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Evaluation of Citizen Police Academies
as an Effective Tool to Improve
Citizens' Relations with Law enforcement

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ABSTRACT

Are Citizen Police Academies an effective tool to improve citizens' relations with the law enforcement agency (s) that serves the community? Citizen Police Academies have been in use for a substantial amount of time and can certainly be evaluated to determine if they are effective or not. The research of available literature concerning Citizen Police Academies produced an informative review of both the history of Citizen Police Academies as well as the present use of academies nation wide. This information along with a survey of law enforcement agencies has produced a wealth of information that will not only aid this author but other law enforcement personnel that may be asking the same questions of Citizen Police Academies. After completing the literature review and the law enforcement surveys, this author became very aware of not only the origins of Citizen Police Academies, but how they have grown in both popularity and practicality in the United States. The majority of agencies utilizing this form of community education reported that Citizen Police Academies have been a very positive way to educate the public in how law enforcement functions and how citizens can effectively assist law enforcement efforts. Other law enforcement agencies, that are considering the utilization of a Citizen Police Academy, should certainly consider this as a very effective and positive program to not only educate their community but build relations between officers and the community they serve. This author believes that if these two feats can be accomplished, that both the law enforcement agency and the community will benefit equally.

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INTRODUCTION

The development of Citizen Police Academies, to improve the relationship between law enforcement agencies and the public, continues to be a growing trend throughout law enforcement. This trend is not limited to major police departments, but is also embraced by smaller departments as well. To determine if this trend is effective, the question "if Citizen Police Academies are an effective tool to improve citizens' relations with the local law enforcement" must be asked. This inquiry would have to be submitted to the law enforcement agency as well as citizens who have participated in the program.

Reviewing available literature and conducting interviews with police agencies, now utilizing Citizen Police Academies, will be conducted in this research. Random interviews of citizens, who have completed the academies, will add to the research. Research will attempt to determine the positive and negative aspects of Citizen Police Academies as related to law enforcement.

The author believes that Citizen Police Academies have become an effective way for law enforcement agencies to educate citizens on the operations and responsibilities of the perspective agency. Not only will the Citizen Police

Academies have provided education for the citizens but it will have also built a sense of trust and partnership between the citizens and the law enforcement agency. Several obstacles facing officers' contacts with citizens will have been eliminated or greatly reduced due to this type of partnership.

If the projected outcome is realized, then law enforcement agencies should seriously consider Citizen Police Academies as a viable option. Programs of this type can be used to build a partnership with a better educated public. A partnership of this magnitude can assist a law enforcement agency in many areas. Citizens may be viewed as allies, instead of obstacles by members of the law enforcement agency. Citizens may become educated observers, who are able to relay important information to investigating officers. Citizens may even volunteer to assist the law enforcement agency with duties that a civilian could be assigned. These possibilities, along with endless others would definitely be a welcomed advantage by any law enforcement agency.

Review of Literature

The law enforcement community, for many years, has been considered a very well protected community. Law enforcement personnel considered themselves different from

civilians because law enforcement officers are subjected to incidents and situations that the normal public is not. To think that the average person knew what law enforcement officers went through or experienced would be unthinkable. This mentality led to a separation of the public and law enforcement. In turn this separation led to a mistrust of law enforcement by the public. The presence of groups in conflict with each other are prevalent even in today's society and nowhere is this conflict more evident than between the police and the community (Coffey, 1982). This mistrust grew larger and larger eventually affecting the way in which law enforcement operated. Lack of cooperation and respect resulted in a rise in crime and decrease in successful investigations into crimes. This problem was not only evident to the local law enforcement agencies but to larger organizations that oversee law enforcement such as the Presidents Commission on Law Enforcement and Administration of Justice. In order to combat this problem and redirect the trend of cooperation police may have to listen to the complaints of the community, instead of portraying an adversarial role, to determine where in fact the problems lie (Bender, 1978).

Recognizing this problem law enforcement began to update practices and programs, even implementing new

practices and programs as times and trends change. One new program that law enforcement has implemented over recent years is the Citizen Police Academy (CPA). CPAs were implemented to educate the public and promote communications between the citizens and members of the police agencies (Hilson, 1994).

Too many times law enforcement agencies let newly developed programs continue without looking at the program to determine if the program is actually progressing in the direction desired. As with any program utilized by law enforcement CPAs need to be evaluated to determine "are CPAs beneficial for law enforcement?" To determine this, several aspects need to be examined. Has the community taken advantage of the program? Has the law enforcement agency noticed any positive or negative results of the program? Do the citizens feel a better sense of cooperation with the law enforcement agency? And if the program was initiated by an agency, is it still in use?

In order to ask these questions it is important to understand CPAs and what the desired results should be. CPAs basically provide a mechanism for educating the public about law enforcement and ways to assist themselves as well as law enforcement (Greenberge, 1991). This knowledge, in turn, would hopefully give the citizen a sense of

partnership with the agency and prompt the citizen to lend assistance if possible to the agency. The assistance from the citizens would not necessarily be of force, but assistance in the form of being a good neighbor or providing information to law enforcement, which may assist in solving crimes. Citizens of an area are many times more aware, than the law enforcement agency, of activities that are taking place, but for what ever reason fail to report these activities to the law enforcement agency in their area. Reason for this could be from feelings of the activities being non-important to feelings of mistrust toward the Law enforcement agency. CPAs were developed in an attempt to resolve these matters, which would in turn provide better relations with the Law enforcement agency and the community they serve. This partnership is precisely the element which the Christopher Commission spoke of in its report in 1991 (Cole, 1994).

CPAs had been a great success with the Devon and Cornwall, England, Constabulary and was originally called "The Police Night School." Members of the Orlando Police Department in Florida recognized this success and thought the program may be of benefit to law enforcement in the United States. This agency was the first in the United States to put the program into practice. This agency found

the program to be a great success, not only in participation from the citizens but in the return cooperation from the citizens who had attended the academy. Since then many agencies have begun to implement the program, not only in Florida but across the country. Many times CPAs have been incorporated into the philosophy known as Community Oriented Policing (Macsas, 1997). CPAs have not been limited to large agencies with large budgets and numerous resources but even smaller agencies where instructors are not paid and classes are small.

The ways in which the program attempts to familiarize the citizens with the operation and responsibilities of the agency are numerous, involving several different techniques to relay this information to the citizens. Citizens that are interested in participating in the program are selected and enrolled in the program. This requires a commitment of the citizen for the period of time the program will be conducted. Classroom sessions are held to relay information about laws, types of crimes that are committed, what elements are necessary for prosecution of these crimes and how officers conduct the daily requirements of their job. Citizens not only learn how the first officer conducts a preliminary investigation/report, but how subsequent investigations take place and how even minute pieces of

information can assist with these investigations and bring criminals to justice. Citizens are given an opportunity to ride along with patrol officer so the citizens can see first hand the types of situations that officers have to deal with on a daily basis. Citizens are also given firearms training as well as the legal requirements for using lethal force against a person.

There is no set limit on the percentage of the population who can attend the program. However class sizes and program dates are limited according to the agency's resources. The program's success may be relative to the percentage of the community that participates in the program, the greater the number of participants the greater the probable success.

Methodology

To determine if CPAs are an effective tool to build relationships between the community and police departments, several police departments were polled to identify the agencies that are currently utilizing the program or began the program and cancelled it for some reason. It is believed that agencies that have begun a CPA will be found to be continuing the program and that the program has in fact built a more positive relationship between the citizens and the law enforcement agency.

For those agencies that are currently utilizing Citizen Police Academies, a questionnaire survey will be developed and given to the agencies in order to compile uniform information. Agencies found to have begun a CPA and no longer utilizing the program will also be given the survey for their input. The survey will consist of basic information such as the length of time the academy has been in use, if it is believed that the results have been positive or negative. The survey ask to list 3 aspects, positive or negative, depending on which way the results were seen. It was also ask if an Alumni Association was formed and if so an approximate number of members enrolled.

A survey will be developed for citizens who have completed the programs of agencies still participating in the program. This will be done in an attempt to gain the viewpoint of the citizens and not just the law enforcement agency. This survey will consist of questions that should reveal if citizens truly gained any new knowledge or understanding of how law enforcement works with and depends on the community for support and cooperation. Questions such as "What have you learned from the academy?", "Do think that your experience has changed your attitude toward you law enforcement agency, if so how?" and "Have you noticed a difference between other citizens who have

completed the academy and the law enforcement agency, if so does it seem to positive or negative?"

Ten law enforcement agencies will be polled. The agencies to be polled will be within the eastern portion of Texas. Size of a department will not be a consideration for a department to be polled.

The feedback from the surveys provided will be reviewed and analyzed to determine if there are any identifiable trends either positive or negative. These trends, if any, will be considered in evaluating the Citizens Police Academy program.

Findings

All ten of the surveys mailed were returned. Upon reviewing, the surveys several things were learned most of them consistent from agency to agency. One thing that was found is that 9 out of the ten agencies polled have begun a Citizen Police Academy, with the other agency planning on starting an academy. Of the agencies that have a program in place, all of them report a benefit from the program. This benefit is either by better cooperation of citizens with the law enforcement agency on investigations, information provided by citizens on criminal activity or by assistance by citizens as volunteers to assist with non-law enforcement actions at the police department, such as

filing paperwork or assisting with organizing community functions sponsored by the police department.

It was also learned that all but one of the agencies placing an academy into service continue to utilize the academy. Several agencies listed ten years or more for the length of service of their academies. The one agency that began an academy, but is not currently active, lists a change in administration as the reason. Of the agencies reporting active academies, not only was it found that the academies are continuing, but an association of the graduates had formed. Most of the associations are referred to as "Citizen Police Academy Alumni Associations" (CPAAA). One agency reported to have 1000 members in their CPAAA. The Alumni Associations have been found to assist with recruitment for upcoming academies, special events, such as crowd control at fairs and parades, as well as fundraisers for the agencies.

In polling citizens who have attended academies it was found that the majority of the graduates have a different opinion of the law enforcement agency they are affiliated with. Citizens report that they learned that there was a great deal more involved in the everyday job of police officers. Citizens also learned that the restrictions on police officers, either by law, by citizens or by

departmental policies are very strict and most times allow for no deviation. Especially in areas such as the use of deadly force or pursuit driving citizens learned that these types of situations, which usually require a split second decision.

The agencies that implemented CPAs and continue to utilize the program are very happy with the results. Agencies reported that the relationships between the agency and the citizens have definitely increased. Agencies report more cooperation from the community with police officers, working on the streets, as well as with administration, who may be more in tune with the community's needs and concerns. This is an example of building relations with citizens through Citizens Police Academies (Fuegett, 1996). One agency reported that assistance from citizens, who had attended an academy, was a major reason for a recent pay referendum passing.

Citizen Police Academies have been so successful for building relations between law enforcement agencies and the communities they serve that it is believed that a similar program, beginning in high schools, would be just as successful(Lesce, 2000).

Discussion/Conclusions

Over time law enforcement agencies and the communities they serve continue to lose a degree of cooperation as each year passes. The purpose of this study is to determine if there is an effective tool to help rebuild that cooperation. One of the latest methods to attempt to accomplish this is the Citizen Police Academy. This program has been in use long enough that other agencies can ask "Are Citizen Police Academies an effective tool to improve citizens' relations with Law enforcement?"

It was hypothesized that Citizen Police Academies were in fact an effective tool to not only build relations between the community and the law enforcement agency that serves it but to educate the same community. To determine if this was the case a study of available literature and a survey of law enforcement agencies were conducted. As a result it was found that agencies, who have utilized Citizen Police Academies reported positive results and continue to utilize the program. In fact only one agency who had begun the program had not continued its use. This agency also reported that it was due to an administration change and due to negative aspects from the program. These findings support the hypothesis that a Citizen Police Academy is an

effective tool to build relations between a law enforcement agency and the community it serves.

This author believes that law enforcement agencies should always strive to improve the relationship between their agency and the community they serve. One way to accomplish the task, is to educate the public. It has been found that one of the most effective ways to do this is to implement a Citizen Police Academy. Knowing that other agencies have benefited from this program and continue to utilize the program could certainly make the decision to begin a program easier for agency administrators, who are considering undertaking the project.

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