

McMicken PATH Project

Executive Summary

The McMicken PATH (Persons Against the Trafficking of Humans) Project was an effort to reduce the number of women involved in the open air prostitution market located on McMicken Avenue, a street segment connecting two police districts in Cincinnati, Ohio.

Scan

The most prolific open air prostitution market in Cincinnati was located just two miles west of downtown Cincinnati. The area gained significant media attention following the murder of a young prostitute in January 2014. Her death highlighted the criminal activity longtime residents were dealing with on a daily basis.

Analysis

Officers identified women engaged in open air prostitution along the McMicken corridor through prior arrests as well as community engagement. Calls for service and place management practices were analyzed. Officers also analyzed the environment to better understand why McMicken Avenue was conducive to street prostitution. Officers believed the route was a matter of convenience and afforded a certain amount of anonymity due to the lack of guardianship found along the majority of the street. The feeling of anonymity and some despair was further strengthened by evidence such as graffiti, litter, and overgrown, abandoned and vacant homes and businesses.

Response

Officers initially conducted a high police visibility presence at specific target areas for fifteen minute patrols. Meanwhile, officers considered the feasibility of disrupting the traffic flow with the use of temporary street barricades. Officers partnered with Hamilton County court personnel to brainstorm ideas on more sustainable solutions for women caught in the revolving door of the justice system and help them succeed toward a life free from addiction. Additionally, officers instituted a “no recite” policy within the target area in an effort to afford the community the opportunity to reclaim their neighborhood.

Assessment

An analysis of calls for service pre and post demonstrated a 17 % decrease in prostitution related runs. The most interesting decrease in calls for service occurred during hours of targeted enforcement that included the “no recite” policy. Between Monday and Friday, 0800 to 1600, prostitution related calls for service decreased by 67%.

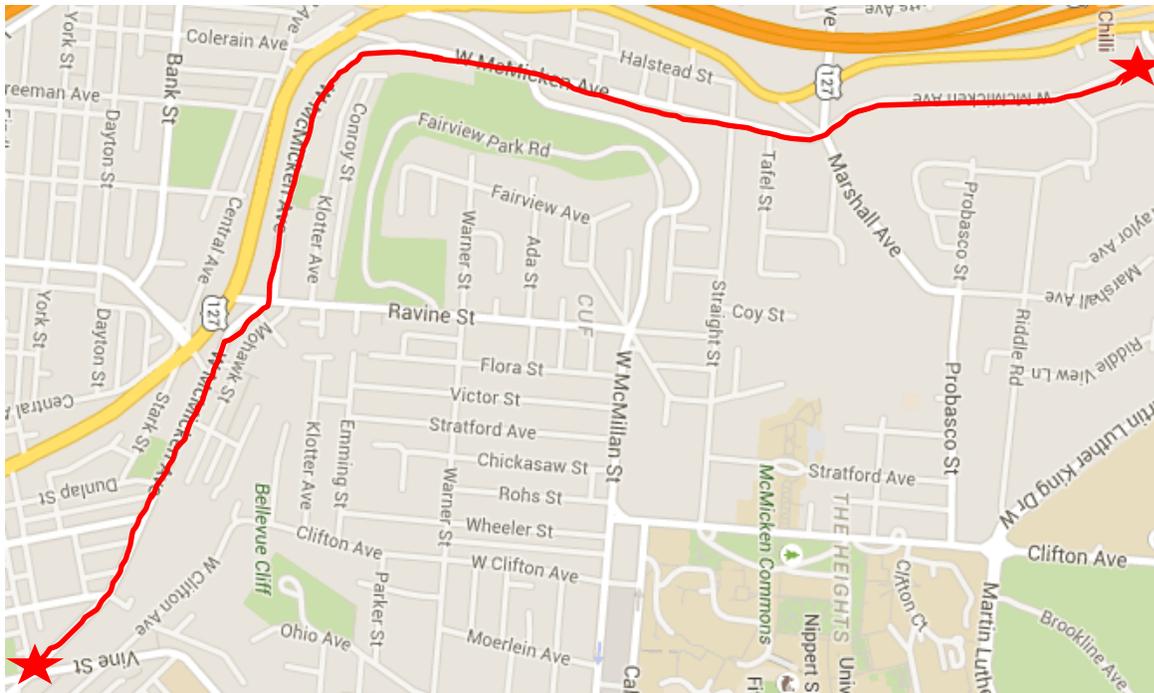
McMicken PATH Project

Scan

The Cincinnati Police Department has traditionally responded to complaints of open market prostitution by either dispatching officers to a scene or utilizing undercover officers acting as Johns to solicit women. In January 2014, the traditional response was no longer acceptable following the tragic murder of a young female with an extensive soliciting history. The incident occurred in the middle of a well-known open air prostitution market located within a 2.3 mile street segment on McMicken Avenue. This location was referred to locally as “McTricken.”



Until recently, one end of McMicken Avenue was home to a budget motel while the other end of the market stopped at the city’s dividing line between the east side and the west side of Cincinnati, Vine St. In the middle were long-time owner occupied residential housing, single family rental housing, numerous vacant buildings, and multi-family apartment complexes. However, a significant portion of McMicken was unguarded.



Between 2009 and 2013, officers responded to 1476 calls for service related to prostitution on or near McMicken Ave. There are no other street segments in Cincinnati where open air prostitution exists to the extreme degree it does on McMicken. This street became so well known for prostitution it was nicknamed “McTricken.” The catalyst for both the police and the community was the murder of Jessica Revelee on January 9, 2014, a twenty four year old female with an extensive criminal history of solicitation and drug charges. On the same day, the Cincinnati Police Department held a Town Hall meeting, unrelated to the murder, just one mile from the scene of Jessica’s murder. While the town hall meeting had been on the police chief’s agenda for weeks, the topic of prostitution was at the forefront and the community was looking for answers.

Analysis

Street prostitution on McMicken was not just a problem for police but also problematic for residents and business owners who call this area home. Long-time residents and community council members were strong advocates for the neighborhood and staunch supporters of the police department. But many times they felt their complaints were left unanswered and many neighbors stopped calling police about the problem. The routine activities theory helped police to better understand the criminogenic conditions that existed in the area. Officers armed with the knowledge that motivated offenders travel to the area to find available, suitable targets in an environment conducive for their criminal behavior. Because of the lack of guardianship observed by the officers, johns found the McMicken route afforded them anonymity and ease.

Officers analyzed the physical nature of the 2.3 mile stretch of McMicken Ave, home to the majority of calls to better understand the criminogenic nature of the area. The conditions which make this street segment popular among johns and prostitutes. Approximately 40% of the linear sidewalk footage lacks guardianship. This means either the building or the land that abuts the sidewalk is vacant or abandoned. At other locations, guardianship shifts throughout the course of the day as residents who work are away from their homes during daytime hours leave their space unguarded. Places of business provide some oversight during the day, but their locations are intermittently dispersed along the corridor.

Officers analyzed the overall aesthetic appearance of the McMicken corridor knowing property owners are responsible for the maintenance of their property despite a building's vacancy. A Crime Prevention through Environmental Design (CPTED) assessment was taken. In addition, residents who call this street home have a responsibility to maintain the neighborhood. The City of Cincinnati offers a customer service program accessible by telephone or online. The request

system provides customers a way to report quality of life issues that can be detrimental to a neighborhood if left alone. During the CPTED assessment, officers reported numerous instances of graffiti, litter, illegal dumping, and abandoned places found open. General observations included:

- trash and litter,
- illegal dumping,
- graffiti,
- tall grass and weeds,
- overgrown brush,
- overtime parkers,
- abandoned vehicles,
- a large park with no children playing in it,
- signs of sexual activity and drug use,
- a bootleg after-hours candy store,
- a bootleg daytime candy store inside an apartment,
- “abandominiums”,
- and goats.

Each one of these quality of life issues was reported through the customer service request system.

Officers identified comfort spaces for the women working on McMicken. Comfort spaces are locations where prostitutes can get something to eat, rest, use the restroom, or even spend the

night. Out of all of the women interviewed during this project only one had a home address on McMicken.

Officers analyzed the traffic pattern to better understand the ease at which customers were able to drive in and out.

Calls for service to police identified McMicken Street as the most prolific area for open air prostitution. There are other hot street segments within city limits where police are called to address prostitution complaints; however, no other street receives calls to the same degree as McMicken.

McMicken Ave Prostitution Calls for Service

<u>2009</u>	<u>2010</u>	<u>2011</u>	<u>2012</u>	<u>2013</u>	<u>2014</u>
218	323	616	211	108	164

Police analyzed their traditional response to women and men loitering to solicit. Those responses included enforcing laws prohibiting prostitution and solicitation by utilizing undercover police officers acting as either johns or prostitutes. The police also used civil penalties against offenders who used their registered vehicles in the commission of a prostitution offense. It has been obvious that the traditional response of picking up a woman who is soliciting in a target area has not been successful due to the rate of recidivism. Interestingly, an analysis of john arrests revealed zero repeat offenders. We are cautious to count this lack of john recidivism as a success. Due to the safety precautions practiced while conducting john arrests, the police believe men learn the difference when soliciting an undercover officer. A better measurement has been to analyze the number of john arrests in a target area over a specified time period.

Response

Following the town hall meeting, the commander of District 1, Captain Michael John, assigned two police officers to the McMicken Street corridor. The two officers selected were equipped with a significant level of experience and expertise between them. Specialist Nate Young, a twenty two year veteran of the police department, with eleven years in the Vice Section and Officer Katie Werner, a fifteen year veteran with eight years in the Problem Solving Unit were partnered to specifically address the prostitution problem. A foundation had already been laid by another CPD officer, Lisa Johnson, a Neighborhood Liaison Unit officer in District 5 who had dedicated almost five years to the trafficked women on McMicken Avenue.

The project goals included a decrease in the number of women walking McMicken for the purpose of loitering to solicit, an increase in calls for service related to prostitution from the community, women voluntarily entering CHANGE court, and a decrease in “john” traffic through the corridor.

Introductions

The first order of business for the newly partnered officers was to consult the Problem Oriented Policing Guide, *Street Prostitution* (Scott and Dedel, 2006) for guidance. The very first response was introductions. This included residents, business owners and employees, and numerous commuters who were either on foot or in vehicles. The beginning of the project started at the end of January with temperatures averaging close to 10 degrees Fahrenheit. Despite the cold weather, the officers made numerous contacts. Werner and Young introduced themselves to each and every person they observed walking on the target street. Even during the coldest temperatures, officers made contact with an average of three to four prostitutes a day. The majority of women

the officers met had similar stories and backgrounds. Most admitted to past or current prostitution activity on McMicken. All but one admitted to using heroin or crack. Most had already been through some type of rehabilitation or treatment program. None of the women were originally from the neighborhood and only one listed a current residence on McMicken Avenue. Many had children who were in the custody of another family member. A common theme that emerged as to reasons for staying in the area was that McMicken was comfortable and when given the choice, heroin wins. Many of the women told police that they could not be left to make their own decisions while addicted to heroin. And while none of them wanted to go to jail, all of them believed it was the only way to detox. Almost every person the police spoke with either knew Jessica, the prostitute that had been murdered, personally or had seen her and knew of her.

Part of the introductions included a message from the police department on the problem solving initiative following Jessica's murder. Werner and Young told the women the police department was going to do something different to address the problem. The officers asked the women for their input on how to tackle the prostitution problem that had plagued McMicken for over a decade. The officers also asked how the department could help them. The officers were advised of the unanimous frustration with the criminal justice system. Many times women in Hamilton County are arrested and eligible for a recite, the option Hamilton County offers for non-violent offenses to appear at a specified court date in lieu of physical arrest, to court if they have outstanding warrants. Other times women are arrested, transported to jail and released after a couple of hours. Werner and Young discovered that women with soliciting charges averaged eighteen recites to court and were notorious for missing their court date.

February 2014

Uniform Police Visibility

First and Second shift officers were tasked with conducting systematic directed patrols along McMicken. This served two main purposes. The first was to be visible, both to those engaged in the prostitution activity, and to the community who had lost confidence in our ability to be proactive. The second purpose was to gather information. We needed to determine who was on the street – not just those we believed may be engaged in illegal activity, but also those community members who could give testimony of their observations of activity, problem locations and problem buildings. We gathered this information and began to build a list of prostitutes. By engaging them in a setting where we had not been called to the area for illegal activity seen by a neighbor, we could open a dialogue and learn more of the circumstances which lead them to the situation they currently found themselves in. Many of their stories were harrowing. We used a 15 minute deployment strategy every two hours at designated locations along McMicken. The deployment strategy was derived from the recent experiment conducted in partnership with UCPI, during 2013 focusing on violent street segments.

Holistic Approach

Simultaneously, the Police Department was engaged in a process to team with the multitude of service agencies who provide sanctuary to those women entangled in the web of prostitution. We were invited to a session to observe the service providers give an overview of their programs. Some overlapped, some challenged by the numbers they were limited to serve. There was much diversity regarding the range of services needed to assist these women. Addictions, abuse, homelessness, were all interwoven into this issue. It was clear, hopes to resolve the issue,

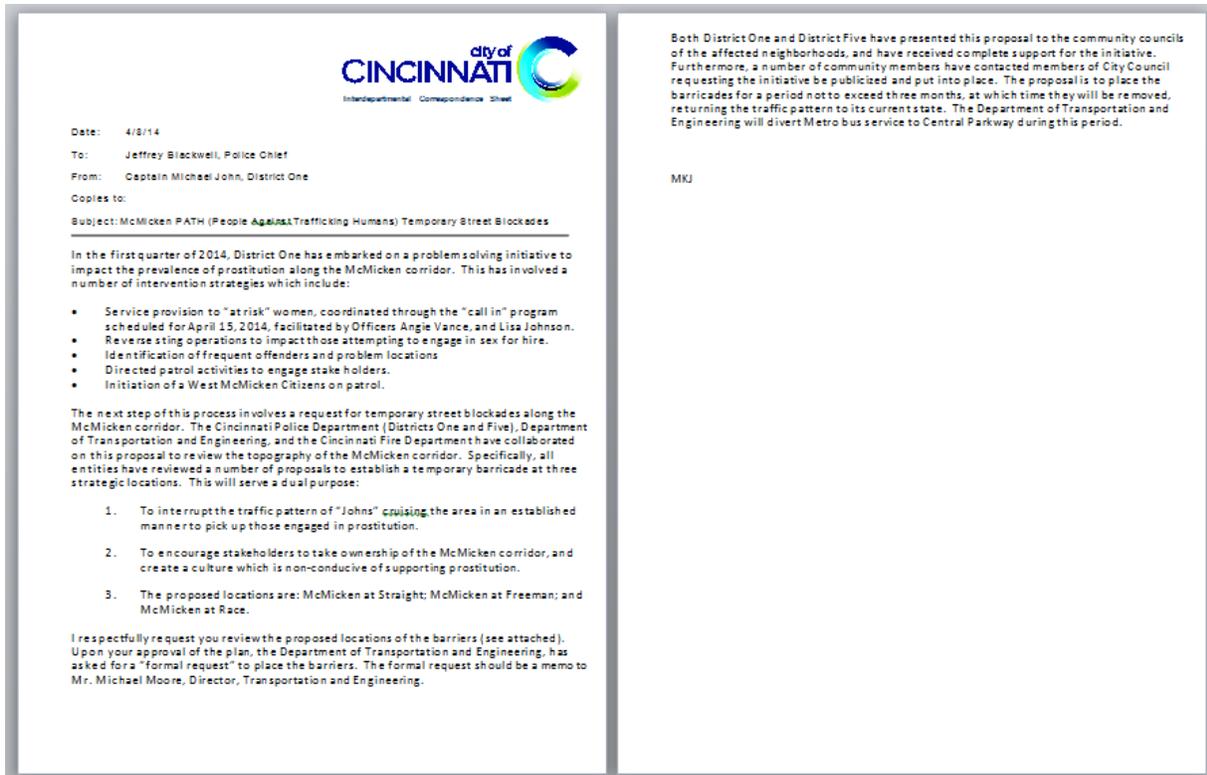
were not centered on incarceration. As with many social challenges, this wasn't a problem the police could arrest their way out of. As demonstrated, the doors to the justice center were continually revolving for women charged with prostitution offenses. This had become catch and release, only adding to the number of criminal arrests the women were burdened with, causing a continual degradation of their ability to pull themselves from the situation. Something needed to "Change." Werner and Young met with Hamilton County municipal court judge, Heather Russell, to ask for assistance with streamlining the process for men and women with prostitution and soliciting backgrounds. The judge's reaction was positive and suggested a specialty court for this particular population. This specialty docket was named **CHANGE Court: Changing Habits of Addiction and creating New Goals is Empowering.**

The process can begin one of three ways: 1) a police officer makes contact with a woman who is either wanted on open warrants related to prostitution or facing original charges; 2) pre-trial services personnel review each morning's docket for women arraigned on prostitution related offenses; or 3) pre-trial services conducts a weekly audit of residents held at the Talbert House, a Rewards Jail Intervention Program for women, to recommend potential candidates for **CHANGE.** Women are advised of the availability of the voluntary, specialty docket in front of one judge in an environment more conducive to supporting women as they reclaim their lives. The two year process includes the involvement of the Hamilton County Sheriff, the local electronic monitoring unit, the probation department, medical professionals, social service agencies offering residential housing as well as addiction treatment. It is only the second of its kind in Ohio.

March 2014

Situational Crime Prevention Strategy

Specialist Young and Officer Werner continued to work with diligence in terms of gathering data, and building relationships of trust with those impacted by the problem of prostitution. They proposed a radical idea of interrupting the traffic pattern of McMicken. Through observations, testimony and historic record, “Johns” routinely would drive the McMicken corridor to locate prostitutes. It was an easy street to cruise, with several “escape” routes once a prostitute was picked up. So both officers followed the pages of the POP Guide and proposed the idea of researching the possibility of closing portions of McMicken to prevent “Johns” from cruising, and limited the “success” of a prostitute from “tricking.” Numerous meetings followed with the Department of Transportation and Engineering (DOT), Metro bus service and the Cincinnati Fire Department (CFD.) Included in the process was Police Officer Lisa Johnson, who like Young and Werner was well versed with the prostitutes on McMicken, with a focus on those in the neighboring District Five. The barricades were placed on McMicken on April 30, 2014 and lifted on July 31, 2014.



The police department continued to engage stakeholders and recognized this would be a somewhat controversial approach. Some would call it a drastic action to a drastic problem. Following press releases and a media blitz, the temporary barricades were installed for a period of 90 days.



April 30th, 2014

Leading up to this time, the commander of District One, Captain Michael John began meeting with Councilmember Yvette Simpson, who with fellow Councilmember Amy Murray were

reviewing legislation associated with measures to reduce Human Trafficking, specifically sex trafficking. This initiative led to the increase in civil fines against “Johns.”

Following the installation of the barricades, we found some oversights we worked through. The first was the issue of Yellow bus service to the children on McMicken. Immediately, we worked with Yellow bus, and altered the barricades from the concrete divider depicted above to a modified temporary (moveable) barricade.



This allowed us to open the street for Yellow bus service only, and only for the hours of pick up and drop off for the students. We received an overwhelmingly supportive reaction from the community with the exception of one group, who we met with personally and provide a number of options including a ride share program through the Over the Rhine Community Council. After consideration, the group declined this offer and insisted the barricades be immediately removed. We ensured, Metro Access – the bus service for limited mobility customers was maintained along McMicken. The two regular bus routes serving McMicken were detoured to Central Parkway. We recognized the inconvenience to the public, and measured the furthest anyone had to walk from a pre-existing stop on McMicken to the new temporary locations on Central Parkway. This furthest distance was approximately 400 yards.

The neighborhood association most affected by the problems related to prostitution meets on a monthly basis. Following one of their meetings, a banner was erected at one of the more prominent intersections for open-air prostitution that read, “Johns we have your number” on one side and “Sex Trafficking is Modern Day Slavery” on the other.



Customer Service and Quality of Life Issues

The City of Cincinnati offers residents a customer service program to report quality of life issues such as litter, overflowing trash cans, graffiti, illegal dumping, and etcetera. The system is accessible by phone or online. Customers are given a tracking number for each complaint providing the opportunity to follow-up on neighborhood issues. Once a complaint has been handled by the appropriate department, customers receive a phone call or email. Officers assigned to the PATH project utilized this service in an effort to not only clean up the target area but to add additional personnel to the area to further reduce the feeling of anonymity for johns cruising through.



Officers Werner and Young identified a multi-family apartment complex in the middle of the McMicken corridor that was a place many of the women spent the night or hung out during the day to use heroin or take johns. None of the women were on a lease at this apartment complex. Officers contacted the owner to assist in an intervention. The property management was cooperative and instituted a “No Guest Policy” between late night hours and early morning hours. The policy became a new house rule and violators would be warned or face possible eviction.

Sting Operations

The police departments undercover VICE unit conducted both solicitation enforcement as well as “reversals” targeting clients on McMicken Avenue. Four solicitation enforcement stings were conducted and three john “reversals” were conducted in 2014.

Assessment

A couple different assessments were completed to measure the effectiveness of the street barricades and the high police visibility. Law enforcement anticipated a decrease in john traffic and measured the barricade's effectiveness based on the number of arrests before the barricade was erected and after. Ten john arrests were made in March 2014, before the barricade, while only six arrests were made once the barricade was in place. Another six arrests occurred three months after the barricade was removed.

The high visibility police presence initiated in February 2014 appeared to have a significant effect on the prevalence of women walking the corridor to engage in prostitution. The VICE unit conducted a prostitution enforcement operation in March and again in April 2014 with zero arrests. The April sweep occurred within ten days of the barricades going up. In June 2014, officers conducted a second sweep while the barricades were in place which resulted in one arrest. And a final sweep was conducted in December 2014 resulting in two prostitution arrests.

Half way through the project, Officer Werner was transferred to another district. Specialist Young continued to enforce a high visibility presence during daytime hours. The most significant decrease measured was directly related to his working hours. While the community was strongly encouraged to call the police when they observed activity believed to be prostitution related, calls for service decreased by 67%. This included a diffusion of benefits to the area within a thousand feet of the target area.

The CHANGE court process has been embraced by sixteen women. There have been relapses that have been met with consequences but the underlying theme of support has been maintained. Each participant has been welcomed back into the program following a relapse. Currently, only

five police officers are involved in the initial stages of the CHANGE court process. The police department is continuing to assess the court's success as well as weigh in the availability of beds at the justice center before fully implementing the initiative department-wide.

Lessons Learned

This project would not have the kind of momentum it did without the assistance and cooperation of the neighborhood council, the West McMicken Improvement Association. This group's persistence and resilience to collaborate with not just the police department but also City Council is immeasurable. The most successful intervention was the close relationship this group maintains with the city, specifically, with their neighborhood officers. It is their positivity and willingness to engage the problem that enabled creative solutions.

Agency and Officer Information

Key Project Team Members:

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