



Overview of Community Justice: Basic Principles

Karp & Clear (2000). *Community Justice: A Conceptual Framework*.

Definition:

Community justice broadly refers to all variants of crime prevention and justice activities that explicitly include the community in their processes and set the enhancement of community quality of life as a goal. It is rooted in:

- Action by citizens, community organizations, public social services and the criminal justice system to take control of crime and social disorder;
- Community level outcomes that shift the emphasis from:
 - Individual incidents to systemic patterns;
 - Individual conscience to social mores;
 - Individual goods to common goods.
- Genuine co-partnerships between area residents, businesses, organizations, public agencies and criminal justice systems.
- Area residents within a neighborhood can and do act independently to strengthen, improve and protect their neighborhood and the surrounding community from social disorder.

Goals:

- Improve the quality of life within a neighborhood in ways that:
 - Strengthen informal pro-social controls;
 - Strengthen the ability of area residents to access resources needed to improve or protect their neighborhoods;
 - Meaningfully address problems of concern to area residents and businesses; and
 - Prevent and reduce incivilities, crime and victimization.

Requirements:

- Primary focus on improving neighborhood social conditions and circumstances in ways that prevent harms and reduce crimes within that area.
- A shift away near total dependence on centralized systems of formal social control rooted in laws and enforcement of those laws.
- Co-equal (non-dominating) relationships between residents, businesses, public social service agencies and justice systems.
- Genuine partnerships using dialogue processes and consensus decision making.

Guiding Questions:

- How do the social conditions within a neighborhood affect quality of life?
- How does quality of life relate to the patterns of crime and victimization in a neighborhood?
- Who are the "subject matter experts" on the neighborhood and its problems?
- What is the role and influence of local residents in identifying and prioritizing neighborhood problems?
- What is the role and influence of local residents in decision making about how best to address those problems?
- Are decision-making processes based on listening, dialogue and consensus?

Principles:

- Focus on neighborhoods within larger communities.
- Focus on quality of life improvements for those who live or work in those neighborhoods.
- Focus on problem solving to ameliorate problems and conditions that are of concern to those who live or work in these neighborhoods.
- Decentralized authority and accountability for the production of safe and livable communities where solutions to problems are tailored to local circumstances and preferences.
- Respect, facilitate, support and prioritize the wisdom of local residents about the problems that need to be addressed.
- Recognize the limits of traditional legal justice, it cannot and does not produce safe and livable neighborhoods.
- Safe and livable neighborhoods are co-produced through pro-social interactions between people, businesses, social institutions and formal justice systems which strengthen informal social controls and improve quality of life.