
PROJECT DESCRIPTION

NEWPORT NEWS, VA

POPULATION CATEGORY: 150,001-500,000

NO LONGER LOST IN TRANSLATION: STRENGTHENING TIES WITH THE HISPANIC COMMUNITY IN NEWPORT NEWS, VIRGINIA

THE CHALLENGE: BREAKING DOWN THE BARRIERS

Located in southeastern Virginia, Newport News has a diverse community of 193,000, with Hispanics accounting for almost 5% of the population. Unfortunately, this segment of the community is at a higher risk of being victimized due to their language barrier and distrust of law enforcement. In an effort to reduce crime in our Hispanic Community, the Newport News Police Department took a proactive approach and brought together all of the city's services and the diverse communities to address the problem.

Over the past decade, the Hispanic community in Newport News, and across the United States, has grown exponentially. According to the U.S. Census Bureau's 2006-2008 American Community Survey, Hispanics accounted for 5.1% of Newport News' total population, up from 4.2% in the 2000 Census. This number is continually increasing and is expected to show a much higher increase in the upcoming 2010 Census. As in a number of cities, Newport News has two types of Hispanic communities. One is comprised of professional and blue collar citizens who are homeowners and whose families attend our public schools and local churches and are actively involved in the community. This group tends to work in the medical, educational and other professional fields. The second group is explained in detail in the next section.

"ATMS WITH LEGS"

The second segment of the Hispanic population has been increasing over the last few years. It is comprised of mostly adult Hispanic males from Mexico and other Hispanic or Latin countries. A large number of them work as laborers in construction, manufacturing and food service. They are mainly transient and reside in cramped older apartment complexes or motels. In some cases, they have left their families behind and send part of their paychecks back home to support their families. They speak barely enough English to get by, or none at all. And, to their own detriment, they carry their entire paycheck in their pockets or stash them away in their rooms due to their distrust of banks and other financial institutions. This has earned them the nickname: "ATMs with legs." And, the criminals know this all too well.

As a reprieve from working back-breaking laborer jobs during the week, these Hispanic men get drunk, frequent prostitutes and, in a number of cases, get robbed. Many of the robberies go unreported due to a lack of trust of authority figures. This lack of trust was formed in their native countries, where police corruption and brutality is a way of life. Furthermore, they feared being deported. To law enforcement, there was another very real concern: that the continued victimization on this Hispanic community would breed the formation of gangs for protection. These gangs, such as the notoriously violent MS-13, were formed to offer protection at a price to Hispanics whether they wanted it or not. MS-13 gang's weapon of choice is the machete, known for crudely maiming and hacking to death its victims. Officers had encountered some of its members in the area. It was recipe for disaster for the city.

RESPONSE: PARTNERSHIPS & OUTREACH

In response to the serious need to address the problem, the Hispanic Outreach Initiative was formed in 2004 by the Newport News Police Department. It was the brain child of Officer Xavier Falero, a Latino, who realized ignoring the problem was in fact making it grow and fester. He realized that police officers could not wait for the Hispanic community to come to them. The police department and other city services had to come to them. Officer Falero enlisted the services of his fellow Hispanic and Latino officers. They went into the Hispanic communities most impacted by crime. They met with the Hispanic residents and provided them with crime prevention brochures that had been translated into Spanish. In a non-threatening setting, they interviewed victims, who had not reported the incident originally, but were willing to trust the police. Slowly, the barriers were breaking down. But there was much more to do. He realized that the Hispanic community could teach the police department a thing or two when it came to cultural sensitivity. As a result, Officer Falero began training all members of the police department on Hispanic/Latino culture to ensure the officers could better communicate and understand a group that grew up in a culture where the police were feared as much or if not more than the bad guys.

CRIME RATE INCREASES; POLICE WELCOME IT AS GOOD NEWS!

It was because of these police-driven efforts that crimes committed in these areas were now being reported. At first, statistically speaking, it appeared that crime was on the rise in these areas. It was not that crime was rising, but now it was being reported by the Hispanic community. This was an expected result and only proved that the Hispanic community was beginning to trust the Police Department. It was several months later that the crime rates began to drop drastically due to police officers addressing the crimes reported in these areas, addressing environmental issues and educating the residents in these areas about how to avoid being a victim of a crime. This drop in crime illustrated the positive relationship that was developing between the police department and members of the Hispanic community.

In 2006, the Police Department noticed that the Hispanic community was not reporting crimes again and began stepping up its efforts. It was discovered that a large portion of the Hispanic community was transient and unaware of prior efforts to connect with this

segment of the community. A more permanent solution was needed to assist the Hispanic community. In the early part of 2007, the Newport News Police sought out leaders in the Hispanic community to assist in communicating and building trust with the Police Department and the City.

On June 2, 2007, the Police Department held the first Hispanic Community Leaders meeting, which hosted Hispanic leaders from different areas of the City. The topic of discussion was on building trust between the community and law enforcement personnel.



In an effort to conduct outreach and answer questions from the community, Sergeant Xavier Falero utilized the Police Department's public information van and visited parts of the city that were known to have large Hispanic populations. These outreach efforts proved to be very successful. After each outreach was conducted, there was an increase of "calls for service" made by the Hispanic community. As these outreaches continued, it was discovered that the members of the Hispanic community were experiencing other issues that did not necessarily pertain to public safety.

BEYOND CRIME

On September 13, 2007, the City Manager and an Assistant City manager, in addition to the leadership of the Police Department, attend the second Hispanic Community Leaders meeting. The message was clear: the Hispanic Community was in need of other services from the City other than those provided by the Police Department.

During this meeting the City Manager requested that an official committee be formed to address issues other than public safety. By now, the outreach effort had grown from a focus on public safety, to including other city services and programs. During this same time, the city's Communication Staff was in the process of developing a city-wide Strategic Communications Plan to increase communication with citizens, visitors, businesses and employees of Newport News. During this process, the City Manager's Office discussed the need to develop key strategies that would specifically target ways to improve communications with members of the city's growing Hispanic community.

The Police Department initiative, coupled with city leadership's desire to improve communications with our Hispanic residents, led to the establishment of the **Hispanic Advisory Committee (HAC)**. This Committee is comprised of 12 Hispanic community

members who either live or work in the City of Newport News and are actively involved with the city's Hispanic community. The members represent a variety of backgrounds including the medical, real estate, non-profit, health, and faith-based fields. Their expertise and direct involvement in the community provide an in-depth view of the wide-ranging issues that affect the limited-English speaking community.



To assist HAC, representatives of the following city departments attend the meetings as well: Human Services, Health, Public Schools, Parks & Recreation, Sheriff's Office, Police Department, Fire Department and Codes Compliance. The HAC members were divided equally in two and three year terms to ensure that if members of the HAC resign or were replaced, the remaining members would have working knowledge of its efforts. All HAC members are volunteers and do not receive public funds. In 2009, almost 600 hours were volunteered by its tireless members.

During 2008, much of HAC's focus was on learning about the various city services and programs available to all city residents. Presentations were made by departments and agencies that the Committee identified as having the most impact on the Hispanic community. This included:

- Sheriff's Office
- Newport News-Hampton Community Services Board
- Department of Human Services
- Newport News Public Schools
- Newport News Redevelopment and Housing Authority
- Health Department
- Healthy Families
- YWCA
- Project CARE
- Census Bureau
- Newport News Emergency Management

KICKING AROUND IDEAS & SOCCER BALLS

In an effort to further tear down the walls between the police and the Hispanic community it serves, the Newport News Police and the Norfolk, Virginia Police Departments established a partnership since both were addressing the same issues with the Hispanic community. Instead of simply kicking ideas around, they added a ball - a

soccer ball. Both Departments formed their own soccer teams to play in a tournament against a soccer team made up of members of the Hispanic Community. Both departments elicited assistance from the local Hispanic Radio Station, Selecta AM 1050, out of Norfolk. It broadcasts entirely in Spanish in the Virginia Hampton Roads area, and most of North Carolina. Sergeant Falero is a regular guest on the radio show, fielding questions and dispensing crime-fighting tips to the Hispanic community. On a sunny and warm day in May, while a Mexican band played Latin music, over 200 from the Hispanic community attended. A Newport News Police K-9 Unit demonstration capped off the event.



Utilizing soccer with the Police Departments in an effort to connect to the Hispanic community has proven to be very successful. Approximately two to four hundred members of the Hispanic community attend these events. The City and HAC distribute informational flyers written in Spanish. These events attract all socio-economic and educational backgrounds from the Hispanic community at one time and in one place.

A STRATEGIC PLAN

In 2009, HAC developed a detailed strategic plan that outlined several goals, including holding a public listening forum, developing informational tools, partnering with various community groups, facilitating training for city staff, formulating a volunteer/internship program and liaising with the Department of Human Services. Below is a synopsis of the Committee and the activities, outreach efforts and accomplishments of 2009.

Public Listening Forums

These forums provide an opportunity to present information on city services and programs to Spanish-speaking residents in a one-stop fashion. It also gives our Spanish-speaking community members an opportunity to ask questions and get answers from city departments and related agencies. Three listening forums were hosted by the Hispanic Advisory Committee during 2009. The presenters were from Human Services, Health Department, Police Department, Sheriff's Office, Newport News Public Schools and a private immigration attorney. Topics included residency and legal status issues, booking procedures, traffic summons, domestic violence, English classes, Medicaid, food stamps, school registration and citizenship.

Utilizing Informational Tools

The Committee identified a need to effectively distribute information to the Hispanic community through various resources. These resources range from electronic to paper format and aimed to provide information on those issues that most impact the Hispanic community. □HAC compiled a contact list of local businesses, agencies, and individuals who serve the local Hispanic community. This list identifies Spanish information distribution points and potential resources for activities and events sponsored by HAC.

- *Flyers:* The Committee developed and distributed various flyers in both English and Spanish to advertise upcoming activities and information on services, programs and events.
- *Newport News TV:* Working Group members worked in conjunction with Newport News TV Channel 48 to produce a Spanish version of “Behind the Badge,” a television show hosted by the Police Department to promote crime prevention and community policing. During this 29 minute segment, Sergeant Falero and Detective Jose Hernandez-Zamora were interviewed by morning radio host of AM 1050. The topics ranged from how not to be a victim of robberies, burglaries, theft from autos, and how to utilize the press 2 for Spanish line for the Newport News Traffic Court to recruitment of bilingual persons as police officers.
- *Radio:* The HAC and the Newport News Police continue to utilize Selecta AM 1050 on a weekly basis to distribute information about city programs and services, as well as emergency information, to Spanish-speaking residents.



- *Spanish Guide to Services:* The Committee identified information in the city’s Citizen’s Guide to Services and translated this information into a condensed version for Spanish-speaking residents. This book is available in Libraries, community centers and through various city departments.

- *Traffic Ticket Information:* HAC and Newport News Police had suggested a “press 2 for Spanish” option on the Traffic Court’s traffic ticket phone line. This greatly reducing the volume of Spanish speaking offenders in the court that would have plead guilty and were not required to come to court.
- *Website:* The HAC developed a page on the city’s website that contains information about the Committee including its vision, mission, and activities, as well as contact and membership information.

Partnerships

HAC and the City of Newport News have partnered with the U.S. Census Bureau to assist them with reaching hard-to-count populations, specifically the Hispanic community and other Non-English speaking citizens.

Early in its creation, HAC identified the Department of Human Services as an agency that receives the most interaction with members of the Hispanic community. In an effort to improve service levels, the HAC created a Human Services Subcommittee consisting of representatives from the Committee and the Department of Human Services. Several improvements were made to Human Services operations as a direct result of HAC’s subcommittee during 2009, including:

- Implemented “press 2 for Spanish” telephone option
- Increased the utilization of the “I Speak” cards for non-English speaking residents
- Increased awareness of “InterpreTalk” for immediate access to interpreters by phone
- Assisted in the placement of the Google Translator on the City’s website
- Assisted with the hiring process of an additional bilingual staff people in Human Services, Health Department and Healthy Family Community Board.
- Assisted in document translation;
- Resolved issues related to pending Medicaid cases due to language barriers;
- Continuing to review and expedite specific cases where problems have occurred;
- Developing multi-language signage in lobby;
- Making great progress in complying with Title VI; and
- Healthy Families: H.A.C. was instrumental in the City’s decision to create a Bilingual Healthy Families position.

The subcommittee continues to work to improve customer service levels, not just for non-English speaking clients, but for all Human Services customers.

At the request from HAC, one their representatives has been allowed to attend the Board’s meetings of Healthy Family Community Board since August 2009. The Healthy Family Community Board consists of agencies whose mission is to see that every child in Newport News has the opportunity for a safe and healthy environment.

Training

HAC provided several training opportunities for interested City Staff and related agencies to learn about issues that directly impact the Hispanic community. These sessions also allowed staff to receive information on legal requirements for programs that receive federal funding, specifically, Title VI requirements. The Committee hosted several in-service training sessions during 2009.

- U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
- Committee on Youth
- Outreaches with Newport News Police
- Undocumented Employee Labor Rights
- Newport News Public Schools: High School - ESL

Mayra Creed, the Committee Chairperson, provided three training sessions entitled "How to Effectively Communicate via an Interpreter: Cultural Overview"

- Newport News Libraries
- Health Department
- Human Services

SHARPENING THE SAW

In an effort to ensure it is addressing the needs of the Hispanic community and is not resting on its laurels, the HAC initiated a needs assessment to identify service delivery gaps. The assessment has been completed and a report was completed by city staff and presented to the Committee at their March 2010 meeting. The Committee is currently working with city staff to identify service gaps and make recommendations to improve service delivery to all residents of the city.

And despite the challenges from a difficult economy, the HAC and City of Newport News will continue address the needs of those in need in the Hispanic Community as well as the other communities which make the city diverse.