Neighbors and Government Collaborate in Fighting Crime:
The CARE Program in North Minneapolis

by William J. Craig and John A. Holcombe

The people living in the Jordan neighborhood in north Minneapolis have been worried about crime and drug dealing. But since last April neighbors have been working with police and other government officials to reduce crime and make the neighborhood more livable. Much has been accomplished and participants from both the neighborhood and government are enthusiastic about CARE, the program which has brought this all about. CARE stands for Community and Resource Exchange, because the community sets the agenda and government uses its resources to help achieve the community’s goals. CARE is designed to provide a holistic response from government to problems defined by the community. In Jordan, those problems have been crime and drugs, in other neighborhoods they might be different.

The problems addressed in Jordan have been very focused. Houses where drugs are sold or where other problems exist are identified. Then, the government coordinates the many departments and agencies required to deal with the problem property. For example, a house on Sheridan Avenue was identified as a potential crack house at a neighborhood block meeting. The neighbors gathered surveillance information for the police, including the license plate numbers of automobiles that frequently stopped at the house, and even a floor plan of the property. Minneapolis police and the Hennepin County Sheriff then cooperated in a successful
raid. When the first assault team emerged from the house, an elderly neighbor from next door gave the assault leader a big hug. Later, a police officer commented, "That's like getting the Heisman Trophy for a drug raid."

In October of 1990, the CARE Intervention Coordinator, Bob Miller, contacted CURA requesting an evaluation of the less than year-old CARE program. CARE had been successful by many measures, and pressure was mounting to replicate the program in other neighborhoods. Mr. Miller needed an external evaluation of the strengths and weaknesses of CARE, along with recommendations for changes that might be required if the program were expanded into other neighborhoods.

The evaluation was based primarily on observation and interviews and, to a lesser extent, written materials and reports. We attended many CARE meetings, including a neighborhood pot-luck dinner attended by both government and neighborhood CARE committee members and others involved with CARE. We attended three block meetings, and held focus groups with the CARE Steering Committee, neighborhood participants on the CARE Committee, government participants on the CARE Committee, and block leaders who have taken their problems to the CARE Committee. Finally, we individually interviewed Jay Clark, the community organizer and executive director of the Jordan Area Community Council (JACC); the intervention coordinator, Bob Miller; and various members of the groups listed above. What follows is a summary of our evaluation.

Beginnings

CARE is a joint project involving the City of Minneapolis, Hennepin County, and the Jordan Area Community Council, the local neighborhood association. The project grew out of the City/County Criminal Justice Coordinating Committee, when they were asked to develop a program designed to reduce crime and drug dealing and increase "livability." The Jordan neighborhood was selected as a test site for a one-year demonstration program because of its characteristics. It is an inner-city neighborhood with a non-white population of about 20 percent, an average household income of less than $16,000 per year, and a population of 7,861 (in 1980). While Jordan has been a stable and vital neighborhood, five quantitative measures showed that drug problems were increasing and that stability was eroding:

- The number of homesteaded properties fell substantially between 1985 and 1987.

- Identifying significant drug-related and crime problems in the target neighborhood that demand coordinated, inter-agency solutions.

- Protecting children against the effects of drug use in their families and immediate neighborhood.

- Supporting neighborhood efforts to improve the quality of life.

- And improving interagency communication and coordination.

The identification of specific problems begins at the block level. Residents hold block club meetings at which problem properties are identified and information is collected. A block leader brings these problems to a CARE meeting (held every two weeks) where they are discussed and a plan of action is designed. Two weeks later, at the next CARE meeting, results are presented, or resolution of the problem is carried forward to subsequent meetings if a satisfactory outcome has not been achieved.

The block meetings have been organized by JACC. By December of 1990, about 60 percent of the Jordan neighborhood blocks had been organized, compared with only 25 percent at the time the CARE program began. JACC's current neighborhood effort is a program called "Block Out Drugs." At initial block meetings, Jay Clark, executive director of JACC, describes activities which may indicate the presence of a drug house and asks if any such activity has been noticed. People are only too willing to talk. Clark helps focus attention on specific houses and details, but is careful to keep neighborhood residents from using the meetings as forums for personal feuds.

JACC is responsible for making block meetings representative. To ensure a good turnout, doors are knocked and flyers dropped the evening before a meeting. Reminders are made on the night of the meeting. Experience has shown that people are more willing to identify specific properties if the block meeting includes four blocks instead of one; with this many homes, attendance has been as high as seventy-five. JACC has helped to be sure that minority homeowners are represented, both at block meetings and on the JACC Board of Directors. If the system has failed, it has been with renters, both white and minority, who have less of a stake in the neighborhood.

The CARE committee meeting is held every other Tuesday night in the JACC office on Lowry Avenue. Recently, high attendance has forced relocation to a nearby church. The committee membership consists of both government people and representatives from the neighborhood. Given the current neighborhood focus on drugs, crime, and property, the government side of the committee contains representatives.

Cover photo: At a meeting of the CARE Committee action can be fast as neighborhood block leaders describe problems in their block and report on their surveillance efforts. In response, government officials prepare on the spot a coordinated plan to eliminate the problems.
An abandoned house can become not only an eyesore but a hang-out for kids and a place for drug deals. Sometimes, the best solution is to tear it down. Instead of the year or more this usually takes, this house on Girard came down within months because of the coordinated efforts of officials working in the CARE committee.

from the following city agencies: Department of Inspections, Health Department, Minneapolis Community Development Agency, Community Crime Prevention/SAFE, and the Police Department. Hennepin County is represented by the Probation Office of the Bureau of Community Corrections, the Welfare Fraud Unit in the Economic Assistance Department, and the Office of Planning and Development, through the intervention coordinator, Bob Miller. The neighborhood side consists of three or four official members, representatives from those blocks where specific action is under discussion, and other interested citizens. The meetings are open to anyone living in the neighborhood.

A presentation is made by the block leader to the committee, describing the nature of a problem and details from the neighborhood surveillance. While the meetings are open, problems can be presented only by block representatives. This approach focuses the meeting and adds credibility to the stated problem. The surveillance information supplied by the block provides the basis for developing a plan of action. Appropriate agency representatives are then asked to reveal what they know about the property in question and to present a plan of action. Sometimes action is restricted by laws and policies, such as those requiring reasonable delays in the taking of property because of non-payment of taxes. Where this is the case, an explanation of the expected time frame is given and this seems to be appreciated by the neighbors.

Where action can begin, the best approach usually involves multiple agencies and the details of that coordinated activity are worked out on the spot among those agencies. For example, a building inspector cannot enter a locked building, but could plan an inspection to follow a police raid where the police have used a warrant to open the building. This is a key aspect of the CARE project, the integration and coordination of all relevant agencies working on a single problem property. The kind of coordination that occurs in the CARE project is very unusual.

Two weeks later the block leader returns to learn the outcome. Early on, both neighborhood people and agency people were skeptical, but initial successes led to increasing enthusiasm and more creative solutions. People from the agencies have developed a sense of teamwork and accountability to the neighborhood and each other that has fueled their interest in solving problems. As one agency person said, "I wouldn't want to be the one person in the group who did not follow-up on his or her promises to take action."

Each meeting of the CARE committee opens with a summary of recent action, then moves to new problems and developing plans of action. Blocks continue to meet every six to eight weeks, first hearing about the results of their initial complaints, then discussing any ongoing or new problems that should be brought before CARE.

Measures of Success

By a wide variety of measures, the CARE program is a success. A number of problem properties have been cleaned up. New programs have developed to serve neighborhood needs. Both the neighborhood and the government people involved are excited by what they have been able to accomplish. However, it is still too early to determine whether the CARE program will have long-term impacts on the Jordan neighborhood.

Problems Resolved. The list of problems attacked and solved is substantial, even after only eight months of operation. Some examples:
A dilapidated property on Hillside Avenue was demolished after a protracted period of negotiations with the owner. Over the seven-month period between bringing this property to the CARE committee and its demolition, reports were made to the neighbors every two weeks. Many turned out to watch the demolition and thank-you letters were sent to the city Inspections Department. The property had been a problem for more than ten years.

Two properties on Irving Avenue, owned by a landlord from another state, were suspected of being places to purchase drugs, but raids proved unsuccessful. Health and Housing inspections occurred within twenty-four hours after the raids, leading to citations to the landlord. When the landlord came to a CARE committee meeting, he was pressured to evict problem tenants and replace them with more responsible ones. Eventually the property was sold to a local landlord who is now meeting with the CARE committee to develop a feeder program of stable tenants through Turning Point, a drug rehabilitation program.

Prostitutes, Johns, and drug deals were an increasing problem in the Broadway and Logan area. The impact on the neighborhood was significant, both because of noise and harassment of individuals. The neighborhood identified the area as a priority and the police worked diligently with the committee to clean it up. "Now you see mothers with strollers," we were told.

Boarded buildings are discouraging to neighbors and give the appearance of deterioration. A neighbor suggested using Plexiglas to secure buildings and the Inspections Department agreed, in response, to sponsor a change in the housing code. The change was adopted by the city council and buildings are now secured in more inconspicuous ways in the neighborhood.

**New Programs.** A number of new programs are being developed to serve neighborhood needs. The residents of Jordan were responsible for some of these developments or were among the first to take advantage of others and prove their merits. They are examples of how the neighborhood and public agencies have come to trust each other and are working on longer-term solutions in addition to the short-term actions taken on immediate problems.

- The criminal justice system is reviewing neighborhood impact statements as it considers detention and sentencing decisions. Prostitution and drugs are often viewed as "victimless crimes," but the Jordan neighborhood has documented the negative impact that these activities have on the neighborhood. The police and court systems have listened to them and are now beginning to use their statements as they deal with the perpetrators.
- **A Neighborhood Service Corps** is being created to help clean up eyesores in Jordan: vacant lots and the yards of abandoned buildings. Local youth will be employed to help improve their own neighborhood.
- Jordan has investigated programs in other cities to see how they use community housing and health inspectors to supplement city workers. Perhaps this could work in Minneapolis if it were modified to fit local needs. The neighborhood is pursuing the idea.
- Neighbors in Jordan proposed that community restitution be required for people causing problems in the neighborhood. This would make community service in Jordan a part of their sentencing. The idea is being considered by criminal justice system agencies and the courts.

**Neighborhood Satisfaction.** People in Jordan are very happy with the CARE program. It has empowered them, giving them a sense of hope and a perception of control over their lives. CARE has also improved their view of government.

The neighborhood was skeptical of CARE in the beginning and unorganized blocks are still skeptical. At a block meeting where some of the "resolved" problem properties were showing early signs of renewed illegal activity, it was asked, "How confident are you that these things will be cleaned up?" The answer was "completely." "How confident would you have felt six months ago?" "Zero."

The people of Jordan have learned how to organize themselves to get attention and credit CARE for this education. They appreciate the fact the government responds to a united grass-roots voice as opposed to individual complaints. The neighbors are proud that they have been able to get people to work together. They have learned how to spot a drug-house and how to collect information that will be useful in shutting it down. All of this has led to a sense of empowerment.

People now have a different view of government, at least of the departments represented at the CARE meetings. They are happy that they have been able to educate government people about their neighborhood and its problems. They have enjoyed seeing bureaucrats get excited about solving those problems. They have a better understanding both of the options open to government and of the limits placed on it. The people believe that they are helping to change the system and make government more accountable. They hope that other neighborhoods will share in this benefit.

**Government Satisfaction.** In many ways, the success felt by government participants in the CARE program reflects the satisfaction felt by neighborhood residents. They too are pleased with the list of problems resolved and have a new ap-
preciation of the reality of these problems for people living in the neighborhood. They are impressed by their new ability to work together. They were skeptical at the beginning of CARE but are now enthusiastic about it. At the start, most were drafted and began attending CARE meetings reluctantly; now the meetings are a highlight of their job.

For those who have been involved, there is a feeling that colleagues back in the agencies would benefit from dealing with a neighborhood first-hand as they are doing. They feel privileged. Working with neighborhood people has given them a better understanding of the problems neighborhoods face. They have enjoyed seeing people get involved and have benefited from all the surveillance work done by the neighborhood. Being able to explain at CARE committee meetings how certain restrictions limit their responses and make progress slower than everyone would like, has left them feeling better understood and appreciated. There is a new sense of working together with the neighborhood on an action-oriented agenda that really does improve people’s lives.

Government people also have a new appreciation of the advantages of coordinating their efforts with other government agencies. This coordination has given them the ability to get results fast. Such coordination has been possible, in the past, only through personal connections and enormous amounts of time on the telephone. Four quotes from government people involved with CARE are worth repeating:

- “It helps me do my job better.”
- “We are actually doing something [effective] for the first time that I’ve seen in twenty years.”
- “The CARE program may be a prototype for changing policies and procedures, making government more responsive.”
- “This is really the way neighborhood revitalization should work.”

Limits of Success

Despite these positive outcomes and attitudes, the CARE program cannot be declared a total success at this time. Partly because it is too soon to know whether the long-term hopes for the Jordan neighborhood will be realized. And partly because success has been limited by the inability to involve a few key players.

In the long run, people hope that Jordan will see many measures of stability and a high quality of life. This might include lower numbers of police calls, more use of prenatal care, higher levels of homeownership, and higher test scores by school children. Because these indicators will take years to stabilize and improve, it is much too early to tell whether the downturn of Jordan has been reversed. In fact, in some places calls to police have increased because of a new faith that something will be done.

In the short run, problems do not go away simply because they have been stopped at one location at one point in time. In fact, there is evidence of problems returning to previously cleaned properties; neighbors now know the signs and are attempting to stop problems before they become large again. There is a wariness and a need for continued vigilance. Even the most involved people continue to be concerned about their future in the neighborhood—enough that a few have their homes for sale and many see themselves living elsewhere in five years.

Initial efforts in Jordan have been aimed at eliminating problems, but more needs to be done to make positive gains. In general, the city has been most involved because it provides “hard” services that attack symptoms. Hennepin County has more responsibility for “community” services, such as drug treatment, that treat the problems of individuals and families. It remains to be seen whether the neighborhood can organize to request the services that would assist people who need help and who, by getting it, would become better neighbors. At this point CARE’s purpose is dealing with the immediate problems of the Jordan neighborhood. Although there is some concern for the people causing the problems and the next neighborhoods where they might land, this is not the primary focus of the Jordan Neighborhood CARE Committee.

Not every group in the neighborhood is involved in CARE. In Jordan, as in many places, it is homeowners who have the largest stake in the neighborhood and who are the most involved. People who choose to rent and stay in one place for a long time seem to be a phenomena of the past. Short-term renters are often seen as being involved in the problems of the neighborhood, but not in the solutions, certainly not in CARE. They have been invited to block meetings, personally and by phone, but they have not participated.

There are other groups whose unwillingness to participate causes problems. The United States Department of Housing and Urban Development and the Veterans Administration have acquired numerous properties in Jordan as a result of loan defaults. Their goal for these properties is to get a high price but many do not sell rapidly. HUD and VA properties are among the most poorly maintained in the neighborhoods and some “secured” properties have become open to children for play and places from which to sell drugs.

At the beginning of the evaluation, there were comments that Hennepin County might not be fully committed, but the evidence suggests that the county has become a willing and effective participant.

Prospects for the Future

Although only in operation since last April, CARE’s successes are already raising questions about its future. Other cities and neighborhoods are asking to have access to the same resources which have benefited Jordan. This raises two questions: Can the program be replicated in another neighborhood? and, Given limited resources, can the Jordan neighborhood maintain its activity with reduced attention from government agencies?

CARE’s success in Jordan is clearly dependent on several key factors that might not be present in other areas: a credible and tenacious community organizer, like Jay Clark; an established community organization, like JACC; and a lead government representative, with skill and energy like Bob Miller. In other neighborhoods, CARE may well take on different faces. Jordan put forward crime and drug dealing as their major issues. Other neighborhoods may have different issues and may need different government agencies to solve them. At the core of CARE is the need for an inter-agency response to a community-based agenda. CARE will have to continue to be adaptable if it is to ensure future successes.

In the long run, it is agreed that the Jordan neighborhood cannot continue to receive the high level of support now provided through the CARE program. The big question is whether the block clubs can retain their vitality without a common enemy. Problems of crime and drugs can regenerate quickly. Certainly some of the new programs developing in Jordan can be spring boards for continued neighborhood involvement. These new programs, like the Neighborhood Service Corps and neighborhood impact statements, offer ways of reducing government involvement and implementing long-term solutions.

Finally, the leadership pool in the neighborhood and in government is continually expanding, and should be able to produce dedicated people to replace some of the key actors in the CARE process. They will need knowledge and determination, but the success of CARE has led to a new responsiveness that will make their jobs easier.

Editors note: This evaluation was completed on the last day of December 1990. Since that time, CARE has begun to work in the Lyndale neighborhood of South Minneapolis. Meanwhile, CARE in Jordan continues to tackle problems in innovative ways. For example, CARE is