

FAST 2009 DRUGS AND CRIME ACTION COMMITTEE REPORT

HOT SPOTS OF DRUG AND CRIME ACTIVITY

The Problem: Last year we began working with the Clearwater Chief of Police, the St. Petersburg Chief of Police, and the Sheriff on a Hot Spot Card Campaign to end drug and crime activity in specific areas in each jurisdiction. To date, we celebrate that over 60 hot spots that FAST congregation members identified have been cleaned up. However, with tragic incidents still happening, such as the recent St. Petersburg shooting of an 8-year-old girl, and areas in Clearwater still experiencing heavy drug and prostitution activity, there is still a need for local officers to do a better job of enforcing the law.

The Solution: Though he has refused to meet with us and attend the Action, we still want Clearwater Chief of Police Sid Klein to take action on reports of drugs and crime in Clearwater neighborhoods. We are disappointed that St. Petersburg Chief of Police Chuck Harmon will not join us tonight, but **St. Petersburg Asst. Chief Luke Williams has been working well with FAST on addressing hot spots, and as committed to join us tonight for us to acknowledge his hard work.**

RACIAL PROFILING

The Problem: Hispanic residents of Clearwater have raised concerns of getting stopped by the police and harassed based on the way they look, which is called racial profiling. Data for incidents of racial profiling is difficult to come by, partly because people are afraid to report it. Racial profiling is an affront to communities and causes unwanted relationships of distrust to develop between residents and law enforcement.

The Solution: The Sheriff has committed to develop a system where residents can anonymously report on police misconduct. He has committed to look into these reports and take appropriate disciplinary action with his deputies. We want Clearwater Chief Sid Klein to do the same. **The Sheriff has agreed to join us tonight to publicly announce his commitment to address racial profiling. We are disappointed that Chief Klein has declined to attend tonight's Nehemiah Action, but we have extended invitations to Clearwater City Council members to join us tonight.**

REPEAT OFFENDERS

The Problem: In our efforts to reduce crime in our neighborhoods, we have focused on stopping the revolving door for criminals who make our communities unsafe. The revolving door is called *recidivism*, which is defined as "a habitual relapse into crime." Our Pinellas County Jail books and releases about 4800 inmates each month, and as many as 70% will return to jail (about 3360 monthly). Therefore, repeat offenders are the major cause of crime in Pinellas County; reducing the number of repeat offenders will lead to safer communities.

In reducing recidivism, there is a significant cost savings for the community, as well. Each day it costs \$105 to house each inmate at the Pinellas County jail. The average stay of an inmate is about 49 days. That translates to an average incarceration cost of about \$17.3 million for repeat offenders alone. Reducing recidivism by just 10% will save taxpayers about \$2.4 million for an average jail stay, which is roughly \$18.4 million per year.

Experts in the Pinellas County and Lansing, Michigan jails, and in the prison systems in Arizona and Florida say that lack of job skills, literacy, substance abuse counseling, housing, and transportation contribute to ex-offenders returning to jail or prison. The Arizona and Florida Department of Corrections attribute their lower recidivism rates (26% and 32%, respectively) to having all inmates' needs assessed when they get booked, and placing them in in-jail and release programs that help them meet their vocational, educational, substance abuse, housing, and transportation needs. Required counseling and in-jail programming has given inmates a better sense of the real world, and helps them to make better decisions, which typically keeps them from recidivating for at least 3 years. The Pinellas County jail has programs that help with these needs, but they are only offered on a "voluntary" basis.

Research Conducted: We met with the Pinellas County Ex-offender Re-entry Coalition; the Pinellas County Sheriff; the STARS program; the Director of Programs and Services at the Pinellas County Jail; the State Attorney; the Public Defender; the Salvation Army; the Britt House; and had phone calls with the Florida State Department of Corrections, and Dora Schriro, the former director of the Arizona State Department of Corrections.

The Solution: We want Sheriff Jim Coats to create a policy where each inmate who is sentenced to serve time in the county jail receive an assessment at booking that will identify and track their job skills, literacy and education level, and substance abuse, housing, and transportation needs. We want the jail to develop a policy where all inmates sentenced to the jail meet with a counselor who will recommend them to in-jail programs that address their needs, and will help the inmates develop a re-entry plan that will refer them to needed job training and placement, education, substance abuse counseling, housing, and transportation in the community. **Sheriff Coats committed to join us tonight to make commitments regarding repeat offenders.**