
Winton Hills Teen Violence Prevention in Cincinnati, Ohio¹

Presenter:

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Background

In 1991 the mayor established the Youth Steering Committee which was composed of Directors from the Recreation Commission, the Department of Health and Safety-the Employment, Training, and Human Services Divisions-and members from the Citizens' Committee on Youth and the Cincinnati Human Relations Commission. The Committee launched an agenda of extensive planning and research to develop a coordinated system of services to deal with youth issues in Cincinnati. The mayor felt that a coordinated plan of action was needed to help avoid serious and widespread incidents of violence that were occurring in Cincinnati.

The Committee identified the root cause of the detrimental behavior of youth ages 13-21 as historical disenfranchisement, poverty, discrimination, inadequate education and skill levels, damaged self-esteem, and thwarted aspirations. More adequate healthcare, education opportunities, improved economic development of communities, better delivery of human services, and fairer treatment in the criminal justice and legal systems were identified as areas where services and approaches needed to be improved.

Back on the Block Program

To help bring about improvement in the situation for young people, the Committee encouraged

representatives of communities and existing service agencies to engage in a "process of closing the gaps in service delivery and improving the negative conditions of the urban population." The Youth Steering Committee determined that a program to take services to the streets and decentralize control away from city hall was needed. *Back on the Block* (BOB) was a ten-week summer program, but its initial success led to year-round implementation as funds became available.

Twelve of the 52 neighborhoods in the city were targeted for attention based on their high levels of poverty, number of single heads of household, and incidence of crime. To achieve the goals of the program, the Youth Steering Committee which was chaired by the Director of the Recreation Commission recommended that several structural elements be put in place, including establishing lead agencies, community oriented policing, community youth support teams, community relations monitors, recreation programs, and a summer youth employment program.

Lead Agencies

A *lead agency* was designated from existing social service organizations that operated in each targeted community. These agencies were charged with bringing together all social service agencies, community groups, and interested citizens to address at-risk youth needs. A list of lead agencies and their

¹ Material is taken edited by Witt, P.A., & Crompton, J.L. (Eds.). (1996). *Recreation programs that work for at-risk youth: The challenge of shaping the future*. State College, PA: Venture Publishing, Inc.

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target communities is shown in Exhibit 10A. The responsibilities of each lead agency are to:

- convene regular meetings (at least once a week) to disseminate information and identify “hot spots;”
- manage the process of neighborhood collaboration;
- identify neighborhood projects and/or services for youth;
- develop referral services for youth;
- identify and increase volunteer involvement; and
- identify families with problems, and work to secure needed services.

Each lead agency was also to distribute funds allocated for programs and activities within its targeted community. To assist lead agencies in the referral process, the Cincinnati Recreation Commission put together a “Social Service Directory,” which lists major services available in the community, e.g., drug and alcohol rehabilitation, day care, counseling, shelter, food and clothing support. Initially, the BOB operated during the summer period, and each lead agency was given \$5,000 from the United Way to help develop local services for youth.

Community-Oriented Policing

A second structural element, Community Oriented Policing (COP), was established by the police department. Neighborhood officers increased their contact with residents through foot patrols in the

neighborhoods and established direct communications with community leaders and businesses to help identify problem areas within each target community. The COP officers also participate in youth activities and BOB events.

Community Youth Support Teams

The city also established Community Youth Support Teams which consist of representatives of the Cincinnati Recreation Commission (CRC), the Cincinnati Human Relations Commission (CHRC), Citizens’ Committee on Youth (CCY), the United Way and Community Chest, social service agencies, COP officers, and community and youth representatives. A support team was assigned to each of five geographical areas. Each team has a supervisor who reports to the overall Youth Support Team Coordinator and the Coordinator reports directly to the CHRC/CCY Senior Staff Coordinators (see Exhibit 10B).

The Youth Support Teams work out of social service agency facilities, recreation centers, or youth service bureaus. Youth Support Teams operate 32 hours per week on a flexible schedule depending on the needs of the community. The primary duties of the Youth Support Teams are to:

- (a) act as a liaison between lead agencies, community councils, youth and social service agencies, neighborhood residents, and COP officers;
- (b) provide referrals to various social service agencies for at-risk youth who need assistance; and

Exhibit 10A

List of Target Communities and Lead Agencies

<i>Target Communities :</i>	<i>Lead Agencies:</i>
Heinold	Cincinnati Union Bethel
Winton Hills	Cincinnati Union Bethel/Terrace Guild
Bond Hill	Coalition of Neighborhoods
Over-the-Rhine	Emanuel Community Center
Evanston	Human Involvement Project
Lower Price Hill	Santa Maria Community Services
West End	Seven Hills Neighborhood Houses
South Fairmont	Urban Appalachian Council
Avondale	Victory Neighborhood Services
Walnut Hills	Victory Neighborhood Services
Northside	Working in the Neighborhoods
Madisonville	YMCA Madisonville Branch

(c) monitor community events and recreation services.

(d) tennis programs, which include Arthur Ashe's National Junior Tennis Program, and a special urban tennis camp.

Community Relations Monitors and Crisis Response Teams

A fourth structural element was the establishment of Community Relations Monitors (CRMs) and Crisis Response Teams. Monitors are trained in conflict resolution, mediation and other community involvement skills. The CRM Teams respond at the request of a social service organization or the police to monitor events and to help diffuse explosive situations. The effort is designed to keep situations from escalating and avoid formal involvement of the police. As a backup, a Crisis Response Team comprised of experts from a variety of agencies, was formed to respond to particularly critical incidents.

Expanded Recreation Programs

The Recreation Commission expanded its programs in the targeted areas to include:

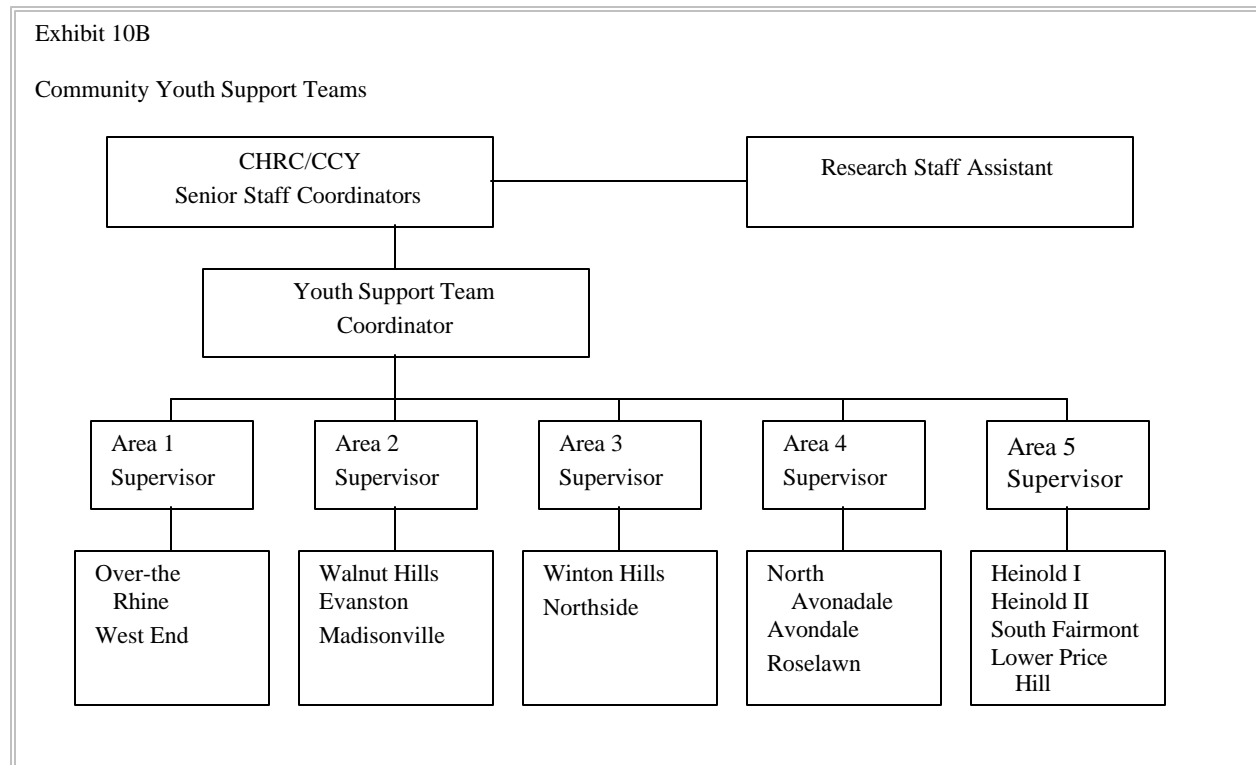
- (a) mayor's summer concerts which feature young local talent, but also have headliners;
- (b) expanded hours at the recreation centers;
- (c) neighborhood basketball shoot out (three-on-three) in 30 locations which attracts 3,000 participants; and

Youth Employment

A Summer Youth Employment Program was established under the sponsorship of the Citizens' Committee on Youth and Youth Employment Services (YES). Through their efforts, approximately 2,500 youth find summer jobs during the summer. In addition, the Recreation Commission has an extensive aquatic training program to train at-risk youth as lifeguards and also hires at-risk youth to work in the recreation centers. An overview of how these structured entities interrelate is shown in Exhibit 10C, page 118. The police division is shown on the chart as the last line of defense to which the city can turn if everything else fails.

The Winton Hills Program

Fortunately, the intricate system of coordinated service agencies and response teams was in place when a crisis emerged in Winton Hills. The area was the scene of a massive drug raid led by the FBI in July 1992. The tensions and problems were exacerbated when, on January 4, 1993, three men jumped from a van and gunned down a 20-year-old at a crowded intersection. A newspaper reporter and



photographer were shot at on January 5 while investigating the shooting. These highly visible incidents and the day-to-day violence and drug dealing galvanized the community and city leaders to address the problems of the Winton Hills community.

The Winton Hills community is composed of three distinct neighborhoods containing public housing units managed by a metropolitan housing authority. The community is plagued by the common problems of violence associated with poor living conditions, poverty, drugs, and loss of hope among the residents. It is composed of approximately 6,800 residents (88% African American) with almost 70% below the poverty level. Forty-five percent of the family units are headed by single parents with children less than four years old.

Immediately following the shooting incidents, the Mayor of Cincinnati called a community meeting in the Winton Hills Community Center, operated by the Cincinnati Recreation Commission, to hear the concerns and recommendations of community residents related to the violence issues. As an outgrowth of that meeting, the City Council took immediate action to provide a \$50,000, one-time emergency grant to the Recreation Commission to establish recreation programs which would alleviate the impact of the ongoing street violence in the community.

Objectives

Objectives of the Recreation Commission’s Winton Hills program were:

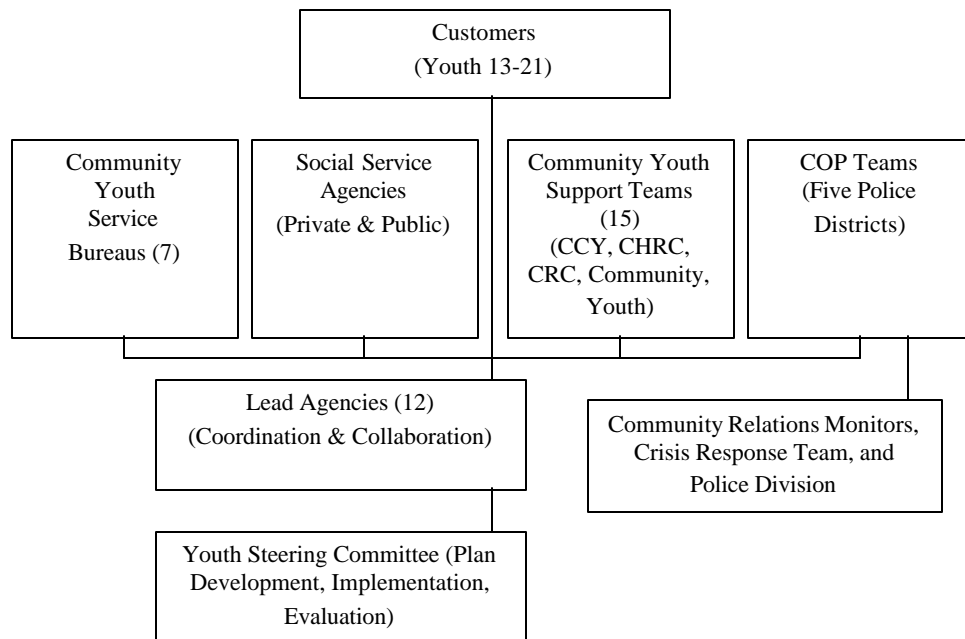
- (1) through a grass-roots collaborative process identify specific recreation and social-service type programs desired by community residents, with an emphasis on services to teens and young adults;
- (2) as part of this collaborative effort, identify and bring to the table all individuals, agencies, city departments, and private supporters to address the problems and to arrive at solutions; and
- (3) utilize the one-time funding allocation to provide programs and services not currently offered at the community center.

Key Players

Under the leadership of the Director of Recreation, a series of consensus building sessions were held at the Winton Hills Community Center which included community council representatives, teenagers, volunteers, United Way funded agencies, the Police Division, the Health Department, the Citizen’s Committee on Youth, the Human Services

Exhibit 10 C

An overview of the structural elements charged with servicing the needs of at-risk youth



Department, the Cincinnati Human Relations Commission, Recreation Commission staff, sports associations, churches, and the Metropolitan Housing Authority, among others. After three meetings, a plan of action evolved that used the recreation center as the focal point for recreational, educational and social services for youth and young adults in the community. The plan called for tutoring, drug awareness and increased athletic programs, expanded weekend center hours, midnight basketball programs, drill teams, girls' sports, boxing, educational field trips, sewing classes, and other activities.

Program Content

The target population of the project included the youth and young adults ages 13-21. The recreation center was the focal part of many of the planned programs. The center consists of a major gymnasium, an indoor roller-skating rink, a fitness room, arts and crafts room, multipurpose room and a room allocated for tutoring which incorporates a resource library.

The consensus building process resulted in allocating the \$50,000 grant to fund expanded weekend operating hours, girls' basketball programs including a skills development camp, registration fees for youth football teams, a community reunion and block party, midnight basketball programs, a girls' drill team with uniforms, field trips, sewing program, boxing, skating parties, drug awareness, tutoring programs and self-enhancement programs. A fitness room was developed in what was formerly a large storage room. An ongoing program entitled Future Leaders, which was designed to create greater self-esteem among the community teens, received much needed audiovisual equipment.

Social service agencies contributed staff and volunteers to either specifically conduct programs such as drug awareness and tutoring, or to augment the efforts of community center staff. The Health Department of the city provided self-awareness programs.

The Cincinnati Metropolitan Housing Authority partnered with the Recreation Commission to sponsor a 20-week midnight basketball program for teens and young adults which averages 350 participants on Friday and Saturday evenings. The Police Department stepped up its Community Oriented Policing efforts in the community with officers walking the beat, visiting the recreation center and generally creating a more positive bond with community residents.

Finally, volunteer residents played a key role in recruiting and linking young people with the community center staff and volunteer leaders. Their

leadership resulted in an enhanced level of trust between loosely knit gangs. Adult volunteers acted as point people in informing the community about the variety of program opportunities available at the center.

Program Outcomes

The one-time infusion of \$50,000 was leveraged with volunteer contributions, enhancements of existing programs, federal grants (for programs like midnight basketball), foundation funding and social agency efforts, so that approximately \$100,000 worth of program services could be delivered. Agencies focused on the mission as opposed to "who gets the credit." Ron Chase, Director of the Recreation Commission, stated:

Don't worry about who takes the credit. That's a bottom line. The one thing I have been trying to tear down, even in our own Department, is this idea that we have to take credit for things when they occur. I'd rather give credit, quite frankly, to other agencies that come on board and work with us because that encourages them to cooperate.... We all know intrinsically we've had success, even though we can't specifically measure it. The neighborhoods help us tremendously because they come out at budget time in a big way and yell and scream at the city council when they think about cutting our budget.

An immeasurable but obvious outcome of this program was the cooperative and collaborative spirit which emanated from the program effort. This remains an integral part of the service delivery system within the Winton Hills community.

According to police statistics, a crime reduction of 31% occurred within the first six months of implementing the prevention programs. Incidents of crime in the Winton Hills community dropped from 174 in the first six months of 1992 to 119 incidents in the first six months of 1993. An additional \$30,000 operating funds was allocated by the Recreation Commission as a direct result of the crime prevention program.

The total involvement of community representatives, social service agencies, and various city departments working in concert with police officers assigned to the Winton Hills community has resulted in a successful process of taking back the community from the drug dealers and the criminal element who previously had the residents living in fear and with little hope for the future.