

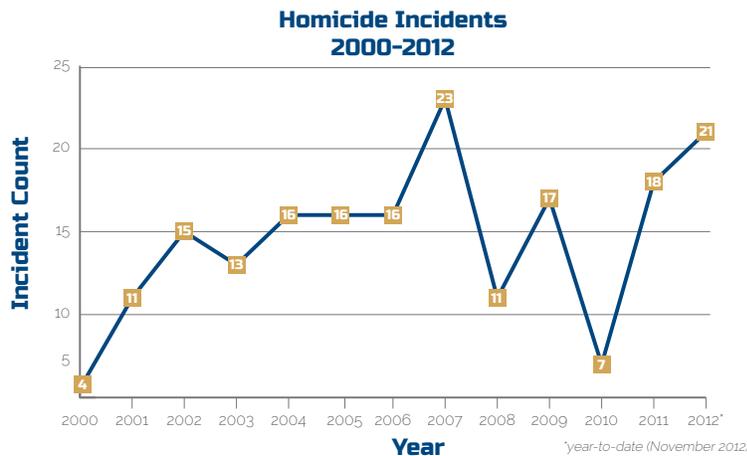
**LOCATION:** Fort Myers, Florida

**REQUESTOR:** The Fort Myers Police Department (FMPD)

**REQUEST:** In April 2012, the FMPD requested the Diagnostic Center's assistance in identifying evidence-based solutions to address violent crime – specifically homicides – and improve community-police relations.

### Priorities

- Reduce homicides, specifically within the Dunbar community
- Improve community-police relations through community engagement (e.g., working with faith-based leaders, schools) to increase crime prevention and awareness
- Decrease access to illegal weapons within the community
- Increase department's knowledge and intelligence gathering capabilities about street gangs, organized crime and violent offenders



### Diagnostic Center Findings

- Reduced staffing and increased calls for service strain police department capabilities and capacity
- Increased use of, and access to, illegal handguns contribute to high violent crime and homicide rates
- Officers are not fully educated on the presence and influence of street gangs, organized groups and drug distribution networks operating in the region
- Limited trust and a lack of cooperation between law enforcement and residents of the Dunbar District negatively impacts the ability of law enforcement to solve homicides
- Fear of retaliation by community members and limited victim-witness services contribute to the circular effects of high homicide rates and cold cases
- Limited availability of community interventions, employment and youth programs contribute to an environment conducive to crime and a growing perception of city government disinterest in Dunbar District



### Diagnostic Center Recommendations

- Implement anonymous methods for crime victims and witnesses to report crimes
- Partner with other criminal justice agencies, school organizations, public housing authorities and community organizations to increase trust between the community and police
- Incorporate faith-based initiatives to build bridges between FMPD and the community
- Enhance homicide investigations, crime scene and cold case investigation training courses to improve officer skills and knowledge

### Overview

From 2000 to 2012, the City of Fort Myers experienced a volatile, but ultimately significant increase in homicides. Additionally, the reduction in staffing levels impacted the FMPD's capacity to effectively respond to rising homicide rates and overall violent crime. As a result, the FMPD requested training and technical assistance (TTA) from the Diagnostic Center to (1) identify data-driven solutions and promising practices to reduce homicides and violent crime and (2) develop a collaborative approach to crime prevention that includes local stakeholders and community-based organizations.

In fulfillment of the TTA request, the Diagnostic Center conducted interviews and collected data from over 15 criminal justice agencies and local stakeholders, including: the FMPD, Lee County Sheriff's Office, Lee County State's Attorney's Office, Lee County Municipal Courts and Probation, the Office of the Mayor, faith-based ministers, schools, community organizations and local residents. The Diagnostic Center identified several factors contributing to violent crime in the city, such as strained community-police relations and limited capacity to effectively investigate and prosecute homicide cases.

The Diagnostic Center recommended the FMPD: (1) enhance law enforcement practices in reducing homicides and combating violent crime, (2) increase community engagement around public safety challenges and (3) develop crime reduction strategies based on data driven solutions and model practices. The Diagnostic Center also recommends enhancing training programs to build officer skills and awareness, developing methodologies to better engage with community and faith-based leaders, creating anonymous crime solver hotlines and growing victim-witness services.



### Community's Response - The Fort Myers Police Department

Building trust and legitimacy with the community became a primary focus for the Department as it looked for ways to conduct outreach and develop relationships with community groups. Its efforts include several programs such as Explorers, Citizen Police Academy, Police Athletic League, Respect for Law Camp and Volunteers in Policing as well as work with faith-based leaders.

In addition, in May 2013, officers of the FMPD attended a homicide training coordinated by the Diagnostic Center. The training improved officer awareness of organized crime activities and homicide procedures. The inclusion of nearby agencies in the training assisted the FMPD in networking and coordination with local departments on crime trends.

The Diagnostic Center also identified the Rebuilding Every City Around Peace (RECAP) initiative, which was developed by Reverend Jeffrey Brown, as a data-based crime solution resource for FMPD. RECAP provides training to assist community leaders, faith-based leaders and law enforcement organizations to work collaboratively and increase their capacity for solving violence in their community.



FMPD officer with children

In September 2014, Rev. Brown delivered RECAP training to Fort Myers' faith-based community and FMPD officers. The training raised participants' awareness on their role in violence reduction strategies. Community leaders and faith-based leaders were identified to take initiative and develop a community coalition to facilitate community-police communication. The Police Clergy Liaison and community members will work together to establish goals and objectives to address disorder and disorganization within the community and develop stronger partnerships with youth. Crime prevention officers and community groups will continue to work together and develop opportunities for community engagement and activities.

Lastly, the FMPD coordinated with the Bureau of Justice Assistance National Training and Technical Assistance Center to receive Fair and Impartial Policing training for its officers in June 2015.

### What is the Diagnostic Center?

The DOJ, Office of Justice Programs launched the Diagnostic Center in Spring 2012 to serve as a technical assistance resource for state, local and tribal policymakers seeking to implement data-driven strategies to combat crime and improve public safety in their communities. The defining characteristic of the Diagnostic Center is its approach to being smart on crime by helping state and local leaders to use local data to apply what works in criminal justice in their communities. This effort ensures that limited local resources are invested wisely, federal assets are leveraged where they are needed most and communities reap better public safety outcomes.

### Contact the Diagnostic Center:

 [www.ojpdiaagnosticcenter.org](http://www.ojpdiaagnosticcenter.org)

 (855) 657-0411

 [contact@OJPDiaagnosticCenter.org](mailto:contact@OJPDiaagnosticCenter.org)

***"The training... arranged by the Diagnostic Center has been extremely helpful in assisting FMPD personnel provide more efficient and effective police services to the citizens of Fort Myers."***  
**- Police Captain Dennis Eads**

### Lessons Learned and Next Steps

Here are three key considerations for departments interested in enhancing their relationship with the community.

- Leverage schools, churches and non-profits as "community anchors" to provide opportunities to interact and openly communicate with community members. These opportunities can encourage collaboration and allow organizations to share resources focused on improving public safety and enhancing relationships between law enforcement and the community they serve.
- Use events that bring the community together around a common interest (e.g., sports leagues, festivals) as a way to engage and identify community leaders that can advocate for, and develop the connection between, the police department and the community.
- Include community policing techniques (e.g., conflict resolution, problem solving) in all aspects of police and community training courses. Inclusion of these elements in performance assessments and expectations for officers will promote a community-focused culture.

