

# **Final Report**

## **Evaluation of the Kankakee County Violent Crime Task Force**

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## **Executive Summary**

In August, 1995 the city and county of Kankakee, Illinois formed a Violent Crime Task Force. This task force was formed in response to escalating levels of homicide and assault, particularly in the city of Kankakee. The city also saw its clean up rate for homicide plummet. The task force was funded by the Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority, with the mandate to solve open homicide cases. A process and outcome study was conducted to determine the feasibility of the task force approach and its impact. The results of this evaluation indicate that the task force was implemented in close accord with its design. The task force complimented ongoing investigations and routine attempts to solve homicide and other serious crimes. The task force investigated 38 individual homicides, making 30 arrests that led to 16 convictions. In addition, during the life of the task force violent crime in the city of Kankakee declined significantly. This evaluation report also discusses the implications of a task force approach to investigations.

## **I. Impetus for the Project**

On March 30, 1995, Ophelia Williams was murdered. Her case number 95C1661 shows the location of her death to be 1074 East Merchant. She was a thirteen-year-old black girl who had been sexually assaulted, stabbed multiple times, and burned. Indeed, her body was found as a consequence of firefighters seeking "hot spots" to extinguish a garage fire.

Christopher Meyer was a ten-year-old white boy abducted in Kankakee County while he played at a boat launch. His murder prompted a countywide manhunt in an effort to apprehend his killer. His killer, Timothy Buss, was apprehended, tried and convicted. The trial drew media coverage from Chicago, with a host of satellite dishes outside the courtroom.

Ophelia's killer remains at large, with little media response and community outrage.

The contrast between these two cases, and the response of the chief of the Kankakee City Police Department to the cases, illustrates the origins of the Violent Crime Task Force. In a widely circulated Associated Press story, the chief was quoted saying that the difference in community, media and law enforcement reactions could be attributed to race. "Christopher was white and Ophelia was black. That in itself is enough reason for shame. But in a broad sense this racism has brought about in the community a more tragic attitude, indifference." These were not the offhand comments of a police chief who let his guard down in front of the media; rather they were the words of his own editorial in the Kankakee Daily Journal.

These comments, and the underlying problem they identified, provided the basis for the Kankakee Violent Crime Task Force. The racism identified by the chief had a variety of effects. The chief recalled seeing the lead detective assigned to the Ophelia Williams case in a store the day after the case. When asked why he was not working on the case, the detective

was reported to have shrugged and offered that it was a weekend. This callousness toward the victimization of African-Americans was pervasive, affecting the police department and spreading to the community. Homicides and serious assaults among blacks in Kankakee were regarded as "routine" and normal events in their community. As a consequence of this view, these crimes received a lower priority from the criminal justice system than crimes where whites were victims. And this treatment of cases involving black victims led to a growing distrust of the police among black residents. Such distrust is consequential for the long and short-term success of the police in solving crimes. Absent significant community involvement, most crimes do not result in an arrest and successful prosecution.

One consequence of this cycle of neglect and distrust was the increasing backlog of unsolved homicide cases. Between 1990 and 1995 seventy-seven homicides took place in the city of Kankakee, forty-nine of them were unsolved. With a clearance rate (arrests divided by homicides) of 35%, Kankakee fell far short of national clearance levels for homicide. The great majority of these cases involved African-American victims and suspects, and the majority involved drugs, gangs and guns. This pattern occurred against an upward spiral of violence in Kankakee. By the mid-1990's, the homicide rate in the city of Kankakee had risen to over 80 per 100,000. This compared to a national homicide rate of just over 8 per 100,000, and a rate in Chicago in the range of 30 per 100,000. By any measure, homicide in Kankakee had spiraled out of control, certainly well beyond the control of local law enforcement.

It is against this backdrop that a new chief of police was named in the city of Kankakee in July 1994. The new chief was selected from outside the department and the area. He had served a full career in the Illinois State Police (ISP), culminating in his term as Director of the

Bureau of Investigation. He brought a strong community policing and problem solving orientation to the job. One of his first acts was to secure funding for the creation of a task force to focus its sole attention on violent crime in Kankakee. The Violent Crime Task Force was funded by the Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority (ICJIA) through federal Anti-Drug Abuse Act funds in July 1995 to address the problems of violent and drug crime in Kankakee. The unit became operational in August of that year. It was initially staffed with a full-time equivalent of 5.5 employees. This included 4.5 detectives, three from the city of Kankakee Police Department, one from the Kankakee County Sheriff's Department, and one half time from the Illinois State Police. The ISP representative was an African-American who served as a minister to a local church and was funded through local match money. In addition, the grant provided funds for an assistant state's attorney in the state attorney's office. The focus of this group was to be on open homicides, trying to solve cases that, for whatever reason, had not been solved. The unit started in October of 1995, and oversight was the responsibility of a Policy Board comprised of the state's attorney, the police chief in Kankakee and the county sheriff.

The orientation of the new task force was unique in the Kankakee area. The department had been managed in traditional means in the past. Little external funding had been brought into the department, and a problem solving or community oriented policing approach was not well integrated into the operation of the Kankakee Police Department. As an outsider, the new chief was in a strong position, having the confidence of the mayor and having taken bold steps in the early days of his appointment. In addition, little inter-departmental cooperation between police departments had taken place. Thus, the task force represented a departure

from business as usual in Kankakee in three distinct ways: (1) it involved cooperation and commitment of officers across departments, (2) it focussed specifically on one type of crime, and (3) it represented a tangible response to crime in the black community. The task force was assigned the responsibility of examining and re-opening "cold" cases, cases that had not been solved by traditional means. By its nature, the task force could invest considerable time and resources into such cases, re-interviewing witnesses, suspects and pursuing old leads. In addition, this workgroup could re-open the physical evidence and re-examine photographic, biologic, and other forensic evidence.

The study began with a meeting of members of the research team, ICJIA program and evaluation staff, and key task force participants. This meeting was essential to the relationships that were subsequently established between the research team and task force staff. The initial response of the lieutenant in charge of the task force toward the research process was quite guarded and somewhat apprehensive. At the end of the meeting, a working relationship was established between this individual and members of the research team that proved to be quite productive.

## **II. Study setting**

Kankakee, Illinois is a microcosm of many American cities. Kankakee is a medium-sized town of approximately 28,000 residents that has experienced many of the crime and social problems that plague larger cities. Shifts in the local economy led to the exit of several of the largest employers in the 1980's. The exit of steady, high-wage jobs had a number of negative economic consequences for the city, including the transition from single family ownership to multiple-family rental properties, increased poverty, a declining tax base, and decreased city revenues to provide services and respond to these problems. The most significant major consequence of this demographic shift was a dramatic increase in the fraction of renter-occupied properties. The Director of the Kankakee County Development Corporation estimates that, as of 1998, as much as two-thirds of the residences in many Kankakee neighborhoods are renter occupied. In part, as a consequence of these changes, the city of Kankakee experienced dramatic increases in crime, particularly violent crime. Homicide rates escalated to over 80 per 100,000 residents, and the Kankakee homicide rate ranked among the highest in the state of Illinois. Consequently, a large backlog of unsolved homicide cases piled up, and many residents lost confidence in the police department.

In an attempt to address this situation, the city of Kankakee hired a new police chief in the mid-1990s. He initiated a number of innovative programs in the city, including the formation of a Problem Oriented Policing (POP) unit, enhanced training for problem solving policing, a Citizen's Police Academy, and a Violent Crime Task Force. At the same time, an aggressive Nuisance Abatement Ordinance was passed, the Metropolitan Enforcement Group unit was reorganized to address street level drug dealing, and a CrimeStoppers Hot Line was

implemented. The Violent Crime Task Force provided an opportunity to enhance the relationship between the Kankakee Police Department and a number of important law enforcement institutions in the area including the state's attorney, sheriff's department, and other municipal police departments.

The increase in crime in Kankakee in the early 1990's was quite dramatic. Between 1992 and 1994, the city of Kankakee experienced a 100% increase in homicides, going from 11 in 1992 to 22 in 1994. In addition, the rate of violent crime in the city was one of the highest in the state, more than double the statewide rate, and higher than many larger cities such as Bloomington, Peoria, Rockford and Springfield. It exceeded that of Chicago by a factor of nearly two to one. Specifically, in 1994, the homicide rate in Kankakee was 80 per 100,000 while in Chicago it was 33 per 100,000. The state of Illinois recorded a homicide rate of 11 per 100,000 for that year, just above the national rate. The increase in the homicide rate in Kankakee was also dramatic, spiking from 30 per 100,000 in 1989 and 1990 to its 1994 peak of 80 per 100,000.

There had been a notable change in the ability of the criminal justice system to respond effectively to crimes of violence. In 1990, all murders that occurred in the city of Kankakee (9) and in Kankakee County (11) were cleared by arrest. However, by 1994, only 45% (10 out of 22) murders were cleared in the city and 50% (13 out of 26) in the county were cleared by arrest. Most dramatic is the data for the years 1988 to 1994. For this time period, 77 homicides were committed in the city of Kankakee; only 21 were solved, a clearance rate of 35%. Similarly, the clearance rate for other violent crimes was quite low and declined in the early 1990's. For robberies, the 1990 clearance rate was 7%, a number that dipped to 2% by

1992. The clearance rates for criminal sexual assault (from 54% to 30%) and aggravated assaults (32% to 22%) also declined from 1990 to 1992, and overall these clearance figures do not compare favorably to the statewide average clearance rates for homicide (60%), robbery (23%), criminal sexual assault (44%) and aggravated assault (60%). By any measure, the sudden spike in homicide rates specifically, and violent crime generally in Kankakee taxed the criminal justice system beyond its capacity to respond.

Further complicating the picture of violent crime in Kankakee was the changing nature of those offenses. Interview and media data indicate that much of the increase in violent offenses was due to gang activity and drug trafficking -- some from Chicago -- and that these types of cases were more complex to solve, requiring more detailed investigation and prosecution strategies. A review of murder and shooting victims since 1990 indicated that violence in that community involved a relatively small group of individuals who may be related to or associated with other offenders in the community. Many of those associations and individuals were heavily involved in the local drug market, and it appears that a notable fraction of violent crime in the early 1990's was related to battles over drug territory.

These rapid and dramatic changes in levels of crime took place against the backdrop of a local criminal justice system and community that was ill-prepared to cope with these events. The criminal justice system in Kankakee reflected local values and concerns and like many communities probably was caught unaware when the influx of gangs, drug sales and firearms came to town. The Kankakee Police Department was comprised of 69 sworn personnel and 23 civilians. The chief was assisted by 2 deputy chiefs, 8 lieutenants, 10 sergeants, and 48 patrol officers. The department included a number of traditional divisions, including patrol,

juvenile, motor pool, stolen auto, a POP unit, and an evidence section. The mayor appoints the chief, and the city of Kankakee has an elective system with a strong mayor and a city council. Prosecution of felony and misdemeanor cases is the responsibility of an elected state's attorney. The 1994 election brought a new state's attorney to office, and this individual participated in the formation of the task force, serving on the task force policy board.

The Kankakee City Police Department responded to over 64,000 calls for service in 1995. The majority of those calls, 38,068 (58%) were originated by citizens. It should be noted that the fraction of officer originated calls (42%) is substantially higher than is observed in most large cities, where citizens initiate ninety percent of calls for service. Of these calls, just over 9,100 case reports were filed, and 2,872 arrests were made. Fourteen percent of all arrests (368) were of juveniles, and the balance was of adults.

### **III. Methods of Study**

The evaluation of the Kankakee Violent Crime Task Force was comprised of three principal components with a series of integrated tasks that cut across these evaluation components. One component of this study was a process evaluation concerned with documenting the implementation and operation of the program. A second aspect of the evaluation examined issues of impact of the project activities. The final aspect of these consisted of a formative evaluation component that focused upon providing feedback for the purpose of program development. These evaluation components are described in the sections below.

## **Process Evaluation**

In a newly initiated activity such as the task force, it is important to understand the steps taken to implement the project and document the difficulties as well as the successes encountered during the implementation process. This evaluation approach is important for several reasons. First, project implementation involves the clarification of goals and objectives of the project and determining the activities that are oriented to achieving those goals. While these are often discussed in program planning materials, the actual operationalization of program activities involves a more specific determination of how the program will actually function. What is going to be important in the daily operation of the program? How are priorities set regarding cases to receive enhanced attention? What is the emphasis attached to various program activities and what are the steps through which the project will progress in order to achieve its goals? These are all questions that are important to this aspect of the assessment.

This step of the evaluation is to clarify and document what was done in the project. Thus, one critical aspect of the assessment is a thorough description of the project, what it hopes to accomplish and how it plans to achieve these objectives. Second, this evaluation component documents the implementation process to learn what is important in initiating projects of this type. What can we learn from the experience of this jurisdiction that will be of benefit to other localities as they seek to replicate a project such as the task force? What did the project administrators and participants discover in project implementation and operation that was particularly beneficial and what do they wish had been done differently are the principal issues that will be explored in isolating the “lessons learned” from the implementation and operation of the task force. Third, the goals, priorities, and operation of programs often change

after the initial implementation period. Another important concern of the process component of the evaluation was to document changes in program operation.

One of the key operating principles adopted by the task force was increased collaboration, cooperation, and interaction among the three participating agencies. Much of the activities of the process component are devoted to describing and analyzing this aspect of the program. In particular, we focussed attention on the nature of the interaction among staff from the various participating agencies, the nature of collaboration between the task force and other agencies, specific steps that were taken to enhance coordination, and the keys to successful collaboration in the investigation and prosecution of cases.

Another very important issue for the process evaluation is the description of how the task force differs from the investigative and prosecutorial practices and procedures that were in effect prior to program implementation. In addition, the process evaluation component explores the effect of the structure of program management upon program operation, the patterns of decision making, the adequacy of training and preparation of program participants, the selection of program personnel, the adequacy of staffing with regard to program objectives and achievements, efforts to include and inform the community about the program, and the community perception of the program. The accumulated information from all of these aspects is integrated into this final report.

#### Data Collection Strategies for Process Evaluation

In order to obtain the necessary information to conduct the process evaluation and make credible assessments of program implementation and operation, a considerable amount of time was spent interviewing participants and observing project activities. Indeed, members of

the research team made more than 75 site visits during the 32 month evaluation period, August 1, 1996 through March 31, 1999.

#### *Interviews with Project Participants*

Interviews were conducted with key participants on the task force at the beginning of the evaluation period. These interviews were held in one on one sessions conducted by the principal investigators. These interviews explored expectations and perceptions of the need for the project, motivations for getting involved, pre-existing levels of cooperation, and experiences since project initiation. Subsequent interviews asked respondents to reflect on their experiences, discuss their perceptions of cooperation, what was particularly important in fostering interagency collaboration, as well as those factors that impeded cooperation, and make suggestions for other agencies wishing to pursue a similar strategy.

#### *Site Visits*

As noted above, the evaluation team made regular site visits to the project site. These site visits were coordinated around key activities of the task force. Site visits offered the evaluation team opportunities for observation, interviews, data collection, and ride-alongs.

#### *Observation of Project Activities*

The evaluation sought to have a thorough understanding of what the project does in its day to day activities in order to adequately represent its operation. Further, it was critical that the local evaluation coordinator spend a significant amount of time with the program staff in order to be accepted and establish a rapport with project personnel. This individual spent a considerable amount of time with task force members, attending staff meetings, observing interactions, and accompanying them in their routine activities. This provides the opportunity to

learn of project activities and progress in an informal setting and thereby supplement the material that was obtained in the more formal interview setting. Observation helped to determine the strengths and weaknesses of task force operation, management and implementation and to learn from its members their concerns about problems and prospects.

#### *Documenting Case Activity - Activity Logs*

Information from case activity logs was used to collect information about case investigations and outcomes. Such information was useful in documenting both project activities and outcomes. This information was directly abstracted from program records and provides the basis for case flow and crime description information.

#### *Documenting Case Activity - Case Studies*

Several cases were selected as “case studies” where the local evaluation coordinator tracked all case activity to fully specify the types of actions that are taken, methods of collaboration, information gathering techniques, prosecutorial strategies, and case outcomes. These cases were selected from categories of cases that represent the typical cases investigated by the task force.

#### *Interviews with Non-project Staff*

It was important to document the activities and progress of task force itself, but also to determine how the it affected the routine operation of other agencies and individuals. In addition, we sought to document how successfully this unit was accepted by the broader agencies involved in the task force, and other non-participating agencies. A group of community leaders not involved in the project were interviewed at the later stages of the

program to determine their perception of project activities and the level of cooperation among agencies.

#### Formative Evaluation

The Request for Proposals noted the need for feedback on project activities at regular intervals. The evaluation team provided regular feedback on the progress of the evaluation to the chief of the Kankakee Police Department, as well as the lieutenant in charge of the unit. In addition to quarterly progress reports made to the ICJIA, an interim report was made in June 1998 to ICJIA staff, task force staff and selected local law enforcement agents. Feedback from that presentation to the evaluation team was helpful in preparing this report.

#### Impact Evaluation

The impact evaluation component was designed to determine project performance on a series of outcome indicators. At the early stages of the evaluation, the evaluation sought to identify and clarify the goals and objectives of this project. An additional topic of early evaluation activities was to obtain agreement on the measurement of outcomes.

We arrived at two categories of outcomes, those that affect the processing of cases and those that affect crime in the community. The project was oriented toward system efficiency, and as a consequence, we chose outcomes that are concerned with case processing and are directly relevant to the program activities. However, the ultimate objective of the task force is the reduction of crime. No rigorous statistical controls exist in this study so it is not possible to determine a causal linkage between crime patterns and project activities. However, this report notes changes in the level of reported crime and perceived community safety that occurred during the evaluation period of project operation that may be a result of the task force.

There were a number of key measures of case processing that focused on the numbers and types of cases that are handled by this unit and the elapsed time that cases take in the investigation and prosecution stages. Of central importance to this part of the analysis was the degree to which the project has increased the clearance rate, reduced the number of unsolved violent offenses, decreased the backlog of cases and engaged in successful prosecution of these offenses. These are key outcome measures. Their measurement is facilitated by an assessment of the effectiveness of the investigation and prosecution process. Thus, measures are included that account for case outcomes in terms of arrests prosecution and disposition. Analysis of these data provides an opportunity to conduct an assessment of the importance of various solvability factors in case processing.

#### Data Collection Strategies for Impact Evaluation

##### *Case Tracking System*

A case tracking system was developed to collect information on each of the cases designated for task force activity. This system includes data elements that describe the offense, information that is known that relates to solvability, relevant dates for case events, investigator and prosecutor activity. As it turned out, the quality and quantity of information was suitable for such an analysis. A related part of this analysis examined the level of activity devoted to cases of various types. This analysis focused on the relationship between the types and level of activities and case outcomes.

##### *Reported Crime*

Another important potential outcome measure is the reduction in homicides and other violent crime. Data were collected from police records on the reported numbers of these offenses beginning with the year 1980 through 1998.

#### *Key Community Informant Interviews*

A key part of the assessment of outcomes is the perception of the community about the project activities and the changes in crime over the project period. As noted earlier in the discussion of the process component, two waves of interviews with key community leaders were conducted. These interviews were conducted initially in the spring of 1998 with thirteen key community leaders including the Kankakee Police Chief, the Mayor of Kankakee, and the Kankakee County Sheriff among others. The second set of interviews was conducted with this same group of individuals in February and March 1999. These individuals were selected purposely based upon their knowledge and activity in the community. The first interviews focused on the perception of crime in the community and the second emphasized the changes in this perception since the project initiation.

### **IV. Process Evaluation Results**

#### Patterns of Crime in Kankakee County

The first question that must be assessed regarding the process evaluation is the nature of crime in Kankakee. If homicides in the study period were substantially and significantly different from other crimes of violence, this finding would suggest that a traditional task force approach to solving violent crimes might not achieve full impact. An additional hypothesis to be investigated is that homicides and assaults share a large fraction of common variance. We examine these important process issues in Figures 1 through 11 (Appendix A). In each figure, we compare the

191 serious assaults (these were the aggravated assaults) to the 52 homicides that occurred in 1990-1997.

Figure 1 examines three event characteristics of homicides and assaults during the study period. Here we seek to determine if homicides differ from assaults on three dimensions (gang-related, alcohol-related, and drug-related). These designations were made by a review of the homicide and assault records of each offense during the study period. For each of these three characteristics, a higher fraction of homicides than assaults had the characteristics present. The difference was smaller in the case of gang-related crimes, where 12% of homicides were gang-related and 8% of assaults were gang related. Ten percent of homicides were alcohol related, compared to 6% of assaults, and 10% of homicides were drug-related compared to 1% of assaults. These differences, in general, are rather small, save for the drug-relatedness of homicides compared to assaults. But overall, the magnitude of the differences is small enough to suggest that these offenses share more in common than they are different.

This conclusion is generally supported by the data in Figure 2. Here we examine the differences between weapon type in assaults and homicides. For each crime type, the use of a gun is the modal category. However, guns were more likely to be used in homicides than assaults. This is particularly true for handguns, where homicides were nearly twice as likely to have a handgun than were assaults (63% to 33%). When the gun categories were combined (rifle, gun unspecified, and handgun) guns were used in 94% of homicides and 75% of assaults. Clearly, policies that target guns or gun users are likely to pay dividends in Kankakee.

In Figure 3, we examine the difference in the day of week of occurrence between assaults and homicides. Remarkably, there are few differences across the day of week in

concentration effects. That is, it does not appear that these violent offenses are concentrated on certain days. Homicides and assaults display somewhat different patterns across the days of the week, with homicides peaking on Fridays, and assaults on Sundays and Thursdays. A similar picture emerges from the data on crime locations. These data are presented in Figure 4. These data show that homicides were more likely to occur on the street (33%) than assaults (48%). Homicides in Kankakee were more likely than assaults to occur within a dwelling such as single family or multiple family dwellings (30% of homicides compared to 17% of assaults).

We next move to a consideration of the characteristics of the individuals involved in homicides. In Figure 5 we compare the ages of suspects in homicides and assaults. In general, suspects arrested for assault are older than those arrested for homicide. While the modal age category for arrest for both offenses was 21-30, nearly half of those arrested for homicide were in this category, while just over one-third of those arrested for assault fell in this category. Fully, 84% of all homicide suspects were 30 years of age or under. These data suggest that while most suspects in the offenses of homicide and assault are under the age of 30, that this youthful character is especially pronounced among homicide suspects. This has implications for the way in which investigations are conducted.

We conclude our examination of victim characteristics in Figures 6 and 7, where the race and sex of suspects is presented. These two figures present rather unequivocal findings and similar patterns. The overwhelming majority of suspects are African-Americans, 93% for homicide and 80% for assaults. These figures are greatly disproportional to the representation of blacks in Kankakee, where they comprise approximately forty percent of the city population. The disproportionality is greater for homicide, suggesting that there is a distinctive quality to the

nature of lethal violence in this city. Suspects in assault and homicide are far more likely to be men than women; 91% of suspects in homicide and 87% of suspects in assault are men. Thus, with regard to the race, gender and age of suspects for violent crime, they are overwhelmingly male and black.

The next four graphs, 8 through 11 examine characteristics of suspects. The age of victim (Figure 8) is distributed somewhat more evenly across the age categories than was suspects. The modal category of victim age for both homicide (46%) and assault (39%) is 21 to 30, followed by 20 and under. Compared to the age of suspects, victims are somewhat older, and less likely to fall in the youngest age categories. Figure 9 presents the data for victim race. While victims of both assaults (67%) and homicides (84%) were more likely to be African-Americans, the disproportionality observed for race of suspects is not as large. It is clear however, that victimization for blacks in Kankakee greatly exceeds their fraction in the population. The data for sex of victim (Figure 10) follows a similar pattern. The majority of victims for homicide (82%) and assault (61%) were males, a considerably lower level than for the sex of suspects. However, victims and offenders for both homicide and assault resemble each other in terms of age, race, and sex. They are overwhelmingly young, black and male.

The final graph (Figure 11) compares the victim offender relationship for homicides and assaults. Most notable is the magnitude of the unknown category, 39% for homicides and 60% for assault. These data are important, as they point to the characteristics that led to the formation of the task force in the first place, the large number of unsolved cases. In general, when a crime has not resulted in arrest, it is impossible to classify the victim offender relationship. This is most pronounced for assault, though it is notable that nearly two in five

homicide cases could not be classified based on these data. For those cases where a victim offender relationship could be determined, the pattern for assault and homicide diverged. Twenty-nine percent of homicides involved acquaintances, nearly twice as large a fraction as for assaults (15%). And overall, assaults are more evenly distributed across victim offender categories. It appears from this figure that homicides in Kankakee are more likely to occur among those who have a prior relationship than is the case for assaults. A very small fraction of each crime type occurs between strangers. Overall, this pattern of victim offender relationship suggests at least two conclusions: (1) a large fraction of assaults and homicides were not solved in Kankakee, making it impossible to determine victim offender relationship, and (2) while homicide and assault shared much of the same pattern of victim offender relationships, homicides were more likely to involve acquaintances than were assaults. Thus violence in Kankakee largely occurred among individuals who are known to each other.

Overall, this review indicates that suspects and victims share a good deal in common. Specifically, the age, race and sex of victims and offenders in both assaults and homicides are quite similar. And the pattern of victim offender relationships for these two crimes have more in common than is different. A similar pattern was observed across the event characteristics that were presented. Assaults and homicides differed on the level of drug involvement, but the pattern of gang, alcohol, weapon, day of week and location were largely similar. These results indicate that assault and homicide have a large number of common characteristics, and as a consequence, the efforts to reduce one offense type may bear fruit in reducing the other.

## History of the Violent Crime Task Force

Like every project, the task force has undergone a number of changes since its inception. The program, which began in July 1995, is currently in its fourth year of operation, with federal funding scheduled to end September 1999. The grant is largely the result of initial efforts by the Kankakee Police Chief to address the backlog of unsolved homicides in his city. Initially, he and the sheriff sought federal funds directly for the formation of such a task force, but were unable to secure these funds. The task force is funded by a grant from the ICJIA using Anti-Drug Abuse Act funds. Funds for the task force come from federal money and are passed through to locals who provide a twenty-five percent match for their program funds. It is one of only two such task forces in the state of Illinois. Funds from the grant help to pay the salaries for 5.5 full time equivalent employees, including a lieutenant who manages the unit, two detectives (one assigned from the sheriff's department, one from the city of Kankakee) a half-time investigator from the Illinois State Police, and a state's attorney from the Kankakee County State's Attorney's Office. The lieutenant currently in charge is the only individual on the law enforcement side who remains from the initial group. The officer assigned from the sheriff's department at the time of the origin of the program was also a lieutenant, and it is the consensus of all who were interviewed that initial problems were encountered as a consequence of having two individuals of a like rank in the unit, with one in charge.

The current configuration of officers with the unit reflects the dynamic nature of the task force. The officer from the sheriff's department, who replaced the lieutenant, joined the squad in October 1996, only to be replaced by another sheriff's officer in late 1998 upon being promoted. His replacement was a relatively inexperienced officer. The officer assigned from

the Kankakee Police Department has been with the unit since November 1996, and the ISP officer has remained with the unit since its inception. This officer (ISP) serves primarily as a community liaison and is not funded through the grant. Funding for the state's attorney comes from a separate but related grant.

Over time, the activities of the task force have changed. Initially, the sole responsibility for the task force was to investigate "cold" homicides, cases that had not been solved by detectives during an initial investigation that had been set aside as "unsolved" cases. The role of the task force gradually changed to assist local police departments with investigations of homicides as they occurred. The group has been influential in such efforts, playing a primary role in the investigation that led to an arrest in a triple slaying that occurred in October 1997. The expertise developed by the task force led to the discovery of physical evidence that produced an arrest in this case. The final focus of the task force has been upon sexual assaults, a mandate that was added during the second year of operation by the Policy Board. All sexual assault and sexual abuse cases involving juvenile victims are now investigated by the task force. The investigator from the city of Kankakee assigned to the task force had considerable experience in conducting such investigations, and as the number of cold homicides with promising leads grew smaller, the group moved to investigate these assaults. This extension of the task force into another offense type lends credibility to the contention that such a unit should have broad responsibility for investigating a variety of serious offenses, and that its success is not concentrated solely within a single offense type.

The role of the task force in relation to other units is an interesting aspect of task force operation. This meant that interactions between task force members and sheriff's deputies or

city officers were less frequent and required special action. Owing to the longstanding relationship between the lieutenant in charge of the task force and the chief of detectives, regular contact was maintained throughout the evaluation period. However, the physical separation early in the grant period necessitated special effort to interact and exchange information.

The task force was initially known as the Anti Gang Violence Program. It took as its initial responsibility the investigation of three high profile homicides, that involved the murders of children, and the murder of a young mother of two who had been raped and stabbed to death. The work of the task force helped local authorities to make an arrest that resulted in a conviction in the murder of Christopher Meyer. Indeed, this case more than any other, defined the early history of the unit. Timothy Buss was taken into custody and charged with the Meyer murder by task force members, and this success provided motivation for the tedious work of moving through cold cases. When a conviction ensued, it too provided motivation for a unit that saw its victories come monthly rather than daily. The Ophelia Williams case is a reminder of the frustrations that can be faced in such investigations, as the unit has now invested over 700 hours into the Williams case and is still trying to convince a suspect to submit to a DNA test. Two arrests were made in the murder of the young mother, and the remaining two initial cases remain unsolved. This method of selecting cases, however, did not continue throughout the evaluation.

The task force selected these cases initially because of their high profile status and the heinous nature of the offenses involved. There were also symbolic reasons for choosing these cases, as they sent a distinct message to the families of victims and the community: the police department was not going to give up on solving these crimes, and that crimes where an African-American was the victim were going to receive serious police attention. The first step was for

the task force to review all unsolved cases, then chose from among all cases those with the greatest prospects for solvability. Over time, the task force selected crimes to investigate by first moving from the paper files and accumulated evidence, to interviewing the officers involved in the initial investigation, and reaching out to witnesses. From the initial review of evidence, the task force sought to identify cases that had a potential for resolution. These cases were worked first, as there was a desire not to let evidence, witnesses or contacts wait any longer than possible. A detective in the task force reviewed every unsolved case since 1988 in Kankakee in an effort to find something to bring the case to resolution. This was done for instrumental reasons; it was believed that the task force might be able to find leads or evidence that could bring a case to resolution. From the onset, members of this group were committed to dedicate activity to each case. This was also done for symbolic reasons, as the family and the community both wanted resolution to the cases, even if that resolution only resulted in renewed attention to the case.

One of the key features of task force operations was the development of informal norms regarding the processing of cases, workgroup processes, and inter-departmental cooperation. These norms and workgroup expectations appeared to be developed in rather short order, and our observations (beginning in August 1996) confirmed these expectations. In part, this may have been enhanced by the location of the task force in a building separate from the police department. This allowed the group to see itself as a separate unit, and be perceived as distinct from routine police activities by other police officers and departments.

## Violent Crime Task Force Activities

A key question to the process evaluation is concerned with the activities engaged in by the unit. A central feature of the task force is the ability to concentrate all of its resources (personnel, time, money, and technology) on cold cases. This is a luxury seldom afforded police investigative units, and it is important to document the pattern of activities this unit engages in.

While the task force had a unique mandate and was able to maintain independent control over its officers and activities, it fundamentally remained a police unit. This was true for the officers included in the unit, their training, and orientation to police work. As much as the task force was created to provide something new to law enforcement, in many ways its activities were dependent on traditional models and patterns of law enforcement. As such, this meant that the primary activities of the task force were traditional law enforcement and investigative activities. As a consequence, the activities of the task force resembled those of a traditional investigative unit. That is, the primary activity of the task force was to review cases and identify leads. This was done through a host of traditional detective actions. Initially, task force detectives spent a considerable amount of time reviewing the paper files of previous investigations. This typically identified “holes” in earlier investigations that suggested new investigative directions. Most prominent among these actions was re-interviewing witnesses, suspects and relatives of suspects and victims. It was often painfully clear to detectives on the task force that initial investigations had overlooked significant facts, not interviewed key witnesses, or failed to fully investigate forensic evidence.

But these typical detective activities were hardly typical of investigations of homicides in Kankakee during the period 1988-1994. To a great extent, the lack of such investigative activities led to the backlog of unsolved homicide cases and the need for the task force. And while such efforts are typical of most investigations, the luxury of time afforded the task force put these activities in a whole new perspective. Because the detectives could devote time and fiscal resources to their re-opened investigations, they were able to interview and re-interview suspects, witnesses and associates in considerably more detail and in much greater numbers. This meant that task force detectives could travel to prison to interview associates and cellmates of suspects, travel out of state to interview witnesses, and re-interview a large number of relevant and material witnesses.

An additional task force activity was the use of forensic evidence. This group had the resources to invest in a number of forensic tests and investigations that were not available or considered at the time of the initial investigation.

One key feature to task force operation is the level of supervision provided by the chief and other management level officers. Throughout the operation of the task force, the chief of the Kankakee Police Department and the county sheriff managed the task force largely through the Policy Board. While the lieutenant who ran the task force met regularly with the chief and maintained an excellent relationship with the chief of Detectives, he operated the task force largely independent of day to day oversight from these individuals. The lieutenant in charge of the task force was especially careful to document the activities and progress on each case with follow up reports and summary reports for all cases. This enabled any officer, with easy

reference, to get an update on the status of a case, and eliminated overlapping of detective duties.

The task force typically worked as a unit. This meant that all three full-time members worked on a single case at one time, rather than a single officer taking a case by themselves. This practice paid important dividends as it led to brainstorming on cases, suggesting leads on new cases and running evidence and interrogation strategies past each other. While one investigator was assigned as the lead on a given case, a team approach was adopted in working those cases, an approach that facilitated the formation of a unit and sharing and critiquing of information.

In sum, the activities of the task force resembled those of typical investigators. However, the luxury of time afforded to the task force by virtue of its funding meant that it could devote unimpeded time to investigating “cold” cases. This often meant following up what may have been viewed as “low yield” avenues of investigation, interview and evidence. As a consequence, however, the task force was able to solve a number of offenses thought to have reached dead ends.

The overload placed on detectives in the early and middle 1990's was very important. The surge in homicide cases taxed the ability of the detective bureau to the limit, creating the need for a task force. In addition, the task force was aided considerably by the improvement in police community relations that occurred during this period of time. The combination of time, resources and community participation all contributed to the success of the unit.

## Interactions with Other Units

The task force spent a considerable amount of time interacting with other law enforcement officers as well as the state's attorney's office. The interactions with other law enforcement agencies were important to the overall activities of the task force. And it is worth considering the ability of the task force to maintain good relationships with the agencies and officers who had conducted the initial investigations. After all, the existence of the task force was commentary that the initial investigation had, in some way, gone wrong. Thus, the extent to which the task force established and sustained good relationships with officers or departments involved in the initial investigation is an important measure of the success of the task force. Over time, the task force received a substantial number of referrals from other police officers. Officers outside the unit received leads or tips from witnesses about cases in the course of patrol or investigation work. This information was in turn referred to the task force.

Another aspect of the operation of this group was the time made available to interact with the state's attorney's office. While relationships between members of the task force (including the lieutenant and the chief of the department) and the state's attorney often were less than amiable, the overall pattern of interactions was quite favorable. The additional time afforded to the task force meant that individual cases could be presented to the state's attorney, whose involvement could be secured at an early stage of the investigation. This involvement was part of the effort to maintain effective relationships throughout the operation of the task force.

The relationship with the command structure was maintained primarily through the oversight and supervision of the Policy Board. This group was responsible for oversight, policy,

and direction for the task force. On a day-to-day basis, regular, informal contacts with the chief of the Kankakee Police Department were the norm for routine direction. Meetings between the lieutenant and this chief made sense as part of an overall command structure, as the lieutenant was employed by the Kankakee Police Department and was hand picked by the chief to run this unit. Deployment to new cases occurred largely as a consequence of conversations between the chief of detectives in the city police department and the lieutenant in charge of the unit. In addition, the chief of detectives from the Kankakee County Sheriff's Department maintained an open line of communication with the commander of the unit.

The primary contacts between the unit and other municipal departments took place between their respective chiefs and the lieutenant in charge of the task force. It should be stressed in this context that when a new homicide occurred in Kankakee, the task force detectives dropped everything they were working on to devote their time and effort to the new case. This helped to integrate the unit more thoroughly within the law enforcement structure in Kankakee County. These contacts were more likely to come from the city of Bourbonnais than any other jurisdiction. The city of Bradley is notable for its isolation from other municipalities in Kankakee County, and the task force was no exception. However, it is notable that in early 1999, a detective from Bradley did contact the task force with a request to examine a "cold" case that was over a decade old. There was little contact from any of the outlying municipalities in the county such as Grant Park or Momence. However, the task force did expend considerable time and effort investigating cases in Pembroke, a very poor, racially segregated area just east of the city of Kankakee.

Interactions with prosecutors occurred in a number of contexts. The first was through the Policy Board, as the state's attorney was a member of this group and communicated with the lieutenant in charge of the task force in this venue. In addition, the assistant state's attorney assigned to the task force met regularly to discuss specific cases with the lieutenant, and occasionally the chief participated. These interactions were more likely to occur in the context of case meetings, warrant requests, clarifications of legal points, or discussions of prosecutorial needs for cases. While the police and prosecutor worked together very well, members of the task force were disappointed with the decision not to prosecute several cases. On occasion, some law enforcement representatives contended that when they had taken a case as far as they could, prosecution should at least take a try with the case in court. The need for closure on the part of the police, and the community, lie behind this motivation. All program participants concluded, however, that a good working relationship existed between the state's attorney and the task force, and law enforcement strongly endorsed the job that the state's attorney had done.

#### Interactions within the Unit

Supervision within the unit was less formal than would occur in another division of the police department. While the lieutenant was clearly in charge, he allowed his officers considerable leeway, befitting their status as detectives. The lieutenant assigned cases to detectives following discussions that resembled "case conferences". If a detective brought a specific expertise to the unit, he may have been more likely to receive a case, but in general this procedure was not followed. Detectives often worked as teams on cases, particularly when suspects or witnesses were interviewed, or if travel to conduct interviews in out of town

locations was required. The lieutenant was an active participant in case investigations, with responsibility for individual cases just like the other detectives. But the lieutenant also had other responsibilities associated with that rank within the department, and served as head of the Pension Board for the police department.

In general, there was a good deal of independence within the task force. This is not to say, however, that there was not a high degree of cooperation among detectives. This cooperation was a consequence of a variety of factors. First, the unit was quite small, facilitating frequent and intense interactions. Second, the task force was physically separated from the sheriff and city police department. Clearly these processes of communication and norm building were enhanced by the physical separation of the task force in the bank building on Court Street. This physical separation was intentional, as the chief believed it was necessary to give the unit the time and attention necessary to devote to the unsolved homicides. And just as the unit was physically separated from the police department, the lieutenant had an office separate from his officers. The separation was a major feature of the unit, particularly in its early days when the separation contributed to a lack of knowledge about the unit and its purpose among officers and the community. Over time, this lack of awareness was overcome. Third, relationships among law enforcement officers in Kankakee County historically have been cooperative and supportive, and the task force built on this tradition. The separation also led to a lack of knowledge about the unit on the part of many officers, some of whom viewed it with animosity.

### Impediments to Implementation

One of the key initial impediments to implementation was the lack of experience in the department in working with grants. This grant was among the first received by the department since the arrival of the new chief in July 1994. The lack of experience in the department working with the grant process was evident in the early days of the grant, as a number of forms and correspondence were exchanged between the department and the ICJIA. These initial difficulties were overcome in due time, and the grant management issues were successfully resolved.

There were a number of additional roadblocks encountered in attempting to implement the program, primary among them the relationships between the department and the black community. Building trust in the African-American community was a tall order for law enforcement, but a task that the chief assumed. He attempted to improve relationships by attending Sunday church services and preaching wherever he could get an opportunity. In addition, he had the foresight to hire part-time an African-American member of the Illinois State Police who served as a pastor to a local church. His outspoken comments regarding the Ophelia Williams case also gained some credibility for his efforts. While this issue was not completely resolved in a favorable manner, it is clear by the increased participation of witnesses and the community that considerable progress was made in this initiative.

Dealing with the Hispanic community also presented challenges for the task force. There was a distinct shortage of Hispanic officers on the department, and there was also the lack of a clear strategy for engaging Hispanic residents, as they tended to be less organized, and more

difficult to reach owing to language barriers. This remained a barrier to working in Kankakee, but very few cases involved Hispanics so this was not a significant issue.

At times dealing with the state's attorney's office raised concerns on the part of the task force. The first task force case tried by the state's attorney went to a jury that returned a not guilty verdict, and this caused concern on the part of both groups. Task force members believed that the state's attorney's office had presented a very strong prosecution, and had done their best. Some concern was expressed that this "loss" may result in the state's attorney becoming less willing to take on cases that were not particularly strong. The disagreements between prosecutors and law enforcement in Kankakee are consistent with the natural tensions that exist in such contexts. On infrequent occasions, law enforcement expressed that concern that too few cases were plea-bargained and that the prosecutor was not willing enough to take chances with cases. From the perspective of law enforcement the old cases it generated were likely to have holes and generally be weaker than newer cases, but that victims' families and justice required that the prosecutor take more chances than they were perceived to be willing to do. A prosecutor's strategy may be to wait to try a case until a later date with hopes that additional evidence will become available to solidify the case. In sum, the relationship between the task force and the state's attorney was strong and generally positive.

#### Institutional Change in Police Departments

The task force represented an important change in thinking about and practicing policing in Kankakee. But these changes were part of a broader set of changes sweeping the department since the arrival of the new chief and the changes in law enforcement being brought about by community policing and the federal COPS office. Of course, the ultimate sustainability

of any change can only be measured by the passage of time. However, the change brought about by the presence of the task force is consistent with a direction that many command level staff in the city police department desire. As a consequence this has positive implications for the sustainability of such change. However, this approach took some selling by the chief within the department, and the presence of grant monies to fund the program helped to “sell” it within the department. Ultimately, the institutionalization of the changes in the department will be linked to the success of the task force.

## **V. Community Perceptions of Crime, Police Response, and Task force Activities**

Integral to the concept of the Kankakee Violent Crime Task Force was the importance of community perceptions. At the time of the creation of this unit, the relationship between the police and the public could not be characterized as positive. Thus an important “byproduct” of the operation of the task force was that the community see that the police were now doing something about violent crime in Kankakee County. This community perception was measured through a series of interviews with community leaders who were knowledgeable about law enforcement in Kankakee County and likely to be familiar with the Violent Crime Task Force. Given the low profile nature of the task force, it was believed that the level of exposure and knowledge about this unit would not be sufficient to warrant a general community survey. Individuals to be interviewed were identified through a purposive sampling technique with suggestions made by the project director, the chief and others. The list included those who had worked closely with the police department as well as those who were outspoken critics of the police. Two waves of interviews were conducted. The first of these were conducted during the spring of 1997 while the second wave took place in February and March of 1999.

The interview consisted of items that measured the perception of crime, violent crime, gangs and drugs in Kankakee County and how these have changed during recent periods. In addition, the respondents' knowledge of and views about the performance of the Violent Crime Task Force were solicited. Further, the respondents' perceptions of the relationship between the police and the community were explored. Questions were framed in a closed-ended format where possible (Appendix B).

There were 16 individuals interviewed during the first administration of the community interviews and twelve were interviewed during the second wave. The same individuals were interviewed in the second wave when they were available. At the time of the second interview the schedule of four individuals precluded their inclusion in the subsequent interview. The following table describes the positions of those interviewed in each wave.

**Table 1**  
**Position of Community Interviewees**

Position	First Wave	Second Wave
Law Enforcement	5	3
Local Politicians	3	2
Prosecutors	2	2
Probation	1	2
Education	1	1
Treatment Providers	3	1
Newspaper	1	1

Perceptions of Crime in Kankakee

Those interviewed were asked to characterize the crime problem in Kankakee County and to indicate how it may have changed over the past few years. Caution should be exercised in the interpretation of these data. First the samples are quite small and thus the percentages are subject to great variation with the shifting on only a few individuals. Second, not all those interviewed in the first wave were available for subsequent interviews. This exclusion alone, given the small sample, could result in the appearance of differences.

**Table 2**  
**Characterization of Crime in Kankakee**

	First Wave	Second Wave
Very Serious	6 (38%)	2 (17%)
Somewhat Serious	6 (38%)	6 (50%)
Moderate	4 (25%)	4 (33%)
Somewhat Minor	---	---
Very Minor	---	---

It is apparent from Table 2 that there is a perception that crime is a serious issue in Kankakee County, although fewer individuals in the second wave, almost two years after the initial survey wave, felt that it was a very serious problem. When asked to identify the nature of the crime problem in Kankakee, 10 individuals (63% of the respondents) in the first wave indicated that crime in Kankakee was characterized by drugs. A similar proportion (7 or 58%) of respondents in the second wave felt that drugs characterized crime in Kankakee. In addition, a substantial number of individuals indicated that property crimes such as burglary (which is often associated with drugs) was a problem in Kankakee. In the first wave 7 (44%) of those interviewed gave this response as did 4 (33%) individuals in the second wave (more than one response was allowed thus the percentages may total to more than 100%).

Those interviewed were also asked to indicate to what degree they felt that crime had changed in Kankakee over the past few years. Table 3 presents these responses. There was consensus across both waves of the survey that crime had decreased in Kankakee considerably in the past few years before the time of the interview. A greater proportion of those interviewed in the second wave felt that crime had declined significantly.

**Table 3**  
**Perception of Crime Changes in Kankakee over the Past Few Years**

	First Wave	Second Wave
Declined Significantly	6 (38%)	8 (67%)
Declined Somewhat	9 (56%)	4 (33%)
Stayed about the Same	---	---
Increased Somewhat	---	---
Increased Significantly	1 (6%)	---

As a follow up to this interview item, respondents were asked to indicate what they felt the reasons were for any change in crime that they had observed. Responses to the first wave of the survey indicated that most individuals attributed the change in crime to police and prosecution activities. While many respondents felt that this was due to more aggressive policing and “locking up the leaders” (6 or 46%), many other individuals attributed this change to increased police and community involvement (5 or 38%). Similar responses were attained during the second wave of interviews; however there appeared to be more mention of community involvement. There were four individuals (37%) who noted that these changes were due to strictly enforcement efforts. Six individuals (55%) indicated that these changes were due to police efforts to work closer with the community. In many responses specific examples were given such as the citizens police academy (2), the nuisance abatement process (2), the new KAMEG strategy (3), and the task force. In addition, there were several specific comments about the positive leadership of the chief and the mayor in bringing about the changes in the department and the city that have influenced the responses to crime in Kankakee.

A similar picture emerges when those interviewed were asked their perception of violent crime patterns over the past few years (Table 4). In both waves respondents indicated overwhelmingly that they felt that violent crime had been declining in this jurisdiction. A higher proportion in the second wave shared this perspective. Although one must be cautious in the interpretation of this given the small sample, almost all of those interviewed in the second wave indicated that violent crime had declined and most of these individuals characterized the decline as significant.

**Table 4**  
**Perception of Violent Crime Changes in Kankakee over the Past Few Years**

	First Wave	Second Wave
Declined Significantly	9 (56%)	9 (75%)
Declined Somewhat	3 (19%)	2 (17%)
Stayed about the Same	1 (6%)	---
Increased Somewhat	3 (19%)	1 (8%)
Increased Significantly	---	---

Those interviewed were also asked their perception of how gang activity may have changed over the past few years. There was greater variation in the response to this item than with previous ones with the modal response in both waves being that there had been no change (Table 5). Respondents were slightly more likely to indicate some decline in gang activity in the second wave compared to their earlier responses.

**Table 5**  
**Perception of Changes in Gangs in Kankakee over the Past Few Years**

	First Wave	Second Wave
Declined Significantly	1 (6%)	3 (25%)
Declined Somewhat	2 (13%)	3 (25%)
Stayed about the Same	7 (44%)	5 (42%)
Increased Somewhat	3 (19%)	1 (8%)
Increased Significantly	3 (19%)	---

Similarly interviewees were asked to indicate any changes that they had observed regarding drugs in Kankakee over the past few years (Table 6). As opposed to other interview items, respondents were most likely to indicate that they thought that the drug problem was stable (44% and 50%) or getting worse (32% and 33%). There were no differences in

responses in the perception of the drug problem in Kankakee between the first and second waves of interviews.

**Table 6**  
**Perception of Changes in the Drug Problem in Kankakee over the Past Few Years**

	First Wave	Second Wave
Declined Significantly	---	---
Declined Somewhat	4 (25%)	2 (17%)
Stayed about the Same	7 (44%)	6 (50%)
Increased Somewhat	2 (13%)	3 (25%)
Increased Significantly	3 (19%)	1(8%)

Assessment of Task Force and Law Enforcement Performance

Those interviewed were asked to provide their assessment of the job that the Violent Crime Task Force has done (Table 7). In both waves the responses to this item were overwhelmingly positive with 50% of those in the first wave and 70% of those in the second wave rating their performance as very good.

**Table 7**  
**Assessment of the Progress of the Violent Crime Task Force**

	First Wave	Second Wave
Very Good	7 (50%)	7 (70%)
Good	7 (50%)	2 (20%)
Fair	---	1 (10%)
Poor	---	---
Very Poor	---	---
Don't Know	2	2

Interviewees were asked to characterize the relationship between the public and law enforcement in Kankakee County. In response to this open-ended question, 10 individuals directly observed that the relationship was “improving”. The other respondents also described the relationship in positive terms. Most used superlatives such as "dramatically" or "greatly improved" over what it was a few years ago. The increased involvement of the community with the police department was cited by almost all individuals, with several specific references to the citizen's police academy as an important indicator of this new relationship. Several individuals noted that although there has been significant improvement there are still areas of the city where there is tension between the community and the police. The consensus of this group is perhaps best characterized by the comments of one individual (not from the law enforcement community) who stated, “It has improved dramatically. When I first came here there was a lot of distrust towards the police, probably due to the high number of unsolved violent crimes. Since then, we have held neighborhood meetings, there have been the creation of neighborhood organizations, and the citizens’ police academy has been one of the best things”.

In addition to the specific assessment of the performance of the Violent Crime Task Force, those interviewed were asked their overall assessment of the effectiveness of law enforcement in Kankakee County (Table 8). The responses to this question were uniformly positive, 75% of the interviewees in the second wave rated law enforcement as doing a very good job compared to 31% in the first wave. In spite of the cautions expressed previously regarding the small sample size, there does appear to be substantial improvement in the perception of these individuals regarding Kankakee law enforcement between these two time periods. Several individuals offered comments regarding their positive assessment, noting the

importance of greater cooperation with the community, the new KAMEG philosophy, and the citizens police academy.

**Table 8**  
**Overall Assessment of the Effectiveness of Law Enforcement in Kankakee County in dealing with the Problems of Crime, Gangs, and Drugs**

	First Wave	Second Wave
Very Good	5 (31%)	9 (75%)
Good	11 (69%)	3 (25%)
Fair	---	---
Poor	---	---
Very Poor	---	---

Those interviewed were also asked how the public's respect for law enforcement in Kankakee County also might have changed in the past few years (Table 9). The overwhelming majority of these individuals indicated that respect for law enforcement was improving. In the second wave, 58% (7 individuals) stated that the public's respect for law enforcement had increased significantly over the past few years and an additional 25% (3 individuals) felt that it had increased somewhat. Similar responses were given in the initial wave of interviews.

**Table 9**  
**Perception of Changes in the Respect for Law Enforcement in Kankakee County in the Past Few Years**

	First Wave	Second Wave
Declined Significantly	---	---
Declined Somewhat	---	---
Stayed about the Same	2 (13%)	2 (17%)
Increased Somewhat	5 (31%)	3 (25%)
Increased Significantly	9 (56%)	7 (58%)

A follow up question to this item was asked regarding the reasons that accounted for this increased public respect for law enforcement. There were several common threads through these responses. This increased respect was viewed as a result of significant changes in the police department, its approach to law enforcement and its relationship with the community. A number of individuals commented that this improvement was a direct result of a higher visibility of the police and a significant drug enforcement strategy. There were a significant number of comments regarding the relationship with the community. It was noted that this relationship now centers on the greater involvement of the police with the community, greater exchange of information, and working on problems together. One individual noted that the more the community knows about the police and what they do the more they will see them in a different light. Another individual commented that there has been a great increase in respect because the police are putting forth increased effort and the community notices this. A third individual observed that now people think that there is a greater chance for results when a crime is reported to the police. Several individuals noted that there is still room for improvement, however, the changes thus far have been significant because, in the words of one individual, the relationship between the police and the community “used to be really poor”. One individual indicated his concern that while communication between the police and the public was at an all-time high, this created increased demands on the police department and there were not sufficient resources to meet these new responsibilities.

## Summary of Community Perception

Extremely consistent findings emerged from the interviews of these community leaders and knowledgeable individuals. There was a widespread shared perception that violent crime had substantially decreased in Kankakee County over the past few years and that the efforts of the Violent Crime Task Force made a significant contribution to this alteration in the crime pattern. However, as has been observed throughout this report, the task force program was part of a larger initiative involving major transformation in the philosophy of policing in Kankakee. This new model emphasizes multi-jurisdictional cooperation, as evidenced by the task force, along with establishing closer working relationships with the community, higher profile policing, and being more responsive to neighborhood public safety concerns. It is apparent from these interviews that this approach has struck a very responsive chord with the community. Individuals interviewed reported a substantial increase in the degree of involvement with the police and the community and a steady improvement in the assessment of the quality of police services and public respect for law enforcement.

## **VI. Outcome measures**

### Task Force Case Outcomes

The following tables present the progress of the task force in making arrests in old open homicide cases. During the five years prior to the initiation of the project there were 97 unsolved homicides. Of these, the task force targeted 38 cases for further investigation. These cases represented the number of open cases from which there were sufficient records to initiate an investigation. At least one arrest was made in 30 or 79% of these 38 cases. At this point in

the processing of these cases there has been a conviction in 16 of these cases and an additional 10 are pending court disposition. In four cases there was no trial or conviction.

**Table 10**  
**Homicide Cases**

Total Individual Homicides	97
Task Force Investigations	38
Cases in which at least one arrest was made	30
Cases in which there was at least one conviction	16
Cases in which a defendant is pending trial	10
Cases in which there was no trial or conviction	4

In the 30 cleared homicide cases, there were 34 individuals arrested. Two individuals were arrested for multiple homicides with each of them being charged with three murders. To this point, there have been 21 trials and 19 convictions for a conviction rate of 90%. The states attorney chose not to prosecute in two additional arrests. Eleven individuals are currently awaiting trial.

**Table 11**  
**Arrests**

Total Arrests Made in 30 Homicide Cases	34 (includes 2 individuals with 3 arrests each)
Trials	21
Convictions	19
Declined to Prosecute	2
Awaiting Trial	11

Of the 19 individuals who have been convicted at this time, there are two individuals who are still awaiting sentencing. Of the 17 remaining individuals, 16 were committed to prison and all of these offenders received sentences in excess of 10 years.

Thus, 94% of those convicted and sentenced were sent to prison for a substantial period of time. Further, of the 21 arrests for which disposition is complete, 76% have been sentenced to long prison terms.

**Table 12**  
**Individual Offenders**

Total Convicted Individuals	19
Convicted Individuals Committed to Prison	16
Convicted Individuals Awaiting Sentencing	2
Prison Commitments Greater than 10 years	16

## Crime in Kankakee

In the end, public and criminal justice attention focuses on criminal justice outcomes. And, the most salient of criminal justice indicators is crime data. One measure of the plausibility of the hypotheses that the task force had an impact on crime rates is to examine those data over time. We examine trends in homicide rates for Kankakee, the city of Chicago, the state of Illinois, and the United States in Figure 12 (Appendix A). This graph presents homicide rates for each of these four jurisdictions for the years 1980 to 1998. This captures a substantial period of time before the initiation of the task force. The other three comparison groups were chosen because they represent important comparative jurisdictions. Of course, the city of Kankakee would be compared to the city of Chicago, as Chicago is the biggest city in the state and helps to define public concern about crime in the state of Illinois. The state of Illinois data was chosen as another jurisdiction with important political and policy consequences for the city of Kankakee. Finally, the data from the United States was chosen as an appropriate comparison group. No city wants its homicide rate to exceed that of the nation or its state.

The data in Figure 12 documents the dramatic nature of patterns of homicide in the city of Kankakee. Beginning with the year 1980, Kankakee had a homicide rate compatible with that for the state of Illinois and the US, at 10 per 100,000. Over the entire time period, the homicide rate for Kankakee is more variable than for the other three jurisdictions, as would be expected, given the magnitude of its rates. However, it is notable that the six highest homicide rates achieved among the four jurisdictions over this time period occurred in the city of Kankakee. And the spike in homicide rates beginning in 1985 is unmistakable. Beginning in 1985, when the Kankakee city rate was 5 per 100,000, homicide increased dramatically

through the mid-1990's when the rate peaked at 80 per 100,000. The rates for the US and the state of Illinois remained relatively constant over this period, hovering between 9 and 10 per 100,000. Rates for the city of Chicago began at the origin of the time series near 30 per 100,000, increasing to 32 per 100,000 in the early 1990's.

Overall, these data offer several important insights regarding homicide for the task force. First, homicide in smaller towns and cities like Kankakee are much more variable than in larger jurisdictions. Second, homicide rates in small cities like Kankakee often exceed those for the nation, the state the city is located in, and even large cities that are geographically proximate. Third, with regard to the rate of homicide in Kankakee, sudden spikes are more likely and far less predictable than may be the case in other jurisdictions. Finally, cities the size of Kankakee may be more likely to see rapid declines in their homicide rates than in other jurisdictions.

In the context of these conclusions about homicide we offer some conclusions about homicide in Kankakee following the introduction of the task force. First, the dramatic increase in homicide rates observed in Kankakee prompted a response from the city that was unprecedented. The assignment of officers to clean up old homicide cases was an important statement to the community about the significance of such crimes to the police department. Second, the decline in homicide rates, while consistent with the pattern of decline in homicide in the nation, is much greater than the trend for the nation. Indeed, since its peak in 1994, the homicide rate has declined from 80 per 100,000 in 1994, to 38 in 1995, to 30 in 1996, to 22 in 1997, and just over 10 in 1998. Clearly, homicide rates have declined substantially in Kankakee since the inception of the task force, and at levels substantially greater than for the state of Illinois, the nation, or the city of Chicago.

We next examine changes in the mapped pattern of homicides in Kankakee over the period 1995-1997. These data are presented in Figure 13. This map demonstrates one of the key features of homicide in the city of Kankakee, homicides are concentrated within a very narrow area. In particular, 1997 homicides -- the lowest rate of the three presented in this map -- are more widely dispersed than are homicides from the prior years. This suggests that enforcement efforts that have been targeted against gang and drug distribution efforts have been successful in suppressing such activities that are known to be concentrated in a specific area. We next move to a geographic analysis of assaults in Kankakee for the year 1996, presented in Figure 14. These data demonstrate that assaults are concentrated in a specific geographic area, an area that appears to include most of the homicides.

We move the geographic analysis of crime data to a much lower level of analysis in Figure 15. Here we examine all 1996 assaults in Kankakee with the use of the STAC (Spatial and Temporal Analysis of Crime) program developed by the Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority. It is clear from this figure that the assaults in Kankakee in 1996 fit the ellipse quite well. In Figure 16 we examine the distribution of homicides for 1995, 1996, and 1997 within the assault ellipse for 1996. Every homicide, except one, fits within the assault ellipse cluster. This suggests that the pattern of homicide and assault are quite similar, and that the problems of violent crime are inter-related. The next figure (17) examines the non-lethal gun crimes in Kankakee in 1996. Here we seek to determine the extent to which these offenses are concentrated within the pattern of other violent offenses. It would appear from this figure that gun crimes are spatially distributed in a pattern that is consistent with assaults and homicides. Finally, in Figure 18 we examine robberies from 1996. Here we observe a similar pattern to

that observed in the previous data: violent crimes occur in a densely concentrated geographic pattern. Indeed, robbery, just like homicide and assault, occurs in a concentrated geographic area.

## **VII. Conclusions**

As has been noted previously in this report, in order to understand the operation and performance of the task force one has to see this unit as a part of the overall context of change and reform within law enforcement in Kankakee. At the time of creation of the task force a myriad of changes were taking place in the Kankakee Police Department that sought to establish closer working relationships with the community. In addition to the task force other initiatives implemented during this time included modifications in the operation of the KAMEG unit, the establishment of an aggressive nuisance abatement process, a Citizens Police Academy, a landlord training program, and developing an problem solving orientation within the police department. The task force was one of the first of these initiatives implemented and in may be considered the linchpin in this effort.

One of the principal reasons that there was such a negative relationship with the community, and particularly the African-American community, was the apparent lack of attention focused upon the investigation and prosecution of very serious criminal offenses. The minority community perceived the high volume of unsolved homicides as the criminal justice system and particularly the police department not being concerned about them. This situation was powerfully demonstrated by the Christopher Meyer and Ophelia Williams cases. What better way to begin to address this situation than to focus considerable effort and attention on unsolved homicides many of which had minority victims.

Many social interventions are implemented with the concept that they will target the most amenable cases for the program. These less difficult cases are viewed as safe, easy, and more likely to contribute to program success. The task force was created with an opposite mission: to focus upon the most difficult, the most intractable cases. Could the devotion of time and energy to specific homicides that had gone unsolved, in many cases for years, prove to be a successful strategy? The answer from the previous sections of this report is a resounding yes. As noted earlier, the activities of the task force produced arrests in 30 of the 38 homicides that were investigated by this unit. It is highly likely that these offenses would have gone unsolved but for the actions of this project.

However, the success of this unit goes considerably beyond these numbers. These solved cases have had dramatic effects that transcend these individual cases. The task force program demonstrated to the law enforcement community in Kankakee County the value of cooperation. Prior to this effort, there was a very fragmented approach with each agency responding to its own jurisdiction and little cross agency interaction. The operation of the task force introduced routine communication across agency boundaries and the policy group established a forum for structured communication among agency heads. By all accounts this has produced benefits beyond this project through establishing a new way of doing the business of law enforcement in the county.

Second, the accomplishments of the task force were of dramatic importance to the families of the homicide victims. Many of those involved in this project spoke of the tremendous relief and appreciation that was expressed by the families when they learned that the case involving their loved one had been solved.

Third, and perhaps the greatest accomplishment of the task force was a more symbolic one. As noted above at the time of project implementation the relationship between law enforcement and the community was not a positive one. Through the task force efforts (along with later implemented department initiatives) the community could see that significant attention was being placed upon serious offenses with minority victims. This perception in turn increased the willingness of the community to provide information that led to the solving of additional homicides and other serious offenses. Thus the initial success of the task force enhanced its ability to obtain information to solve additional offenses and set the stage for community cooperation with subsequent police initiatives having significant community involvement.

Fourth, there has been a dramatic decline in the numbers of homicides in both the city and county of Kankakee over the project period. While it is apparent that not all of this decline can be attributed to the task force efforts, the decline is larger than what would be expected given national trends. As noted, project efforts have led to the incarceration of a number of individuals who were chronic offenders. This undoubtedly has had an effect on public safety in Kankakee.

Finally, the actions of the task force cannot be isolated from other changes in the department. The importance of the leadership of the department in creating a climate for organizational change and fostering a community orientation cannot be minimized in the success of the task force. Had the program been implemented without this organizational commitment and exceptional leadership it likely would not have been successful.

## Best Practices

What have we learned from the task force experience that might be taken away from this project and applied to other agencies? There are three areas that likely have implications for other agencies contemplating such an initiative.

First, a consistent response from all involved regarding the critical element of success of the project was having sufficient time to devote to these cases without distraction from other daily tasks. In law enforcement, as in most agencies, the daily administrative tasks and the crisis of the moment tend to consume most of the time. This project allowed for the luxury of devotion of all of one's time to a single task. This sole dedication to one specific effort was instrumental in the task force's ability to solve these open cases. In addition, the presence of the task force at new homicides was critical to the long-term success in solving these cases.

Second, the multidisciplinary nature of this project was viewed by many as a key to its success that has implications for other jurisdictions. Although many jurisdictions have had experiences with multijurisdictional task forces, this particular one was not characterized by the interjurisdictional conflict that continues to characterize many of these efforts. This was likely a response to the commitment of the leadership of the participating agencies. At the time of project implementation, the heads of the key participating agencies were all new to their respective positions as was the Mayor of Kankakee. Each of these individuals came to the table with an orientation of cooperation that facilitated meaningful agency level participation. The routine agency held meetings that were established under this effort were also integral in fostering communication and cooperation.

Third, the role of the prosecution was also critical in task force operation and outcomes. By all accounts, having a prosecutor dedicated to this effort and having this individual involved early in the investigation process led to the creation of better cases and more successful prosecution outcomes. When cases are lost in court, there can be a negative impact on the community; when the quality of cases improves this can be avoided.

Is the task force initiative as implemented in Kankakee suitable for replication in other jurisdictions? This is always a difficult issue since no two jurisdictions are alike, and crime in jurisdictions also differs. Many elements that may contribute to success in one jurisdiction will not be present in others. The excessive level of unsolved homicides and the negative relationship between the community and the police are likely not typical of many jurisdictions. Similarly the size of the community and law enforcement agencies meant that there were small networks and long standing interpersonal relationships that in many instances facilitated project operations. Further, the climate of reform, commitment to community involvement, and strong leadership were certainly important to the success of the Kankakee effort that may not exist in other jurisdictions. Equally important were the early successes in solving cases that the task force was able to generate. However, it is apparent from the task force effort that such multijurisdictional efforts can be successful and other jurisdictions can benefit from their experiences by following the above noted issues in the implementation of multijurisdictional efforts.