



# Maryland Research in Brief

## HotSpot Communities Initiative Phase I

An interim report prepared for the Governor's Office of Crime Control & Prevention<sup>1</sup>

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### Purpose

The HotSpot Communities Initiative was launched in mid-1997 to bring the practice of comprehensive community-based crime prevention to 36 communities across the State. HotSpots are locally designated neighborhoods suffering from a disproportionate amount of crime but whose residents are eager to make a change.

### Why Use Comprehensive Community-based Crime Prevention?

Recent studies from the National Institute of Justice (NIJ) and Join Together offer reasons for the success of comprehensive strategies such as those implemented through the HotSpot Communities Initiative. Feins et al. (NIJ, 1997:xi) indicates that the most effective strategies are "those that take into account the geographic, cultural, economic, and social characteristics of the targeted community."<sup>2</sup> And the results of the national Survey on Community Efforts to Reduce Substance Abuse and Gun Violence released by Join Together emphasize that coalitions of all different shapes and sizes are an integral part of a community's response to substance abuse. There is no "ideal" type of coalition; rather, coalitions should meet the needs of the communities they are meant to serve.<sup>3</sup>

Programs oriented toward specific areas, such as HotSpots, can uniquely meet these objectives. In fact, several recent studies have cited the effectiveness of comprehensive community partnerships in reducing crime.<sup>4</sup> The most successful partnerships

### Program Highlights 1997 to 2000

There were nearly 14,000 participants in community organization meetings, and nearly 54,000 in community activities and events such as resource days, crime watches, clean-ups, and youth programs.

Over 190,000 additional police hours were provided to the HotSpots.

Just over 1,000 residents received assistance from a domestic violence response team.

Nearly 70,000 prosecutor and other staff hours were devoted to nuisance abatement efforts.

Offender work crews provided over 18,000 hours of community service to the HotSpots.

Youth prevention programs provided recreational activities, education services, and other activities to approximately 2,000 HotSpot youths.

have a large number of prevention activities, generate widespread community involvement, implement a widely shared vision reflecting a broad-based community consensus, maintain an inclusive and broad-based membership, and have an ability to avoid or resolve conflicts.<sup>5</sup> Peterson et al. (2000) shows that communities may also reduce violent crime somewhat by developing community organizations such as recreation centers and preventing the development of others such as bars.<sup>6</sup>

Findings in recent research indicate that community policing strategies make a difference. For both adults and children, seeing police-on-foot activities increased the image of the officers in the community.<sup>7</sup> And, as cooperation between police and residents in solving neighborhood problems increased, residents felt more secure in their neighborhood.<sup>8</sup>

“It [is] working,” says Cherrydale Patrol member Cleo Walker. “Crime is down. People are starting to trust police officers. Little boys and girls can go out on street corners and play without worrying about being shot. Seniors can walk to the stores without being afraid. There aren’t gunshots every night anymore.” In revitalizing communities, comprehensive community-based crime control strategies can have a profound impact on the quality-of-life of the residents.

In 1999, phase II of the Initiative expanded comprehensive crime prevention to 26 additional neighborhoods. The 62 HotSpots currently receiving funding utilize both State and federal funds to initiate and support activities ranging from community policing and community prosecution to after-school programs, victim outreach and assistance, and community-based addiction recovery.

This report explores the impact of the Initiative on the quality-of-life of HotSpot residents in seven core areas: community prosecution, community probation, community policing, community mobilization, youth prevention, victim services, and addiction recovery. Data included comes from progress reports submitted by HotSpots team members to the Governor’s Office of Crime Control and Prevention, except where otherwise cited.

## Preliminary Results

### Crime Trends

Data provided by State and local law enforcement agencies indicate that violent crime in the 35 HotSpots analyzed decreased 24% and property crime decreased 30% from 1996 to 1999. This decrease was experienced by over three quarters of the HotSpots (80% experienced a decrease in violent crime and 80% a decrease in property crime). Over half experienced a decrease of 25% or more in total crime, and a quarter experienced a decrease of 40% or more.<sup>9</sup> By comparison, statewide violent crime

decreased 11% and property crime decreased 16% during the same period.

### Community Prosecution

Community prosecution focuses on quality-of-life interventions as well as criminal justice prosecutions. Prosecutors collaborate with community residents to request judgments and sentences that suit the community. Quality-of-life interventions include housing code actions, such as receiverships and tax sales, drug nuisance abatement cases, and self-help nuisance abatement cases. From 1997 to 2000, nearly 17,000 violations were filed against property owners and their tenants. Three quarters of these violations were housing code violations.

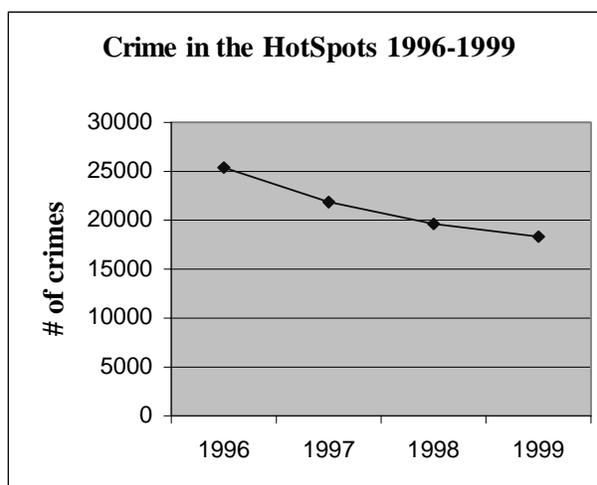


Figure 1: 35 of the 36 HotSpots were included in this analysis. These HotSpots experienced a decrease in violent crime of 24% and property crime of 30% for a total decrease of 28% from 1996 to 1999.

Prosecutors and other staff devoted nearly 70,000 hours to the pursuit of nuisance abatement cases. Community prosecution efforts resulted in the filing of 5,102 criminal cases, nearly half (48%) of which were drug-related.

### Community Probation

In each HotSpot, police officers, probation agents, residents, and others have collaborated to form community probation and supervision teams. These teams protect the community by providing increased monitoring of offenders through home visits, drug testing, and regular meetings. They also work with the offenders to ease their return to society through,

in some communities, offender work crews. Crews conduct community clean-ups, vacant house boardings, and other projects. From 1997 to 2000, offender work crews provided over 18,000 hours of community service to the HotSpots.

### *Community Policing*

Community policing is proactive policing that solves problems and enables officers and residents to develop partnerships and better utilize community resources. A focus on solving ongoing problems supports community mobilization and other crime prevention efforts. Community police officers actively research problems and work with community residents to develop solutions for them.

Each HotSpot has at least one community police officer. These officers have provided over 190,000 additional hours to their communities through community policing efforts such as foot patrols, youth programs and community probation and supervision team investigations.

In the Wicomico County HotSpot, for example, community policing efforts involved expanding foot patrols and coordinating activities with the local schools. Local law enforcement monitored traffic on and around the middle-school grounds and participated in the after-school tutoring program at the elementary school. Community policing staff reported that as a result of these efforts, calls for service from both of these schools greatly decreased.

### *Community Mobilization/CPTED*

More than three quarters (78%) of the original 36 HotSpots have been engaging in community mobilization for at least two years. There were nearly 14,000 participants in community organization meetings, and nearly 54,000 in community activities and events such as resource days, crime watches, clean-ups, and youth programs.

Residents of some HotSpots also engaged in quality-of-life interventions such as reducing the numbers of stray and vicious animals on the streets and pursuing Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) projects. Over 133 CPTED projects were planned by the HotSpots. They included projects to redirect traffic, install lighting, block off alleys,

repair playgrounds, and plant gardens. More than three quarters of these projects (77%) were implemented by the end of the reporting period.

### *Youth Prevention*

Research has shown that youths are most often involved in delinquent behavior in the hours immediately following the school day. Almost half of all juvenile violent crimes occur between 2:00 p.m. and 8:00 p.m.<sup>10</sup> Lack of supervision and constructive activities can lead to illegal drug use, loitering, and other problem behaviors. The HotSpot Communities Initiative emphasizes the provision of alternative activities designed to improve social skills and academic performance while reducing the number of unsupervised hours.

At this time, most of the HotSpots have at least one after-school program. These youth prevention programs serve approximately 2,000 youths by providing recreational activities, educational services, character development exercises, and other activities.<sup>11</sup> Residents have served as mentors to provide one-on-one attention as positive role models.

In 1998, the Easton HotSpot in Talbot County set up an alternative suspension program that offers modules on conflict resolution, alcohol and drug use, violence prevention, self-esteem, peer pressure, communication skills, and healthy decisions. From the 1999 school year to the 2000 school year, suspensions from the high school decreased 42% and suspensions from the middle schools decreased 78%.

Other HotSpots, such as Lexington Park in St. Mary's County, have implemented Neighborhood Youth Panels. The Department of Juvenile Justice works with community volunteers to establish panels of approximately five people who hear cases for first time nonviolent youth offenders. Testimony can be given by the offenders, their parents, and their victims. The panel then determines an appropriate response and monitors the offender to ensure that the sentence is completed. In St. Mary's County, youth offenders perform community work and pay restitution to their victims. Approximately 150 youths have participated in this program and 7% have committed new offenses.

## Victim Services

The impact of crime on victims is immediate, ongoing, and complex. Victims of crime often suffer emotional distress as well as physical injury or financial loss. The HotSpot Communities Initiative supports these victims and encourages their participation in the justice process by providing court advocates, counseling, shelter, and other assistance. Nearly 17,000 hours of service were provided to 3,242 crime victims. Almost half (41%) of these victims were victims of violent crime.

There were 1,865 incidents of domestic violence investigated in the 36 HotSpots. Two HotSpots had a special focus on domestic violence. The domestic violence response team in South Cumberland, for example, investigated more than 250 incidents and made 138 arrests.

## Addiction Recovery

Substance abuse causes complex and devastating problems for both communities and individuals. Several HotSpots have implemented special efforts such as mentoring and drug treatment to support 2,327 known drug offenders and other addicts.

In Crisfield, a Somerset County HotSpot, a drug treatment facility was set up so that addicts, many of whom did not have a car in a jurisdiction without public transportation, would no longer have to travel 20 miles to receive treatment. More than 390 addicts have participated in programs at this facility for 10 to 12 weeks each. Recovery in Community provides aggressive street outreach, treatment readiness, drug treatment and aftercare to addicts in the Southwest Cluster HotSpot in Baltimore City. Drug treatment case managers work closely with community leaders and police probation team members. In Baltimore County, an addictions specialist works with each police probation team in Hotspots-based offices to conduct assessments and make referrals and with local churches to support recovering addicts.

## Summary

Upon the request of the Governor's Office of Crime Control and Prevention, CESAR reviewed the crime statistics and other data currently available on the 36 initial HotSpots. These preliminary results are

encouraging and are supported by current research. HotSpots residents, officers, and other partners eagerly relate stories about the positive effects of the HotSpot Communities Initiative. Crime trend tracking and targeted research in the seven areas of activity cited above are continuing.

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For additional information, please visit the electronic HotSpots community at [www.goccp.org](http://www.goccp.org)

<sup>1</sup> This report was prepared for the Governor's Office of Crime Control & Prevention under contract #BYRN-2000-0576.

<sup>2</sup> Feins et al., NIJ, 1997.

<sup>3</sup> Join Together, 1999.

<sup>4</sup> Sampson, Raudenbush, and Earls, 1998; Hypki, 2000.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Peterson et al., 2000.

<sup>7</sup> Salmi et al., 2000.

<sup>8</sup> Mastrofski et al., 1998.

<sup>9</sup> To enable a comparison between HotSpots crime and state crime, calendar year 1996 was used as the baseline, and 35 of the 36 HotSpots were included in the crime analysis. Years included ranged from 1996 to 1999 or 2000 depending on data availability. The crime data used were submitted by local enforcement agencies and Maryland Department of State Police (MDSP) to the Governor's Office of Crime Control and Prevention. The crimes counted are the standard categories and definitions used in the annual uniform crime report released by the MDSP.

<sup>10</sup> Fox and Newman, 1997.

<sup>11</sup> The number of youth was calculated by GOCCP based on the average number of youths participating in each program.