

LOCKHART

The Lockhart neighborhood in unincorporated Seminole County, Florida, has developed a crack cocaine problem that exists in many other that are similar in demographics. When a resident completes his/her education and obtains a job with a promising future, one of the first things to occur is to move out of the Lockhart community. The indicators of the problems that co-exist with open air crack dealing (signs of neighborhood decay and social disorder) are commonly seen on many of the corners in Lockhart.

The typical Lockhart resident is a hardworking, law abiding individual. A small segment of the population was involved in the street sales of crack. As we see over and over, this small portion was the loudest and most visible. They marked their area with litter, loud music, gunfire and the other signs of social disorder and neighborhood decay that usually accompany their criminal lifestyle. Drug buyers were often the victims of shootings due to thefts, arguments, etc. Just as likely, a neighborhood resident could be struck by a random shot. Erratic driving was commonplace in the area from either buyers or dealers. Parents were unwilling to allow their children to play in the front yards due to the constant potential of a vehicular crash.

Crack abusers who were in advanced stages of their addiction were committing crimes to support their habit. Some of their crimes were committed in Lockhart. As a result of

the actions of the crack dealers, the average resident of the community felt trapped in his/her home but also feared for the safety of their property while at work.

One intersection[^] in particular was noted as a standout in the list of problem intersections. That corner was inhabited all hours of the day and night by subjects who were selling crack cocaine. The house located on the corner of Strickland Avenue and 20th Street was occupied by a subject who was known to drug agents. Although he was addicted to the use of crack cocaine he was not involved in the sale of crack due to the fact that his addiction was advanced to the point that no one would trust him with any crack to sell. Any crack he received would be smoked, not sold.

When a crack dealer completed a sale, he/she would return to the interior of the residence at Strickland and 20th. By doing that, the dealers were able to operate with more freedom from law enforcement. Uniform patrol officers were unable to move the dealers from loitering on the corner with the ability for the dealers to hide in the house.

Undercover purchases of crack were very difficult in this area. The crack cocaine problem in Lockhart has become deeply entrenched with the passage of time. More and more, the dealers have built up a steady clientele of customers. Users are seen driving around in the neighborhood looking for a specific dealer. They are reluctant to buy from strangers for the fear of being "ripped off." These relationships create a situation where most of the dealers simply will not sell to strangers. This makes it difficult for an undercover agent to make a purchase. With the high level of violence

offender

that this neighborhood is known for makes it unlikely that defendant informants are willing to work with undercover agents to make introductions to dealers.

Another factor that enters the scene is the dramatic increase in the number of buyers who are indigenous to Lockhart. Obviously, someone who has lived in the neighborhood for years and is known to the dealer does not represent a threat of incarceration to the dealer.

Lockhart is somewhat isolated geographically. It is not located on a road that is used for general purpose traffic. People driving through Lockhart have a destination in Lockhart or one of the contiguous neighborhoods. This factor is included in the reasons that reduce the ability of an undercover agent making street level purchases. It is not one of the areas that experiences a significant number of first-time buyers.

Most of the dealers have enough business to keep them busy and fairly satisfied with their income. Undercover street purchases of crack cocaine are disproportionately lower in Lockhart than they are in other neighborhoods that are demographically similar.

When an arrest was made for the sale or possession of crack cocaine at Strickland and 20th Street, the defendant was a Lockhart resident. Upon release from incarceration, they went home and returned to the only source of income they knew; crack cocaine sales. Most of the arrestees were either juveniles or young first offenders. They

received no incarceration for their crime and were released to their families. As is often typical of problems that are as deeply entrenched as this one was, arrest was only one of the options, not the sole solution to the problems.

This series of complaints were assigned to Agent Tony Fannin. He was selected for this for several reasons not the least of which was his success in Lockhart in a Community Policing experiment a few years prior to his assignment to the drug unit. He knew many of the problem residents of the area including the person who lived in the house at Strickland and 20th Street, but more importantly, he knew most of the good residents of the area. He started with the knowledge of who was willing and able to assist him.

SCANNING

Agent Fannin was able to determine that the people using the house at Strickland and 20th Street were definitely a problem for the neighborhood. Not only did they directly impact the quality of life for the residents of the neighborhood with the commission of the crime of sale of crack but also with their acts that created the neighborhood decay and social disorder.

ANALYSIS

Using property tax information, Agent Fannin was able to identify the property owner. She lived in New Jersey and received the property via wills. When Agent Fannin described the problem to her, she was distraught about it. She said that although she was an absentee owner of the property, she still had family and friends in the area and deeply felt an obligation to them to do whatever was required to be part of the solution to the problem. In fact, she owned a total of three contiguous lots on which there were four rental residences. This included the infamous residence at Strickland and 20th Street.

RESPONSE

During his conversations with the property owner, Agent Fannin realized that she was willing to dispose of the property at no profit to eradicate the problem at that location. From his prior contact with the neighborhood, Agent Fannin was familiar with the minister of a church whose property backed up to the three lots in question. Upon contacting the minister Agent Fannin learned that the church was in need of more parking space. Agent Fannin got the need and the resource together; that is, the minister and the property owner. That telephonic meeting resulted in the church buying the property at a very low price. The property owner was not only glad to get rid of the problem but was also happy to be able to help the church.

This created another problem. The resident at the house at Strickland and 20th Street refused to vacate the house willingly. Agent Fannin then walked the minister through the formal eviction process. Certainly, the minister could have done that by himself however, since Agent Fannin knew exactly with whom to deal in the government much time was shaved off the process. Agent Fannin served the requisite notices himself, again saving time. As each of the four houses was emptied of its inhabitants, officers removed the doors from the buildings. This prevented squatters from moving into the buildings overnight as had happened in other buildings in the neighborhood. Agent Fannin received written authorization from the new land owner, the minister, to order any trespasser from the property. Their refusal to leave or their return would result in their immediate arrest. Copies of that authorization was provided to all uniform patrol officers who were assigned to that area. Agent Fannin made personal contact with many of them and kept them aware of his goals and enlisted their assistance.

The resident at the house at Strickland and 20th Street was the most resistant and last to leave. He contacted Legal Aid in an attempt to prevent his eviction and even went to the ACLU. While these actions would normally cause months of delay, with Agent Fannin staying on top of the situation on a daily basis only a few days were lost.

With the belated removal of the last resident, the four houses were empty. Realizing that this would only lead to future problems, Agent Fannin made arrangements to have the properties demolished. When he was in Community Policing Agent Fannin worked

with the County Building Department in establishing a protocol for the demolition of buildings that were labeled as "crack" houses. Agent Fannin then turned to those resources and made the arrangements to have the four houses demolished. A piece of heavy equipment and two large dump trucks were assigned the task of tearing down the buildings and removing the trash. Agent Fannin also obtained assistance from the local Correctional Facility in the form of several trustees.

The day of the scheduled demolition, the entire drug unit showed up to assist with the process. They were dressed in their raid gear, including masks. At noon all work stopped while everyone took part in enjoying a bar-b-que lunch that was provided by the church.

It took a total of two days to remove all the debris from the property. On the third day, a Sunday, the property was already being used by the church for parking.

ASSESSMENT

The specific problems that were caused by the residence at Strickland and 20th Street have been removed from that area. Certainly, some of the crack dealers were only displaced to other areas but the quality of life at this specific intersection has been dramatically improved. Certain studies such as the one in Tampa have indicated that displacement is an effective tool in combating street level drug sales. Although there

are no scientific data to prove this fact at Strickland and 20th Street, the number of calls for law enforcement service for offenses related to crack sales at that location have not only diminished^thje^have^disappeared. At the time of this writing, six weeks after the demolition, there have been no complaints similar to the ones that deluged the Sheriffs Office earlier. The drug unit keeps tabs on the area and continues to attempt "buys" in the area.

Agent Fannin approached an all too traditional problem and used a non-traditional application. Arrests were made on numerous occasions without stopping the problem. Law enforcement realized that some other approach was required. Through intelligent and diligent efforts, Agent Fannin was able to obtain the results desired by all, law enforcement as well as Lockhart residents.