



From the Editor

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From the Editor

Since its creation at the direction of the Texas Legislature in 1952, the School of Social Work at the University of Texas at Austin has played a prominent role in Texas life working with local groups, city and county governments, private businesses and state government in creating, evaluating and refining programs to improve social and economic welfare. The School and its graduates have played visible and often dominant roles in creating and improving child and general welfare services, creation of health and public health systems, rural and border social services, state information systems and innovations in assessing and projecting the impact of state government services.

More than two decades ago separately the Texas Youth Commission, the Texas Department of Criminal Justice, the Travis County District Attorney and the Austin Police approached the School for assistance in dealing with crime and neighborhood disorder. The concerns were the role that neighborhoods play in either fostering or preventing crime. Especially important for the Austin Police were efforts to improve the leadership skills of all officers and specific concepts and skills in providing “community policing”.

Community policing is an approach to policing that emphasizes the police acting to build partnerships and participation in the community to address crime and disorder. It draws from the classic work of George Kelling and James Q. Wilson first published in the Atlantic in 1982 and subsequently extended by many including Kelling and Cole (1986). The concept is fundamentally one of community organization and using small steps to improve public order and control environments that might give rise to more serious crime. The most well-known reported use of this idea was efforts conducted by William Bratton, first in the NYC subway system and then with the NYC Police under Mayor Rudy Giuliani. Indeed using community organization techniques to address minor signs of disorder along with visible police presence to buttress public confidence became a hallmark of Bratton’s career first in New York City, then in Los Angeles and most recently returning to New York City.

This edition of *Professional Development: The International Journal of Continuing Social Work Education* looks at how the city of Austin, Texas is using such fundamental concepts about

neighborhoods, public spaces and visible police presence to address several neighborhoods with some of the City’s highest crime rates and with high percentages of persons with loose ties to the local neighborhood. This edition chronicles key portions of events and the scholarship resulting from an ongoing partnership between the University of Texas at Austin’s School of Social Work and the Austin Police Department in documenting and fulfilling a U.S. Department of Justice grant to implement innovative law enforcement solutions in the target area of north central Austin known as the Rundberg area.

As several papers in this edition detail, Austin is one of the nation’s fastest growing cities with persons from the north, east and west coast moving to the city in the last two decades. Significant as well are the increasing numbers coming from Mexico and Central America. Persons from those countries are distinctive as compared to Americans as they likely have negative experience with police and government authorities. Moreover in many cases they have been and may continue to be exposed to the violence and corruption that has characterized these countries in the last three or four decades. During the 80’s and 90’s much of Central America was engulfed in violent revolutions and military control. Mexico, while being a stable state, has in the last decade suffered high levels of violence and corruption coming from organized crime.

The lead author of the first article is Dr. David Springer who is the joint faculty member in School of Social Work and The LBJ Schools of Public Affairs at the University of Texas at Austin. The article provides the backdrop and overarching areas in the Restore Rundberg efforts: at risk youth, crime, social disorder, community engagement, and overall community interaction and relationships with police. The level of community engagement and impact of community interventions are a cornerstone to gauging the overall influence and effectiveness of the efforts. As a measure of community engagement, Castro, Casstevens, Garcia and Springer detail a collective efficacy and community engagement assessment survey administered throughout the area to allow residents, local businesses, and community leaders a voice in the process. Furthermore, within the Rundberg area, four specific hot spots (areas of

concerns and potential high criminal activity) are examined and analyzed by Whitt to ascertain the extent of issues, how to reduce crime in these areas, and how to limit the displacement of crime to neighboring sites.

At youth risk is one of the key considerations in the grant area. Davis provides an intervention summary of a program designed to promote youth leadership. The program title “Longhorn Leaders” is a partnership with the University of Texas at Austin’s School of Social Work, the Austin Independent School District and the Greater Austin Crime Commission. Longhorn Leaders is a prominent program for the Commission in promoting the importance of academic and personal success for middle school children.

The following article by Pitzer reports on the an inventory of resources, social services, programs, and current initiatives in the are Rundberg area focused on improving the overall environment. Accurate inventories are a necessity in understanding the needs of the community. Additionally, an article documenting and providing a platform to illustrate the concerns, dreams, and to deepen the understanding of the community, is the focus of the article by Streeter. The LaunchPad Photovoice Project is a community interactive research method that collects images, sounds, and captioned narrative of the community.

The article on Aspects of Organized Drug Trade (lead author, Taraba) provides perspectives of issues impacting both the area of Central Texas and the Southwestern United States. One key relevant factor is the location of Rundberg which is situated along the heavily traveled north/south corridor of Interstate 35. The final article by Lauderdale establishes a broad perspective of the Rundberg and Austin community and the resources needed within the sectors of public safety and emergency response to address a rapidly growing area in population and in demographic complexity.

Taken together, these articles submitted and printed for this edition, serve more than just a resource or documentation of efforts in the Restore Rundberg area. This edition serves as a template and illustration of best practices in developing, maintaining and encouraging positive relationships between community and public safety, and the essential role an institution of higher education may play in enhancing both the interaction and the understanding of this relationship. Future editions are open for submissions from other communities and scholars wishing to add to the conversation of community

engagement and public safety.

Dr. Noel Landuyt
Managing Editor