

Drug Market Intervention Initiative

The challenge of effectively responding to illegal drug markets and their associated crime, violence, and disorder has proven challenging for communities and law enforcement for decades. Recently, a strategic problem-solving approach has emerged and shown tremendous promise. Developed by David Kennedy and implemented by a multiagency team of local and federal law enforcement officials, neighborhood leaders, social service providers, and local government officials in High Point, North Carolina, the High Point West End Drug Market Initiative has drawn considerable interest and generated promising results in terms of enhanced community safety and quality of life.

As in many communities, officials in the High Point Police Department (HPPD) were frustrated with open-air drug markets and escalating crime rates. With the approval of the new Police Chief, HPPD set out to try a new approach. Based on the successes of the Boston Gun Project, later replicated in places like Indianapolis and Stockton, HPPD set out to implement a strategic, focused, data-driven problem-solving project aimed at permanently closing down drug markets. The High Point West End Initiative (HPWEI) produced an average decrease in crime of just over 36 percent over 2 years in that neighborhood. Interestingly, there appears to have been no displacement effect.¹

There are several key components of the HPWEI. First, it began with an assessment of the local drug market involving crime mapping and incident reviews to better understand the nature of the drug market and to map out the individuals involved in drug sales, purchases, and distribution networks. Having determined that a relatively small group of chronic offenders were responsible for the drug market and much of its associated crime and violence, local officials decided that a “lever-pulling” strategy based on notions of focused deterrence would be appropriate given the nature of the local drug market program. They then conducted a traditional drug enforcement operation involving undercover buys. Cases were built against the key players. Warrants and arrests were executed upon those key individuals believed to be “major players” and involved in violent crime. The operation then moved from a traditional drug enforcement stage to an innovative problem-solving stage. Rather than arresting all those eligible, the task force invited the drug market offenders and their significant family members to a community meeting. At the meeting, law enforcement and prosecution officials explained the cases that had been built against the individuals in attendance. Community members told of their frustration of living in an open drug market environment. The law enforcement officials made a promise to the offenders: their charges would be held in abeyance as long two conditions were fulfilled: (1) the drug market must end immediately (and not move elsewhere), and (2) the violence associated with the market must end immediately. Violations of these conditions would result in warrants being served with the intention that the individuals would serve long sentences for cases that had already been developed.

This deterrence-based message was also coupled with an attempt to link the offenders to a broad array of services. Social service and related social support resources were presented with opportunities for one-to-one connections with the service providers. Family members were provided an opportunity to talk with most providers to express their concerns over the well-being of their children; their desire that the children remain free of drugs, violence, and prison; and their appreciation of providing their children with another opportunity.

As noted above, the initial reports from High Point, since repeated with another drug market, have been very encouraging. The drug markets were closed and remain closed, neighborhood crime and disorder declined significantly, and the community communicated high levels of support.

Key Steps of the High Point Drug Market Intervention Model

Step 1—Crime Mapping. Step 1 entails mapping data from several different sources to determine the focus area for the initiative. Data sources including 911 calls and calls for service, field contacts made by officers in the Narcotics Unit, and Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) Uniform Crime Reports (UCR)

¹A formal evaluation is currently in progress.

Part I crimes focusing on those crimes involving drugs, weapons, and sex/prostitution are utilized to identify drug market targets. "Drug buy" locations are then layered within that neighborhood.

Step 2—Survey. This step involves surveying law enforcement officers, probation officers, vice officers, and community members in the target area about area drug dealers, who they are, and where they live.

Step 3—Incident Review. An incident review based on individuals identified in Step 2 is then conducted with vice and narcotics officers and officers who work in the target area. The list of drug dealers is refined to include only those street dealers who are still active in the target area. Important questions to be answered include: Is the dealer a street-level or mid-level dealer? Does he or she have a history of violence? Does he or she have any pending charges?

Step 4—Undercover Operations. Once specific people are identified, an enforcement operation involving undercover officers making buys, sending in confidential informants to make buys, audio-taping, video-taping, and taking photographs will be implemented to build cases against the drug dealers.

Step 5—Mobilize the Community. As the enforcement operation is occurring, efforts are made to mobilize key community leaders. This involves securing the support of community leaders, enlisting their involvement, and mobilizing resources for potential offenders.

Step 6—Contact with the offender's family. While Steps 5 and 6 are occurring, law enforcement officers spend time identifying "influential" people in each targeted offender's life. This would naturally be family but could also be friends, spiritual advisors, or other non-family members. Then, a small group of police officers, community members, and clergy pay a visit to the immediate family or other influential people and explain the goals of the initiative, invite them to participate in asking the offender to quit doing what they are doing, and encourage the family to attend the Call-In Meeting (see Step 7). Also during this step, letters from the Chief of Police are mailed to the targeted offenders that inform the offender that the police are aware of their street-level drug dealing and that this behavior has to stop. The offender is invited to a meeting (i.e., the Call-In). In addition, the letter will suggest that the offender bring someone who is important to them with them to the meeting.

Step 7—Call-In/Notification. The Call-In/Notification is a face-to-face meeting between the offenders, the community, and law enforcement. The meeting occurs at the district headquarters in which the target area falls (some communities use other locations). At these meetings, the results of all the undercover work by police are displayed, including pictures of the drugs dealers and drug deals in progress and of the houses and street corners where these transactions are taking place. The police will have compiled a notebook about each offender, which is displayed. Each notebook contains the information the police have about that offender and their drug dealing habits and, importantly, an unsigned arrest warrant for that offender. During the Call-In, the police will deliver a very strong two-pronged message. First, drug dealing and violence will no longer be tolerated in the target area. Second, each of the offenders will be put on "official notice." If they continue the illegal activity, they will be arrested and prosecuted. If they stop, they will be given a second chance.

Just as important as the law enforcement message is the community message: community members will convey that they find the offender's behavior unacceptable; however, they are offering help in the form of community resources to those that want it. This will include drug treatment, education, job training, gainful employment, help with family issues, and transportation.

Step 8—Enforcement. While the Call-In is seen as very important and the climax of a lot of hard work, what happens after the meeting is also very important. The police and the community watch for any signs of continued street-level drug dealing in the target area. The police continue to try to make buys in the area and continue to send in confidential informants into confirmed drug locations. The residents are encouraged to call the police and their calls are given priority (e.g., in High Point the residents were given a special phone number to call to report drug activity). Any reports of drug dealing will be immediately investigated by police and additional narcotics officers will be assigned to the area (using overtime money). Complaints involving a notified offender will result in a judge signing his or her arrest warrant and

ultimately execution of his or her arrest. Finally, the prosecutor's office assigns one assistant district attorney to these cases, and they will be given "special" treatment by the prosecutor's office.

Step 9—Follow up. A resource coordinator contacts the notified offenders to determine if they are getting the help they need. Mentors are assigned to the notified offenders and community members are encouraged to keep in touch with them through phone calls and visits. The police department distributes newsletters and flyers containing information about the targeted drug dealers who have been arrested as well as those that chose a different path. Officers continue to attend community meetings in the area to maintain the lines of communication. The follow-up also includes close monitoring of the crime data with continual feedback from the research partners.

This BJA initiative consists of a continuum of three trainings for eight Project Safe Neighborhoods (PSN) sites. Each site team is comprised of a law enforcement official, a local prosecutor, a community member, and a social service provider. Each team will receive a site visit from a BJA technical assistance provider along with ongoing support to assist local teams adapt the DMI model to their unique local context. National partners will also develop a training manual that interested jurisdictions can use to implement DMI locally.

The eight sites invited to the trainings are:

*Baltimore, MD
Dallas County, TX
Chicago, IL
New Haven, CT
Milwaukee, WI
Cook County, IL
Indianapolis, IN
Durham, NC*