Police departments throughout the nation approach different strategies and plans to keep their city, town or state as safe as can be. One strategy in particular that many police departments use is community policing. This term can be best described as a philosophy that promotes organizational strategies, which support the systematic use of partnerships and problem-solving techniques, to proactively address the immediate conditions that give rise to public safety issues such as crime, social disorder, and fear of crime. (U.S. Department of Justice, 2012) This strategy aims to reduce crime and fear while restoring a sense of order within a community as well as rebuilding the bond between citizens and the police. Many years ago, people would actually police their communities along with the police itself. (Eggers, W. D., & O'Leary, J., 1995) Many viewed the police officers as helping the community instead of, as we see it today, where the police help us. Community policing is comprised of three main components including community partnerships, organizational transformation, and problem solving, in which all three play a huge role in making this strategy very essential for police.

Ever since the 19th Century, community policing has been an essential part of contemporary policing. Many find it to be a philosophy or concept but to this day, community policing is defined as a strategy that promotes partnership between the people and the police. (Donnelly, 2006) The first component of community policing is community “partnerships.” This is what makes community policing work because this is the bond the law enforcement agency makes with the individual or organization. According to Jon Shane’s article on community policing, experts refer to the partnership as the glue of community policing. The glue comes about when there is a mutual trust and active community involvement. (Shane, J.M, 2007) This bond or partnership serves to develop solutions to any problems that might arise, and this increases the trust in the police. Without having trust, this strategy would never be able to serve its purpose. Since the police would never be able to solve crimes on their own, these partnerships are highly relied upon. The next key component within community policing is organizational transformation. This is the alignment of organizational management, structure, personnel, and information systems to support community partnerships and proactive problem-solving efforts. (U.S. Department of Justice, 2012) Community policing focuses on the way law enforcement agencies are organized and managed since they will need to change to support this strategy. Within this component, the police department needs to infuse the ideas of the community throughout the agency itself. Organizational structure is very important in community policing because it ensures that police officers are able to make decisions and are accountable for their decisions they choose to fulfill. Within structure, the geographical assignment of police officers will change. When a community brings about a problem in a specific area, more police officers will be designated there. This is key because when the community sees this change in increased police, they will know that their views have been expressed and are being used.

The last component of community policing is problem solving. This is the proactive examination of identified problems to develop and evaluate responses. (U.S. Department of Justice, 2012) When a crime is committed, the police respond and create a report. By being proactive, community policing encourages agencies to develop solutions to the immediate conditions contributing to the problem. SARA, which stands for Scanning, Analysis, Response, and Assessment, is a great problem solving model law enforcement agencies can follow. Scanning identifies the problem as well as determining the seriousness of the problem. Analysis researches the problem to give a better understanding of what it really is. Response is when solutions are made to either get rid of the problem as a whole or reduce it. Last is Assessment, which is the evaluation of the response to see if it worked, or not. By following this model, problem solving can be done in an organized fashion to keep community policing as a great strategy.

One law enforcement agency that practices community policing is the New York City Police Department. The NYC Police Department uses this strategy to allow the community to be a part of their agency and to figure out problems in the community. The Precinct Community Councils are forums that provide an ongoing and direct communication between the police and the community. This council was established in the 1940’s and is used to this day. What it does is it allows community members to meet regularly with the precinct Commanding Officer and Community Affairs Officers to discuss and find solutions to public safety problems in their neighborhoods. (Community Affairs, 2012) This is the partnership that is needed to fulfill community policing. There is a meeting held each month and the community’s attendance and participation is highly encouraged. A program the NYC Police Department created to help with community policing is the Civilian Observation Patrol (C.O.P.). The mission of this program is to enhance the quality of life in NYC by reporting suspicious activity, to preserve the peace, reduce fear and to maintain a safe environment to live in. This is a perfect example of community policing because within this program, responsible civilians patrol their own communities and report any problems or suspicious activities to the police. In our second class, we learned about how in the 1970’s many feared the subway because of crime. If community policing was around, I feel many could have felt safer if they were in contact with the police on a regular basis. By reporting incidents, crimes, and any other conditions, this helps in deterring crime and promoting neighborhood safety and security. (Community Affairs, 2012)

One program the New York City Police Department offers is the ride-along program. This program offers individuals 18 years of age the opportunity to observe police officers on patrol. The individual rides along with a uniformed officer for approximately two to four hours to witness firsthand what a police officer sees on duty. (Community Affairs, 2012) By allowing individuals to ride along with the police officer, they can get a good perspective on what is really going on and they can help by looking out for what they might see from this experience. This program definitely shows how community policing is a big aspect in the law enforcement agency. The NYC Police Department not only allows you to ride along but you are also given a bullet resistant vest. This experience will allow the individual to help out and be a part of the police department by being an active community member.

In a fairly recent news article, the NYC Police Department is shown to have taken part in a new program to reduce crime. Community affairs officers in Brooklyn created a plan where officers will take pictures of individual’s cars and homes. They will then send the pictures to the owners to notify them of valuables they can be easily stolen from their car as well as unlocked doors to their homes. This new plan is aimed towards stopping crime before it can be committed which is said to be “clever” by one individual in the community. (Harshbarger, 2013) This neighborhood is known to be very safe and members of the community can now get direct help from the police with a warning to not leave valuables in plain sight. In all, this new idea to benefit this community looks very promising and with the help, as well as cooperation from the community members, this neighborhood will be safer than ever.

As one can see, community policing is defined as the relationship between the police and the community. This relationship is used to learn about problems in the community and what can be done to solve them. The NYC Police Department is one law enforcement agency that has used this community policing strategy to their advantage by creating many programs to diminish crime. In all, community policing is one of the best strategies any law enforcement agency could use because of the fact that it allows individuals in the community to be united with the police who serve to protect them.

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