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The High Point West End Initiative:

A New Strategy to Reduce
Drug-Related Crime

by *Don Kidd*

For three months, police investigated more than 20 drug dealers operating in the West End neighborhood of High Point, North Carolina, where crack cocaine was openly sold on the street and in houses. Police made dozens of undercover buys and videotaped many other drug purchases.¹

They also did something unusual. They determined the “influentials” in the dealers’ lives—mothers, grandmothers, and 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.²

In May 2004, after accumulating evidence in the West End, Police Chief James Fealy invited the suspected drug dealers to a meeting at the police station with a promise they would not be arrested. Encouraged by their “influentials,” they 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.”³



Then the alleged dealers moved to a second room where they encountered several law enforcement officials: police, a prosecuting attorney, an assistant United States Attorney, and representatives of the Drug Enforcement Administration, the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms, and others. Around the room hung poster-size photographs 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.⁴

The law enforcement officials made an ultimatum: stop dealing or go to jail. The prosecuting attorney promised to seek the maximum possible sentences, and the assistant United States 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.

After these meetings, the West End street drug market closed “overnight” and hasn’t reopened in more than two years, according to Chief Fealy, who was shocked at the success.

The High Point Police Department worked with Professor David Kennedy, then of Harvard University but now with the John Jay College of Criminal Justice, to formulate the original plan. Professor Kennedy proposed a different approach to the problem: do your homework, focus on the street level dealers, make undercover buys to use as leverage, put them on notice, and give them alternatives.

Even though dealers engage in dangerous criminal activity, they are not irrational. If we craft a message and a structure around them that makes sense, they will respond. Most of them have learned from the Criminal Justice System that there are no real consequences for dealing drugs. If police, community members, and family join together to say this behavior is not acceptable, it can have a powerful impact.⁶


The action plan implemented by the High Point Police Department involved the following steps:

1.) Mapping: The focus area is identified by mapping crime data. A density map is created by overlaying all 911 calls, serious offenses reported (part 1 offenses), drug related calls, and field contacts by officers. The hot spots are then analyzed and the neighborhood to be targeted is selected.

2.) Mobilize Commitment of Community: A series of public meetings are scheduled in the target area to identify and inform the stakeholders in the community of the action plan. City Council members, the Mayor, and the City Manager are also briefed.

3.) Survey: Survey police officers, probation officers, vice officers, and community members to identify persons actively involved with street dealing in the focus area.

4.) Identification: A list of offenders is created from the surveys. Exact locations involved with dealing are compiled.



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5.) Incident Review: Vice/Narcotics detectives conduct a complete incident review of all offenders. All reports, contacts with police and intelligence are examined. The list of offenders is refined to include only the street dealers based on the review. A final list is approved.

6.) Undercover Investigation: Each location and offender is investigated. Drug houses are photographed. Undercover purchases are made from individuals. Each buy is videotaped with audio. The investigation requires only a judge’s signature to make the arrest.

7.) Contact with the Offender’s Family: Small groups of officers, community members, and ministers visit immediate family members of the offenders. The team explains the goal and invites the family to join in asking the offender to quit. Family members are encouraged to attend the call-in with the offenders. A letter from the Chief inviting the offenders to the call-in and promising they will not be arrested that night is delivered.

8.) The Call-In: Face-to-face call-in with offenders, law enforcement, and community. The face-to-face meeting with the offenders takes away their anonymity. First, the community groups offer help. Second, law enforcement delivers a two-pronged message that street drug dealing

and violence will no longer be tolerated, and offenders are hereby put on notice.

9.) **Deadline:** The offenders are given a deadline to quit. The deadline is three days after the call-in. Those who do not come to the call-in will be personally visited. The strategy is to warn, allow the escape from, and prevent the return to drug dealing. Officers and the community then carefully watch for the first sign of drug dealing.

10.) **Enforcement:** Any reports of drug dealing are immediately investigated. Any reports involving an offender who was called in result in the warrants being signed and their arrest.

11.) **Follow-up:** Follow-up contact is made with offenders about one month later to see if they are getting the help they need. Community members are encouraged to keep in contact with those notified through phone calls or visits. Newsletters to the community contain information of arrests or success stories. Officers attend community watches in the area and maintain the lines of communication.⁶

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.⁷ There have been no homicides, rapes, or gun assaults reported in the West End since the May 18, 2004, call-in.⁸ The program continues to significantly impact the crime rates in High Point, North Carolina.⁹

After the May 18th notification session, ministers in the West End noticed dramatic changes in crime, drug, and other activities. Open-air drug sales and prostitution appeared to be diminishing in the area, and abandoned houses were no longer being used for illicit drug use or prostitution. One minister felt that as a result of the initiative, people within the West End area felt safer and are beginning to come out of their homes.

This year, 35 children signed up for vacation Bible school at the English Road Baptist Church, whereas only a handful participated last year. Many of the children walked from their homes to the church each day, stating that they felt it would be safe to walk down the street

without worry of harassment or harm.¹⁰ High Point officers felt that the most significant result of the initiative was the decline in the fear of crime. Officers noticed more residents sitting on their porch, walking in the neighborhood, and using the park.¹¹

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. For them, police try to implement a community-wide intervention, choreographed to send three clear messages: if they return to dealing, they will go to jail; their community will help them turn their lives around; and the police and community are working together to combat dealing.¹²

Police in neighboring Winston-Salem, North Carolina, as well as Newburgh, New York, 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, Arizona, Providence, Rhode Island, and Kansas City, Missouri, are gearing up to try it.

Not everyone agrees with the initiative. "Why not slam them from the beginning and forget this foolishness?" says Karen Richards, county prosecutor in the Fort Wayne, Indiana, 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.¹³

Peter Reuter, who co-authored the book *An Analytic Assessment of U.S. Drug Policy*, states that American drug policy is characterized by a commitment to tough law enforcement at the local, state, and federal levels. Whereas in 1980, on any given day, fewer than 50,000 individuals were incarcerated in local, state, or federal prisons for drug offenses, by 2003 there were about 450,000 behind bars.

It is very difficult, however, to find evidence that this toughness has made a major difference. Cocaine and heroin are no harder to obtain than they used to be, and their prices have fallen for twenty-five years. A pure

gram of cocaine that cost \$500 in 1980 now costs probably only \$100 (in constant dollars).¹⁴

With city and county jails full and state and federal prisons incarcerating large numbers of individuals for drug violations, law enforcement must look to additional tools in the war on drugs. The High Point West End Initiative may or may not be the answer. It does, however, provide food for thought.

1 Mark Schoofs, Novel Police Tactic Puts Drug Markets Out of Business, Wall Street Journal, September 27, 2006, A1

2 Mark Schoofs, Novel Police Tactic Puts Drug Markets Out of Business, supra.

3 Mark Schoofs, Novel Police Tactic Puts Drug Markets Out of Business, supra at A1, A16.

4 Mark Schoofs, Novel Police Tactic Puts Drug Markets Out of Business, supra at A16.

5 High Point, North Carolina Police Department. High Point West End Initiative: A Data-Driven, Police & Community Part-

nership Strategy to Reduce Drug-Related Crime and Violence. (2006)

6 High Point North Carolina Police Department, High Point West End Initiative, supra.

7 Mark Schoofs, Novel Police Tactics Put Drug Markets Out of Business, supra at A16.

8 High Point North Carolina Police Department, High Point West End Initiative, supra.

9 Telephone Interview with Dr. Eleazer D. Hunt, High Point Police Department, High Point, North Carolina. (October 19, 2006).

10 James M. Frabutt, et al, High Point West End Initiative. Project Description, Log, and Preliminary Impact Analysis. University of North Carolina at Greensboro. (July, 2004)

11 High Point, North Carolina Police Department. High Point West End Initiative, supra.

12 Mark Schoofs, Novel Police Tactic Puts Drug Markets Out of Business, supra, A16.

13 Mark Schoofs, Novel Police Tactic Puts Drug Markets Out of Business, supra A16.

14 Peter Reuter, An Analytic Assessment of U.S. Drug Policy, American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy, Press Release. (April 14, 2005).



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