

SCORE (Second Chance OR Else) Program

SCORE is a collaborative drug market intervention program (DMI) of the USAO, Mobile Police Department (MPD) and the Mobile County Board of Health's Fatherhood Initiative. Under the previous MPD Police Chief roughly 4200 arrests and/or citations were executed in high crime neighborhoods over an 18 month period. The new MPD Police Chief advised the USA that these communities had become beleaguered with law enforcement intervention in their communities and had developed a general antipathy towards the police because even law abiding citizens were being harassed and receiving citations for de minimis infractions. The new MPD Police Chief also advised the USA that his department received very little community cooperation in solving crimes in these communities.

Based on the STAND program in North Charleston, South Carolina a DMI program was crafted to fit the needs of the Mobile community. As part of the SCORE Program the MPD Police Chief identified an open air drug market in one of the problem communities where most of the drug transactions could be traced back to one residence. An undercover investigation was initiated where video footage of drug trafficking was captured using poll cams and undercover buys. From this information a decision was made to prosecute certain suspects federally or in the state system. A select few suspects who had little or no criminal history and no record or history of violence were selected to participate in an intensive mentorship program administered by the Fatherhood Initiative. Instead of being arrested during the greater drug suspect round-up the six individuals who had previously been identified as good SCORE participants were approached by law enforcement officers and provided with a letter from the Mobile PD Chief stating that law enforcement was aware of their drug dealing activity and that it had to stop immediately. The letter also stated that but for the fact that community leaders had prevailed upon the chief to give them a second chance they would have been arrested and charged with drug distribution. The letter concluded by advising the suspects that they had to show up at the police station in a few days for a meeting with community leaders where they would find out more about a special program to give them a second chance and that a failure to appear would result in their immediate arrest.

A community panel of 15-20 people consisting of pastors and business owners from the blighted community were handpicked to serve on the community panel by the police chief and the USA. In addition to following the progress of each of the program participants once a month and determining whether they should continue in the program, the community members also agreed to collectively meet with the program participants face-to-face once a month in order to discuss their progress and offer encouragement.

Prior to the first "call-in" meeting the Mobile Police Chief gained legal title to the troublesome drug house and bulldozed it to the ground in front of the local media and the community.

Several churches and community groups volunteered to assist the PD remove the rubble from the demolished drug house. All six of the identified SCORE Program participants showed up for the first meeting with the community panel. Moreover, due to information about the SCORE Program spreading on the street, two more previously unidentified drug dealers showed up at the business of one of the community leaders and asked to participate in the program and that they wanted to “change their lives.” One additional drug dealer, who was not under indictment or otherwise contacted by police, showed up at the police station and pleaded to be able to participate in the program. Since the initiation of the SCORE Program numerous other drug dealers requested to participate in the program but were turned away due to SCORE Program capacity and the desire by authorities to focus on the current program participants. The nine SCORE Program participants range in age from 20-40 years of age and have 37 children and two grandchildren among them. To a man, all of the nine men who were offered an opportunity to participate in the SCORE Program accepted the invitation with enthusiasm and outlined the lack of a father or father figure when they were growing up. All of them stated how much it meant to them to be mentored by such a prestigious group of men from the community. Many of the program participants had outstanding traffic warrants or fines, which were withdrawn or dismissed after the police chief informed the presiding judge of the program and each suspects’ participation in it.

Additionally, in coordination with Mobile PD, the Fatherhood Initiative provides SCORE Program participants with drug and mental health counseling, drug testing, employment placement assistance, general life mentorship and specific fatherhood mentorship. SCORE Program participants are required to collectively meet with representatives from the Fatherhood Initiative once a week. In practice, SCORE Program participants are in contact with their Fatherhood Initiative mentors on a constant basis relaying their needs and struggles. The SCORE Program has been in operation for four months and so far all of the program participants have refrained from additional criminal activity, are drug free and employed. Community panel members who own businesses have provided employment opportunities to a few of the program participants. Several of the program participants also participated in an ex-offender employment workshop and job fair sponsored by the USAO.

As an aside, the dismantled open air drug market had been drug free for three months when a drug dealer showed up to sell drugs in the location of the demolished drug house. Of their own accord the nine SCORE Program participants accosted the drug dealer and advised him that he was not welcome in the community and to “never come back.” The very next day the SCORE Program participants held an impromptu meeting with the youth in the community where they advised the young people against the use or sale of illegal drugs.

All of the SCORE Program participants continue to express a strong connectedness to each other, the community panel members, personnel from the Fatherhood Initiative and the participating law enforcement officials.

The police chief now reports that law enforcement relations with this troubled community have never been stronger and that execution of the SCORE Program turned a previously very negative relationship around almost overnight. He also advised the USA that the Mobile PD now has great rapport with community members and that they provide assistance to police with regard to preventing and solving crime in their community. The progress of the SCORE Program is being chronicled by personnel from the sociology department of Springhill College and a few imbedded reporters from the local media.