant originally assigned to the project. It mixes the contents of the funding proposal submitted to the U.S. Department of Justice with additional ideas on community policing obtained from other programs throughout the country. The components of the plan emphasize establishing a visible police presence. Officers are required to patrol their assigned blocks on foot or by bike on a daily basis and to park their marked police vehicles in strategic locations. They are encouraged to “improve coordination between neighborhood officers, the community, Neighborhood Crime Prevention staff and other service providers;” to “link citizens with the correct service provider to solve neighborhood problems;” and to “assist neighborhood residents in having a voice in the application of government services.” The plan describes general responsibilities for both individual officers and supervisory officers. It also states that the involvement of community residents in policing efforts is necessary to achieve a long term effect on neighborhood problems. The plan includes a list of neighborhood resident responsibilities which are, in fact, ideas and suggestions.

The ideas presented in the grant proposal and the planning document are all drawn from the common stock of ideas surrounding the term *community policing*, but they are phrased in non-specific ways. The problem faced by the officers assigned to Mountain View—none of whom had any experience with community policing at the time of the initial assignment—was how to translate the ideas into activities suited to the nature of that particular neighborhood. The document itself was pulled together during the beginning months of the project, when officers had already been assigned to the area. While none had any extensive background in community policing and few had any formal training in its theory or practice, many report having been intrigued by

the possibilities, with some reflecting that this approach at least in theory promised an approach to policing more in keeping with how they intuitively felt officers should work in a community. (See accompanying article, “Community Policing: Perspectives from the Field.”)

Interviews revealed that the Mountain View team decided to concentrate initially on the drug problem which many officers perceived to underlie the deterioration in community life. The team coordinated surveillance, the use of search warrants, informants and sting operations in a heavy initial “clean-up” effort, and they involved landlords and municipal code enforcement personnel as they sought to eliminate the drug operations in various apartment buildings. Because of the heavy police presence other public irritants, such as street prostitution, became less common. Various officers sought to eliminate junked vehicles and graffiti and to put an end to jaywalking.

After the streets and parks of Mountain View became more orderly, the CAP team turned its attention to more routine law enforcement tasks — responding to dispatch calls; conducting bike and foot patrols; and enforcing traffic regulations. The team also began to develop other community-focused programs. Among the projects attempted by the team were a truancy program, which sought to enforce state school attendance regulations; a property identification project; bike rodeos for instructing children in safety and security; the establishment of regular neighborhood ethnic roundtables; and an extended and complex effort to reroute traffic in the neighborhood.

Interviews with officers assigned to the CAP team, both those still working in Mountain View and those who have left the project, reveal that designing and developing community-based projects, in accordance with theories of community policing, has required officers to switch from an approach to work which is almost completely reactive—responding to dispatch—to one which requires more creative initiative under a different type and degree of supervision.

The extended effort to put “jersey barriers” in place illustrates some of the complexities involved in community-policing activities. “Jersey barriers” are the concrete structures, sometimes designed as planters, erected to block access to a portion of a street and redirect traffic. The streets in Mountain View are broad for a residential neighborhood and laid out in a grid. Officers who have worked in the area report that the arrangement of the streets leads to speeding, with its associated dangers in a residential neighborhood, and to quick entrances and

exits by those engaged in drug dealing from cars. Members of the CAP team envisioned that the placement of jersey barriers on certain streets would slow and reroute traffic and perhaps lessen illegal activity occurring from vehicles. The officer concentrating on the jersey barriers project worked with Mountain View residents and city officials in several offices over nine months to put the barriers in place, but as the plan for erecting the blocks became more widely known in the area, other voices began to raise objections, revealing complexities in the life of the community: in particular, the initial site chosen for placement was seen as impeding easy access to the Mountain View Resource Center, where the new health clinic was opening. Momentum on the project slowed after the municipality, responding to letters from other community groups, indicated that the Traffic Engineering Department would conduct a broad traffic study of the area late this summer. Some of the community policing team, many of whom had little experience in the slow, incremental work involved in projects such as this one, expressed frustration with their inability to effect this type of change easily. The idea has not died, however; and the city planning division is also applying for HUD Safe Neighborhood funds which would permit similar traffic flow changes.

The original APD grant proposal projected that various health and social service agencies might establish branch offices in the neighborhood near the substation. This idea too is common to community policing theories of how to serve neighborhoods more effectively. While individual officers on specific projects have broadened their contacts with various other government entities in order to help residents with particular problems, no effort by other city or state bureaucracies to establish actual offices has occurred.

Community Involvement

Underpinning the theory of community policing is a belief that the regular exchange of information between residents and law enforcement personnel is essential to effective policing. Reflecting this, the proposal for the Mountain View project promised the establishment of a community advisory board. As the project evolved, the actual push to form a board came initially from the APD officers involved. After a period, the mayor’s office, drawing upon suggestions from the police, appointed an advisory board with eight members. Several of the board members live in the community and all have strong

Table 3. Community Perceptions of Anchorage Police Department Performance in Mountain View, 1996

In January and February 1997, Justice Center researchers visited Mountain View to test a questionnaire designed to measure community satisfaction with police services. The results of this survey, using a convenience sample of 95 residents, suggest that community members are generally pleased with the Anchorage Police Department's recent efforts in Mountain View. While crime remains a central concern for residents, and problems involving drugs and drug dealing are an important priority, most residents surveyed indicated that police service was better in 1996 than in 1995.

For each of the following activities or traits, please circle the answer that you feel best describes police performance in Mountain View during the past year.

	N	%		N	%
<i>Protecting the community from crime</i>			<i>Effort — trying to do better in Mountain View</i>		
Excellent	18	18.9 %	Excellent	38	40.9 %
Very good	29	30.5	Very good	25	26.9
Satisfactory	21	22.1	Satisfactory	19	20.4
Needs improvement	23	24.2	Needs improvement	9	9.7
Failure	4	4.2	Failure	2	2.2
Total	95		Total	93	
<i>Providing service to the community</i>			<i>Setting priorities — putting first things first</i>		
Excellent	27	28.4 %	Excellent	17	19.3 %
Very good	28	29.5	Very good	24	27.3
Satisfactory	24	25.3	Satisfactory	27	30.7
Needs improvement	12	12.6	Needs improvement	15	17.0
Failure	4	4.2	Failure	5	5.7
Total	95		Total	88	
<i>Showing respect for community members</i>			<i>Actual improvement in performance last year</i>		
Excellent	27	28.7 %	Excellent	28	30.8 %
Very good	26	27.7	Very good	32	35.2
Satisfactory	21	22.3	Satisfactory	19	20.9
Needs improvement	12	12.8	Needs improvement	9	9.9
Failure	8	8.5	Failure	3	3.3
Total	94		Total	91	
<i>Listening to suggestions</i>			<i>Overall performance last year in Mountain View</i>		
Excellent	18	19.4 %	Excellent	28	31.5 %
Very good	23	24.7	Very good	27	30.3
Satisfactory	29	31.2	Satisfactory	23	25.8
Needs improvement	16	17.2	Needs improvement	8	9.0
Failure	7	7.5	Failure	3	3.4
Total	93		Total	89	
Overall, how would you compare police performance in Mountain View during 1996 with performance in 1995?			What problem or problems would you like to see police focus on in Mountain View?		
	N	%		N	%
Much better	31	38.8 %	Drugs/dealers	24	27.3 %
Better	34	42.5	Curfew	12	13.6
About the same	15	18.8	Late night parties	7	8.0
Worse	0	0.0	Attitude	5	5.7
Much worse	0	0.0	Communicating with young people	4	4.5
Total	80		Traffic	4	4.5
			Other	32	36.4
			Total	88	

Source of data: Police Services Evaluation: Mountain View, conducted by the Justice Center, University of Alaska Anchorage, Winter 1997

tative mode. It has no budget for its work; it has no direct authority over the officers involved in the project or their assignments, and it does not have a regular liaison with the mayor's office. Since its formation, contacts with the mayor's office have been initiated by letters from the board. The group has made a number of recommendations and suggestions to the APD community policing team, and it continues to assemble information on community policing from outside sources. In its efforts to facilitate the work of the police the board has assisted in obtaining equipment for the substation and has arranged meeting space for the police team

The board meets at least once a month. Several members attend regularly while others are more sporadic in attendance or usually absent. It is general practice for a member of the CAP team to present a report on project activities at the board meetings, although on a number of occasions no representative from the police team has attended the meeting.

Board meetings, which are sometimes attended by other interested parties from the community, have provided a forum for discussion of community problems and their relationship to the policing project. For example, in April 1997 a representative from the Alaska Department of Health and Human Services was invited to speak to the group on the upcoming extensive changes in the federal and state welfare systems. The information precipitated a discussion on the possible effects of the welfare cuts on the Mountain View community and the implications for policing.

In early summer 1997 the board stated its intention to recommend that the Mountain View project be extended beyond the initial three-year period. It has also recommended that the substation be moved to a larger building somewhere closer to the entrance to the neighborhood, on Mountain View Drive. The board suggested the building formerly occupied by Tommy's Grocery, but before any action could be taken on this suggestion a pawn shop opened at the site.

Both the CAP team and the advisory board consider the current substation to be much too small to serve the needs of the officers working in Mountain View. Various alternatives to the current building are now being explored, although at least some officers would like to see the little building also continue to be used because its visibility in the heart of the neighborhood is now associated with a sense of police presence.

connections to the neighborhood, whether through schools, churches or private businesses.

The board began meeting on a regular basis in 1996. For several months it worked to define its mission, draft its bylaws and

decide how best to guide the project. Beginning in early 1997 it began to provide more direction to the police. However, the authority and accountability of the board have never been clearly defined, and to this point, it has functioned primarily in a facili-

Mountain View (continued from page 7)

The progress and effects of the Mountain View community policing project are difficult to evaluate in a quantitative way, primarily because the data are very sparse. Data maintained by APD for the project area show that during the first year, from October 1, 1995 through September 30, 1996, the total of calls for service increased slightly, by nearly 7 percent (Table 1). It is problematic and complicated to analyze the number of calls for service as a measurement of effectiveness for this project, since the increased access to police will make reporting of certain incidents more common, while at the same time the sheer presence of officers undoubtedly results in certain types of incidents occurring less often. However, the total of calls involving major violent crimes

(homicide, sexual assaults, robberies, and assaults) declined by 16 per cent, and calls involving weapons offenses declined by 34 per cent. Other categories also show changes. (In the city as a whole, calendar year 1996 reflected a 5.5 per cent increase in calls for service over the 1995 figures; a 9 per cent decline in major violent crime calls; and a 25 per cent decline in calls involving weapons offenses. See Table 2.) These percentages, however, must be viewed with caution because they are derived from data from a relatively short period.

A small preliminary community resident survey undertaken by the Justice Center in early 1997 revealed that residents were pleased with recent police performance (Table 3). More than two-thirds of those responding noted an improvement (Question 7) and 62 per cent rated overall perfor-

mance as *excellent* or *very good*. Comparing 1996 to 1995, 81 per cent of respondents viewed police performance as *better* or *much better*.

The funding for the Mountain View project has enabled the police department to station an exceptionally high number of officers in the neighborhood—something which would be unlikely without the federal money. It seems this strong presence has had some success in reducing visible crime and disorder and has permitted department personnel to draw some aspects of community policing into their approach to the community. The extent to which these initial efforts can be continued in Mountain View—or tried in other Anchorage neighborhoods—without such a heavy commitment of personnel remains unclear.

Antonia Moras is the editor of the Alaska Justice Forum.

Alaska Justice Forum
Justice Center
University of Alaska Anchorage
3211 Providence Drive
Anchorage, AK 99508

Non-Profit Organization
U.S. Postage
PAID
Anchorage, Alaska
Permit No. 107

Address correction requested.