

**Evaluation of Albuquerque Weed and Seed Sites: Trumbull
and La Mesa Neighborhoods**

Final Report

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Introduction

Background of Trumbull and La Mesa Weed and Seed Programs

Although crime rates are decreasing nationally, crime rates in Albuquerque, New Mexico still remain high. In fact, Albuquerque's crime rates exceed those of cities of similar size. The Trumbull and La Mesa neighborhoods in Albuquerque, New Mexico, are especially victimized by this increase in crime. The crime rates in these neighborhoods exceed the city rates. These neighborhoods were selected as the Weed and Seed site on the basis of crime statistics and demonstrated neighborhood commitment to change the situation. They are characterized by aging, low-quality multi-family housing and deteriorating infrastructure. As a result of drug dealers and gangs, along with other low-income families and individuals moving into the neighborhood, the Trumbull and La Mesa neighborhoods became known as the "war zone." They are often considered to be the "worst of the worst" in terms of illegal drug activity in the city of Albuquerque, and they had the highest narcotics offense crime rate for 1996 out of the ten highest-crime neighborhoods.

The Weed and Seed strategy, following the EOWS guidelines, was developed by the city of Albuquerque Police Department (APD) and the Department of Family and Community Services (DFCS) in collaboration with Trumbull and La Mesa residents and the United States Attorney. A number of programs have been implemented in the area to accomplish the goals of "weeding out" violent crime, gang activity, drug use, and drug trafficking, and "seeding" the target area by restoring these neighborhoods through social and economic revitalization. Some of the programs include: the formation of Turnaround Albuquerque groups using Wrice march techniques; implementation of Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design

(CPTED)–projects which include changing traffic patterns to reduce crime; community policing; crime-free multi-housing; and the development of two Safe Havens in the area.

The Community and Prosecutions Coordinator Position

A very innovative venture of the ‘weed’ component is the creation of the Community and Prosecutions Coordinator (CPC) position. The Weed and Seed Project Manager as well as the neighborhood members work very closely with the CPC at the District Attorney’s office. The CPC assists the neighborhoods in establishing Neighborhood Associations (NA) and supports the crime prevention activities in which these associations engage. The CPC attends NA meetings, distributes a quarterly newsletter, and works with the City Neighborhood Organizing Division as well as the Housing Division to evaluate criminal activity occurring in the Albuquerque-area neighborhoods. The Trumbull and La Mesa NAs, in coordination with the CPC, actively develop and participate in crime prevention activities within their neighborhoods. One of the most vital roles of the CPC is working with the NAs to assist them in following drug offenders arrested in those neighborhoods, as they are processed through the legal system; this is otherwise known as court monitoring.

Evaluation Methodology

Goals of The Evaluation of The Trumbull And La Mesa Neighborhoods

The primary goals of the evaluation were to examine and document the role of the CPC and determine the degree to which Weed and Seed drug related offenses were successfully prosecuted. The overall evaluation question was this: how does the work of the CPC impact the NAs of Trumbull and La Mesa? This question is specified further by asking whether or not court

monitoring, performed by members of the NAs in coordination with the CPC, increases the likelihood that Weed and Seed drug trafficking cases will be successfully prosecuted?

Overview of Research Design

The core objectives for the evaluation design were to: (1) thoroughly examine the coordination efforts between the CPC and the Trumbull and La Mesa NAs and; (2) determine whether court monitoring by neighborhood members is associated with favorable prosecution outcomes for convicted criminals, especially drug-related offenses. The first objective was addressed by collecting detailed information on the various facets of the relationship between the CPC and the NAs of Trumbull and La Mesa, and then constructing a descriptive profile of their collaboration. In response to the second objective, the evaluation compared the prosecution rates for drug offenders arrested in the Trumbull and La Mesa neighborhoods with those arrested in neighborhoods with inactive or no NAs. Originally, the evaluation team intended on differentiating between neighborhoods with both inactive NAs and neighborhoods without; however, due to the small numbers, these types of neighborhoods were collapsed into one category for comparison with the Weed and Seed neighborhoods.

Results

Objective I of the Evaluation: The Interviews

Description of Survey and participants. Intensive interviews were conducted with a sample of eight active NA members. These members were chosen based on their intense involvement in NA functions, especially court monitoring. In addition, the evaluation team met with the CPC as well as the Weed and Seed Project Coordinator to obtain the details on the

collaborative effort between the District Attorney's office and Weed and Seed neighborhoods. The CPC provided the evaluation team with a list of names and phone numbers for the NA members. The interview guide included questions that addressed such issues as coordination logistics with the CPC, participation level in various neighborhood crime prevention activities, community satisfaction with the collaboration, and ideas for improvement.

The Court Monitoring Process. The CPC maintains a database that contains information on drug trafficking cases being prosecuted in Albuquerque. This database allows the CPC to track court hearings and to notify victims and key NA members of upcoming hearings, trials, and criminal sentencing. Approximately once a month, the CPC provides the key NA representatives from La Mesa and Trumbull with a list of upcoming cases for drug offenders arrested in their respective neighborhoods. Designated NA members attend the hearings and trials and typically give the judge a letter describing their neighborhood's experience with the drug offender and reasons why the drug-related crime should not go unpunished. In addition, when a defendant gets probation or sentenced to drug court instead of prison time, the NA members automatically send a letter to the judge asking for a stay away order. A stay away order is a provision of probation that makes staying out of their neighborhood a condition of the probation. If the defendant violates the condition, the defendant can be taken back to court and the District Attorney will ask that the probation be revoked and the prison time be instated. One of the primary purposes of the stay away order is to break the cycle of drug-related crimes wherein criminals cannot go back to those neighborhoods and sell drugs again. Unfortunately, this means that oftentimes the drug trafficking is transferred to nearby neighborhoods. One positive repercussion is this sometimes provides the impetus for that neighborhood to create or become

active in their neighborhood association. In a few cases, the defendant actually lives in the neighborhood in which he/she was arrested. For those cases, a stay away order is usually not feasible; therefore, in its place, a curfew is requested by the NA members.

Neighborhood Association Member Satisfaction.

Each neighborhood member interviewed expressed extreme satisfaction with their working relationship with the CPC and the District Attorney's office. Many of them believed that the partnerships with the D.A.'s office as well as the APD have been strengthened as a result of the CPC's work. The court monitoring process would be much more laborious if the CPC were not there to provide them with up-to-date information on upcoming cases. The informal collaborative partnership among the NA members, the CPC, and the APD is a critical component for weeding out crime in these neighborhoods. Important information regarding recent arrests, problem properties, and current drug trafficking activities is exchanged frequently among the members of this partnership. Residents of La Mesa and Trumbull neighborhoods are concerned for the future of their neighborhoods after the Weed and Seed funding comes to an end. Because the collaborative partnerships are so informal, there is a concern that they will disappear when the monies go away. Despite this concern, they are still dedicated to maintaining and strengthening their community networks and are striving for more improvements to their neighborhoods. These NA members believe they are making a difference in their neighborhoods, providing them with even more motivation to pursue crime prevention activities.

Additionally, the NA members are very pleased with the stay away orders that the CPC coordinates. They believe that these stay away orders make a difference in the level of crime in their neighborhoods and are an effective means for punishing drug-related crimes. There is a

deep level of commitment among these people to work together to achieve the overall goals of the Weed and Seed project. This commitment level requires many hours of unpaid work as well as a willingness among NA members to be exposed and, therefore, vulnerable to retaliations by criminals in their neighborhoods. This commitment, coupled with the organized coordination efforts with the D.A.'s office, have strengthened these communities and given the residents hope for a brighter future.

Objective II of the Evaluation: The Data Analysis

Description of data. Crime, and in particular, drug related crime, is a major problem in the Trumbull and La Mesa neighborhoods and, although the increase in policing has increased the number of arrests, there is no guarantee that convicted criminals will be removed from the neighborhood. Many of the criminals who are arrested in Albuquerque are released by the judge after indictment. These individuals then return to the neighborhood and resume their criminal activity until they are arrested again, and so on. It is hypothesized that when a representative from the NA contacts the judge regarding sentencing or probation violation, the offender is more likely to be successfully prosecuted and prevented from returning to the neighborhood. Court monitoring is almost exclusively performed by NA members in the Trumbull and La Mesa neighborhoods. Although the CPC has access to all drug trafficking case information in the Albuquerque area and is willing to provide this information to the various neighborhoods, so far there is little NA participation in the court monitoring process, outside of the Weed and Seed sites. Therefore, we hypothesized that drug trafficking case outcomes are better in the Weed and Seed neighborhoods, compared to the other neighborhoods in Albuquerque. The major outcome variable is whether or not a convicted felon is successfully prosecuted. A case is considered to

be “successfully prosecuted” if an arrested individual is removed from the neighborhood, either through a stay away order, being sentenced to jail time or prison, or re-arrested on a probation violation. These outcomes are likely to be influenced by court monitoring as well as other circumstantial characteristics that include such variables as the number of prior offenses, the number of prior drug trafficking offenses, availability of jail space, judge assignment, and other demographic features of the individual.

Once someone is arrested and arraigned in District Court on a felony charge, the case is sent to the District Attorney’s office and tracked in their database. The CPC specially tracks the drug offenses and maintains an extensive database that contains the date and time of arrest, the neighborhood where the arrest occurred, background information on the defendant, the judge assigned to the case, and the case status. Unfortunately this database was only recently developed and more incomplete than we had anticipated. Therefore, the evaluation was unable to recover data on these circumstantial characteristics. In addition, there were not enough cases in the non-Weed and Seed neighborhoods to differentiate among those that have inactive neighborhood associations and those that have not neighborhood associations. Despite this, the data that was collected provides insightful information concerning the trafficking cases in the Weed and Seed sites. We obtained updated copies of the database and developed an SPSS file in order to analyze the data. The results are described in the following section.

Results. To examine the interaction of neighborhood and prosecution outcome, we used the cross-tab procedure and tested for independence of the variables using chi-square statistic. The variable “neighborhood” was categorized in two ways: the Weed and Seed neighborhoods and other neighborhoods that are not a part of the Weed and Seed program. The frequencies are

reported in table 1 below.

Table 1. Neighborhood (N=403; 22 missing)		
Neighborhood	Frequency	Percent
Weed and Seed (Trumbull and La Mesa)	179	44.4%
Not Weed and Seed	224	55.6%

The variable “charge outcome” was categorized in four ways: (1) charge dismissed; (2) probation and/or drug court; (3) Probation and/or drug court AND a stay away order; and, (4) sentenced to prison. The frequencies for this variable are reported in table 2 below.

Table 2. Charge Outcome Frequency (N=234; 191 missing)		
Charge	Frequency	Percent
Dismissed	65	27.8%
Probation and/or Drug Court	90	38.5%
Probation and/or Drug Court plus Stay Away Order	43	18.4%
Sentenced to Prison	36	15.4%

The chi-square value was significant, indicating that prosecution outcomes do vary according to the neighborhood where the crime occurred. Table 3 presents the cross-tabulation of these variables and the chi-square results.

Table 3. Cross-tabulation: Neighborhood by Charge Outcome (N=226; 199 missing)

Neighborhood	Charge Outcome			
	Dismissed	Probation/ drug court only	Probation/ drug court plus Stay Away Order	Sentenced to Prison
Weed and Seed Count	27	27	39	21
Expected Count	32.8	42.4	21.7	17.2
Not Weed and Seed Count	38	57	4	13
Expected Count	32.2	41.6	21.3	16.8
Total	65	84	43	34
Chi-Square Statistics				
Pearson Chi-Square		31.658**		
Lambda		.209**		
Gamma		.393**		
**Significance level is < .001				

In neighborhoods without a Weed and Seed program, there are significantly less drug trafficking cases that result in a prison sentence. In addition, in the Weed and Seed neighborhoods, there are many more stay away orders issued and less cases dismissed. These results provide some limited but supportive evidence for the argument that court monitoring, performed by an active neighborhood association in coordination with the CPC, increases the likelihood that drug trafficking cases will be successfully prosecuted.

Conclusion

It is the hope of the evaluation team that, by documenting the coordination effort between the Weed and Seed sites and the CPC, the director and coordinator of the local Weed and Seed program can determine the strengths and weaknesses of this relationship and make any necessary structural changes to the existing collaborative effort. This documentation may also make available valuable information on promising practices and lessons learned to other Weed and Seed sites that are trying to create stronger communities that actively participate in crime prevention activities. In addition, the data collected on the drug trafficking cases and their outcomes is useful in determining the effectiveness of the neighborhood members' participation in the prosecution efforts.

It is clear by the data collected that neighborhood participation in the court monitoring process has a positive effect on keeping criminals out of these neighborhoods. There are a greater number of stay away orders, less dismissals, and more prison sentences for offenders arrested in the Weed and Seed sites, compared to other neighborhoods in Albuquerque. In addition, neighborhood participation in the court monitoring process is ostensibly facilitated by the CPC. Through the coordination efforts of the NA members and the CPC, drug trafficking cases are efficiently tracked as they are processed through the system. Because of this, NA members are more effective in organizing their efforts in keeping drug traffickers out of their neighborhoods. Clearer, more formal collaborative partnerships will promote further change and are the next step in providing these and other Albuquerque neighborhoods with better, more comprehensive community services.