

2012 IACP – CISCO SYSTEMS COMMUNITY POLICING AWARD

Hopkins Police Department (Hopkins, Minnesota)

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Executive Overview

Hopkins Police serve 17,500 residents in a 4.4 square mile suburb of Minneapolis, Minnesota. Hopkins is a diverse community where 48 different languages are spoken and there are many young families. Hopkins police are known for creative problem solving approaches to quality of life issues that are accomplished through strong community partnerships.

Police and school staff began noticing an increasing problem at the schools, which was also affecting the neighborhoods, they responded with what some would call a “crazy” idea!

Bullying, disagreements and disruptions on the playground were spilling over into the classrooms and disrupting learning, leading youth to feel unsafe at school. Incidents of truancy were increasing due to fear. These incidents were continuing after school in the neighborhoods. There was a lack of problem solving skills for youth.

Hopkins police were given a prestigious national award with a monetary element. The Chief put the all call out to staff asking for ways to use the funds to benefit youth. Patrol officers asked the Chief “can we go play at recess with the elementary youth?”. Operation Recess was created!

Operation Recess is a partnership between Alice Smith and Eisenhower Elementary Schools and the Hopkins Police. Patrol officers spend one day per week at each school for three hours over recess playing games with students on the playground. These games are all inclusive, focusing on creating positive relationships between youth and police, while fostering leadership and developing problem solving skills. The goal of this partnership is to create a peaceful environment in the school and neighborhoods.

The success with this pilot program has been incredible. School staff, youth, community members, parents and officers involved rave about this program. Agencies from across the nation are asking – how can we do this?

Framework Questions

The mission of the Hopkins police department is “Service to the Community with Honesty, Integrity and Respect”. It is upon these principles that strong, trusting and lasting relationships and partnerships are developed. The vision of the department includes “being progressive while collaborating with all stakeholders to continually improve our community”. The core values of the department include; “Problem Solving: We are committed to identifying and solving problems through building positive community partnerships”. Every division of the department is expected to carry out the mission and involve all 27 sworn officers, 14 civilian staff and every volunteer.

New hires have the personality and skills to carryout the mission of the department and continue the tradition of community policing. The interview process includes community stakeholders and interview questions involve community policing as well as traditional policing. The field training process involves tasks such as public speaking, interactions

with community groups, attending community events and problem solving. The policy and procedure manual was written to include guidelines relating to the departments community policing philosophy.

Employees choose “community contacts” which include business owners, schools and neighborhood associations. Community Orientated Policing (COP) calls as well as traditional policing calls, such as arrests and citations, are tracked and reviewed by supervisors. Police department employees are members of several business and civic organizations, associations, boards, committees, coalitions and collaboratives. They meet with these groups on a monthly or quarterly basis. Involvement with these organizations brings resources to the department while developing and maintaining strong partnerships to achieve success in prevention, identification and solving of community problems.

The police department hosts weekly crime and problem solving (CAP) meetings to proactively prevent crime and discuss quality of life concerns that are brought forward by the community. The chief extends an open invitation to anyone wishing to participate in these discussions. Attendance at these meetings includes department supervisory staff, patrol officers, investigators, outreach staff, records staff and valuable partners such as fire fighters, city building officials, inspectors, city housing coordinator, juvenile probation, city attorney and assisting law enforcement agencies.

The chief has divided the community into four sectors and each patrol team is assigned to one of these sectors and responsible for preventing crime and recognizing crime trends. The chief has divided these sectors into 12 neighborhood regions and conducts “Town Hall Meetings” where he and key department staff present updates on the police department and then open the meeting up to hear the concerns of the community. If neighbors cannot attend the meeting they are encouraged to email the police department at: neighborhoodconcerns@hopkinsmn.com

Initiative Questions

The Hopkins Police and the Hopkins School District have an incredibly strong, trusting long standing relationship built on dedication to youth. Together they are an influential force in the community for positive change. The number of stakeholders from every aspect of the community that they are able to garner in partnership for unique initiatives is outstanding. The resources that they are able to obtain are incredible. Hopkins is a community with a history of collaboration and dedication to youth. There is a clear understanding that youth are our future and if we fail them we are failing ourselves.

In an effort to better direct all of the stakeholders working in the community, they created the School and Community in Partnership coalition or SCIP. SCIP is comprised of school administrators, police, community education staff, school board members, social workers, counselors, local family practice doctors, mental health professionals, local churches, local government representatives, county library, performing arts center staff and non profits such as the food shelf, teen center and resource center. It is quite a think tank! There are typically 15-20 persons who meet every other month to give updates from their individual sector of the community, align their efforts and discuss current trends with youth. Hopkins police and schools are leaders in this coalition. In 2010 the state wide Minnesota Student Survey was completed and by the beginning of 2011 the results for Hopkins had been analyzed and were ready to be presented to the community. The trends for junior high youth did not look good. Girls were reporting a sharp increase

in risky behavior and bullying by both boys and girls was reported as a major problem. The coalition had work to do.

In the spring of 2011 teachers, school administrators and police began meeting to discuss a focus on preventing bullying at school and in the neighborhoods. Staff from the school was reporting an increase in disruptions at school that were spilling over into the classrooms interfering with learning. Police were increasingly being called to the school to mediate fights between students. Bulling behavior was occurring on the bus after school and then continuing in the neighborhoods. Police were being called by parents to intervene in bullying situations and solve the problem. Parents were obtaining restraining orders from the courts to prevent youth from having contact with one another at school and in the neighborhood. Things had gotten out of control and something had to be done. Police knew that a comprehensive approach including all community partners was needed to be successful. Together they developed a strategic plan to include school district policy change, creating a definition of bullying and establishing disciplinary actions for violations. They also posted specific expectations for behavior (for youth, parents and adults) at various locations in each building, created more peaceful playgrounds through physical design and revised curriculum currently taught by the police-school counselor team. The emphasis was on making sure youth new what was expected of them in the hallways, classroom, bathroom areas, lunchroom and playground while giving them the skills to prevent, identify, redirect, report and stop bullying behavior in and out of school. They presented their plan to the SCIP group who worked to support the plan and publicize it to the many community sectors that they represent. SCIP members dedicated themselves to this new focus and choose the book “Cultivating Calm” as the new community book read for the year. The plan began full implementation in the fall of 2011 when school started.

Adults in the community suspected that there were many incidents of youth bullying that were going unreported. Once young people felt empowered to report it, documented incidents of occurrence rose at both schools. The problem was no longer silent. Staff and police were able to intervene and work to prevent future incidents. It was identified that a majority of incidents were occurring on the playground and then on the bus spilling over into the neighborhoods. Interestingly there was a common theme with these locations. The adult to youth ratio was extremely low and youth had little to no structured activities during these times. Police and school counselors met at the first of the year to review and revise the initiative to be more effective. Hopkins police had recently been honored as one of only six agencies in the US to receive a prestigious national Community Safety Initiative award from LISC and Metlife for revitalization and crime reduction in a neighborhood of Hopkins. This award came with a monetary gift of \$20,000. <http://www.hopkinsmn.com/police/awards.php> The police chief asked patrol officers to find a way to spend the money on a program to benefit youth. Officers had an idea that was far from traditional policing!

“Operation Recess”, a unique initiative unlike any in the nation where officers play with youth at recess, was created. Officers presented their idea first to the school counselors who loved it. An initial meeting was set up to present the idea to school administrators where they stated, “that is awesome – can you start today?!”. The operation was a go. Police and school counselors then set out to develop the pilot project and created a model. This model involved patrol officers spending one day per week at each of the two elementary schools for 3 hours over recess playing games with youth on the playground. The patrol captain was responsible for posting overtime sheets in the roll call room asking for officers to sign up for these shifts. A contingency plan for rain days was put

into place where officers would then visit the classrooms to play bullying prevention games or do yoga under the direction of instructors with youth in the gym. Officers at recess were not to be in uniform but would instead wear specially made t-shirts with the Operation Recess logo. Hopkins police were not to be the rule enforcers on the playground; they are strictly there to play, role model cooperative problem solving behavior and bullying intervention techniques if need be. Officers notify an adult supervisor on the playground, known as a PARA, if there is a problem that needs addressing. The games that officers play are all inclusive and focus on the two major objectives of the initiative; creating positive relationships with youth and decreasing the incidents of bullying and disruptive behavior. The ultimate goal of this initiative is to create a more peaceful school environment by role modeling behavior and teaching youth problem solving skills.

School administrators and police agreed to a process for evaluation of the initiative that included analyzing disciplinary incidents and surveying school staff, youth and police participants. The police department public information officer and school district media person met to develop a media plan to include press releases, photography/video assignments and promotion of the initiative to parents and the community. School staff sent emails to all teachers with a synopsis of how the initiative would work and what the objectives were. Teachers were ecstatic! They notified the students and they cheered! School staff also sent letters home to all parents introducing them to the initiative and asking for their support.

Once the model was created a plan for implementation was developed. School staff created a kit for officers that included information regarding peaceful games, game rules and key school policies/procedures (where to check in, schedules for grade level recess periods and school staff contact information). This kit was able to be passed from officer to officer participating each week. An initial training session with the first officers participating was conducted by the school principals. Officers were introduced to key staff in the building and shown how the behind the scenes operations work at each school. Every week participating officers were responsible for training the oncoming participants and sent emails describing how the day went and shared any key discoveries and success stories with all police staff.

The kick off for Operation Recess happened the first week in April. The chief and a group of officers arrived at the school and headed out to the playground. The youth were literally all over them! One shy girl walked up to school staff and stated that she was afraid of the police. The teacher told her that the police were her friends and community helpers so she did not have to be afraid. The teacher then told her that the police were there to play with them. As the young girl watched her classmates having fun, she soon joined them. The local media syndicates were highly attracted to the story and national syndicates have shown interest. The local print and online papers all ran stories. The school publicized the initiative to the entire school district as a highlight on their website front page. Operation Recess buzz was everywhere. Emails from the community stakeholders and residents flooded the school and police department mailboxes praising the efforts. A community member who saw they story on the news, stopped by the police department to donated over 800 t-shirts for youth at the two schools because he was so touched and wanted to be part of the initiatives positive influence. As the next nine weeks progressed youth and officers forged fervent relationships with youth and had the opportunity to learn from each other. Operation Recess was a huge success. Youth looked forward to the days that officers would be visiting and disruptions on the playground decreased dramatically. School ended for the year and the officers celebrated

with the 6th grade graduates at an end of the year party at school by volunteering to sit in the “dunk tank”.

Sustainability for the initiative was achieved by reaching out to the business partners in our community. The Hopkins police had let the community know that the pilot program was very successful, however financial resources needed to be obtained to continue in the fall for the 2012-2013 school year and beyond. A group of corporate CEO's from major businesses, which are headquartered in Minnesota, raise money for one selected organization each year. In July of 2012 they will be holding a large community event in one of the local parks in Hopkins. These events draw thousands of people and are completely organized by the business community. Hopkins police will be able to secure funding through this event for the next year and possibly well beyond. They will also have the opportunity to draw awareness to the efforts of the school-police partnership and the initiative to stop bullying even greater!

Operation Recess allowed the police department and patrol officers to positively impact the lives of over 1200 elementary youth. It was an incredibly easy to implement program that any agency could institute if they create partnerships with their schools in the community.

Initiative Evaluation

Bullying prevention is not a new concept. There are numerous examples of best practices and research based prevention methods that have been effective. Hopkins police in partnership with the school district has adopted many of these best practices as part of the overall initiative. However, the partnership wanted to gain even greater success and had conducted evaluation of incident data to see when the problem of bullying still existed. The playground at recess became the focus and a specific initiative to deal with it was launched – Operation Recess.

The two major objectives of Operation Recess are; creating positive relationships with youth and decreasing the incidents of bullying and disruptive behavior. The ultimate goal of this initiative is to create a more peaceful school environment by role modeling behavior and teaching youth problem solving skills.

Having the objectives clearly defined allowed the partners in this initiative to draft a plan to evaluate if the actions taken during the pilot phase of the initiative were successful in meeting these objectives and if critical changes need to be made for full implementation in the next school year. This plan included evaluating both quantitative and qualitative data. Partners agreed on the plan and then assigned specific partners individual responsibility for gathering, analyzing and interpreting the data. A decision to secure an organization for professional research and a consultant for analysis after the 2012-2013 school year. Data from the pilot phase will be crucial to secure funds for this professional review.

Quantitative data gathering methods for the pilot phase include using school and police department to records to document the number of youth affected, the percentage of patrol officers involved and total number of hours worked, number of school disciplinary incidents and number of police calls for service to the schools for disruptions. It was

imperative that the partners in this initiative have a deeply seeded and trusting relationship due to the nature of juveniles being the subject of the data gathering and exchange. Because the police and schools have a long history of demonstrating this confidence, information sharing this was not an obstacle. Analysis of raw quantitative data has just begun with the pilot program concluding June 9th, 2012. Initial review of this data has shown that almost every officer in the department has participated in touching the lives of over 1200 elementary youth over the course of nine weeks. Officers have given 54 hours of service to the school in this pilot phase of the initiative, staff resources that the school would not have been able to supply otherwise. Written disciplinary reports have significantly decreased in this time period averaging from 15 a week to only 5. Only one incident occurred on the days when officers were present - incredible. There have been no instances of families obtaining court awarded restraining orders for their children due to bullying instances in school and the neighborhood, however there have been disagreements continuing in the neighborhoods after school and it is possible that the problem has been relocated. It will be important to conduct additional evaluation of the initiative to address this potential and implement action to correct it.

Qualitative data gathering measures were adopted to gauge how participants including school staff, police officers and youth felt about the initiative and the success in obtaining the objectives set forth. These methods needed to be comprehensive to include; written and electronic correspondence from school staff and police officers during the planning process as well as periodically throughout the implementation. Officers and school staff will be asked to submit anecdotal examples of how the initiative is working. The collection of anecdotes can be enduring and helps bring real feeling to the raw data collected. These real life examples can be used to tell the story to potential funders. Younger youth who are just learning to read and write need to be considered when asking for feedback. It was decided that posters and completion of art work depicting answers to questions like, "how did you feel having police officers play with you at recess?" would be used to gauge the effectiveness of the initiative. Actual photos of the interactions between officers and youth speak a thousand words and specific partners were assigned to capture these moments and create a collection to be used for evaluation as well as promotion of the initiative.

The major method for capturing qualitative information will be through implementation of an online survey using "Survey Monkey". School staff will be asked to respond to five questions using a likert scale of response; strongly agree, disagree, neither agree or disagree, agree, strongly agree. These questions will include:

1. It was helpful for school staff to have officers at recess?
2. Incidents of bullying and disruptive behavior decreased at recess?
3. Disruptive behavior between students seemed to decrease at other times during the school day when officers were present at recess?
4. Youth engaged with officers at recess and developed positive relationships?
5. Police officers helped teach youth how to play cooperatively by role modeling behavior on the playground?

School staff will be asked to respond to these questions over the summer when they have time and follow up will be done before the initiative gears back up in the fall.

Over the course of the summer the school district has AmeriCorps volunteers and the police department has an intern that will help to analyze this data both quantitative and qualitative in greater depth and prepare a formal report on key findings. Analysis of this data is extremely important to developing an overall budget and sustainability for the

initiative. By showing not only the cost for the initiative but more importantly the incredible impact it can have, support from the community will be generated and resources will be more easily secured. Youth will continue to be positively influenced and our community will be a safer more peaceful place to live.

Lessons Learned

The most resounding lesson learned from the initiative Operation Recess is that the most unconventional responses to community problems can have an incredible impact. When a police agency takes a leap of faith and is brave enough to try something no other police agency ever has amazing results can happen. Hopkins police have learned that once a problem is identified and community partners are called upon to help brainstorm solutions, it must have a team that not only is committed to the objectives of the initiative but open and creative enough to think outside the box. If the solutions seem completely untraditional and maybe even a bit crazy – it just might work!

When a police agency or any other community organization attempts to work with a school system it can be a daunting and seemingly impossible task. To implement new programs is difficult because classroom time is guarded and the policies and procedures are highly structured. It does not mean that new initiatives cannot be attempted; it does mean that a deeply rooted trust must be in place prior to posing ideas and the partners within the school system must be involved in creating and implementing the initiative. Once initiatives are developed, to be successful, especially in a school setting, police and school administrators (chiefs and principals) must be fully supportive to the point they are cheerleaders for the initiative encouraging excitement for participation.

Other lessons learned from this initiative is that simple ideas can work and it is relatively easy to implement an initiative using the systems and framework already in place. Working with youth is fun, however setting up programs can present hurdles regarding registration of youth by parents, transportation issues with families and acquiring programming space and sufficient adult supervision volunteers. Hopkins police kept it simple and “took it to them” which is aligned closely with the City of Hopkins strategic plan and goals of taking city services to the residents where they are in their neighborhoods, schools and places of employment. The framework for Operation recess was already in place. The youth were in one location, no registration process had to be put in place, no extra resources had to be secured as the current school sporting and playground equipment were already available and the opportunity for impacting a great number of youth was perfect.

Hopkins police also learned that playing with youth for 3 hours over recess is exhausting however very rewarding and the opportunity for relationship building is HUGE! Youth thrive on adult interaction however programming for youth often involves officers interacting with youth for a single event or short period of time and deeply rooted trust takes more than that. Giving the youth as well as the officers the opportunity to build on relationships over a consistent and continual period of time is critical.

Hopkins police also learned that role modeling is an incredibly effective method to teach life skills to youth. Officers had the opportunity to demonstrate in real life situations how the lessons taught in the classroom regarding bullying can be applied. As bystanders on the playground they were able to interrupt bullying behavior and show youth not only the words to say but the body language that goes with it. Officers were able to actually demonstrate how to include others and solve simple problems through redirection and

cooperative play. Adults in the school observed youth using the words of officers in other situations throughout the school day – the greatest compliment and indication of success!

Hopkins police learned that it is not successful to implement survey methods for school staff members in the last week of school and over the summer. Responses to surveys have been low and may have to be reinstated again in the fall when classes are in session. It is very important to solicit feedback early, giving respondents several weeks to use the tools in place as well as several reminders.

Hopkins police were surprised to learn how important and beneficial it can be to comprehensively communicate community initiative efforts and the needs associated with them. Through extensive media support the greater community learned about the needs associated with youth and incredible monetary support has been generated as well as additional partners in the community have been recruited for this initiative as well as others that the police department and school are involved in. Community members are attracted to this positive, proactive team approach and are asking “how can I be part of this and what can I do to help?”. Other private schools in the community are now asking if police can come to their schools over recess and teach in their classes, something we did not prepare for! It is important to be confident enough to ask, “what should we do if this initiative is incredibly effective?” and how are we going to answer requests from others to reproduce these results in the community. Police staff will be meeting with school partners in the fall to see if we can bring other trusted community partners in to play with officers and therefore add additional schools to our team. Keeping these excited residents and business interested and involved with the police departments community efforts will be the next challenge!

In the next few weeks many additional lessons will be learned about the overall effectiveness of this initiative as the raw research data is analyzed. Police and school staff are reporting huge success and it will be interesting to see how the data supports these views!