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SHTA White Paper

Safety & Security

Proposed Solutions to Increase the Safety and Security on St. Maarten

Problem: Safety and Security

Resident Impact

Feeling safe and secure is an important aspect of our quality of life on St. Maarten. Increased crime, especially violent crimes, break-ins and robberies leave everyone feeling vulnerable and cautious in our community. Feeling safe in our homes and daily lives is an important part of living on St. Maarten.

Business Impact

Crime directly increases the cost of doing business on St. Maarten. Businesses have to increase security to protect their assets and their employees. Employees also need to feel safe when going to work.

Visitor Impact

St. Maarten has historically always been a safe destination and is still considered safe compared to many other destinations in the world and even many in the Caribbean. Crime, however, still negatively impacts the experience that visitors have on the island. Petty crimes such as a rental car being stolen or broken into or witnessing a crime, are not memories that visitors want to bring home with them. Recent high profile crimes in the region and on St. Maarten, such as the Natalee Holloway case and the recent attack on a visitor at Bamboo Bernie's, further highlight how a single instance of crime can be detrimental to our economy.

Goal: Increase Safety and Security

Proposed Solutions

Enforcement of Existing Laws

- Strong Police Force – Enforcement of Existing Laws
- Broken Window Theory – Enforce law also at the lowest level of offence
- Better Judicial Facilities – Alternatives to Incarceration

Strengthening our Community

- Awareness and Action
- Youth Activities
- Stronger Family Units

Quality of Life

- Improve Education- Compulsory Education
- Improve Spending Power – Increased earnings minimum wage
- Improve Employment – Better employment, career growth

Conclusion

The proposed solutions can only really result in increased Safety and Security when residents, businesses, visitors and government work together and support them. Many of these solutions will not be easy to implement, but are essential to improve the quality of life on St. Maarten for residents, businesses and visitors.



Enforcement of Existing Law – Strengthen Police Force

Strengthen Police Force

Description

Providing the Police Department with the resources and staff needed to effectively combat crime is a fundamental step to reducing crime on St. Maarten, and is necessary to implement many other solutions. Currently, the police force is understaffed and under funded, making it difficult to respond to all reports of crime in a timely manner. This aggravates crime as it creates the impression that the police will not even respond when a crime is taking place. This also creates the impression among visitors that little is being done to catch criminals and solve crimes.

Benefits

An adequately resourced police force makes the enforcement of existing laws possible, reduces the response time of officers to calls for help and allows police officers to provide additional support to victims. These small improvements all work towards building trust that the police force is present in the community and can be relied on when a crime is being committed.

Restrictions

The Police Department currently remains a Federal Department. Decisions to change the police department are not taken at an island level.

Suggestions

- *Increase commitment of police officers*
Increasing the salaries of police officers would also increase their commitment to their jobs, making them less susceptible to corruption. One way of doing this is by making sure that all traffic fines and other fees that are collected on St. Maarten remain on St. Maarten. This additional funding can be used for performance related bonuses as well as additional training and equipment for police officers. For example, a geographical database could analyze place and time of most crimes, allowing for a more strategic allotment of police resource. Other benefits for police officers, such as pension, widow(er)'s fund or benefits can also be strengthened to reward police officers. Stricter evaluations should be carry out, where the increase in salary be based on the outcome of these evaluations. Another way to ensure higher commitment is by implementing some sort of mechanism for public feedback or complaints. By dealing with public complaints, the police officers get a better idea of what is lacking in their police force and can work towards improving this.
- *Attract more police officers*
By developing a Police Academy on the island, training would be in both English and Dutch and potential police officers would not have to study abroad. To speed up the training process, specialized modular training would be provided. For example, initial training in traffic or crime. Additional courses would allow officers to progress in their careers. As an officer's career path and experience grows, his/her salary would increase with the amount of training that he/she has completed. During the course of his/her career, a police officer would go through ongoing training. Recruitment of police officers should also be a depiction of the population, with Spanish and Haitian nationals also being part of the recruitment program.
- *Improve the image of the police force*
The implementation of an effective PR program will lead to a better relationship with and a safer feeling in the community. As a better relationship with the community is formed, more information will be disclosed to police officers and more cases will be solved. This PR program should also be directed internally and if coupled with training, should lead to more



pride in being a police officer and should facilitate the recruitment of new police officers. There should also be an increased respect for the uniforms of police officers, by re-implementing the uniform code, where, among others, daily checks will be carried out on each police officer to ensure that he/she dresses and conducts him/herself according to the uniform code. This includes: uniform checks, no smoking in public while in uniform, addressing citizens properly, even if they are relatives/ friends and so forth. Police officers should also always wear a visible badge as well as a visible nametag.

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Enforcement of Existing Laws – Broken Window Theory

Broken Window Theory

Description

Mayor Giuliani effectively reduced instances of crime in Manhattan and made New York a safer place to live and work by implementing the Broken Window Theory. By enforcing even the lowest levels of offences around the city, he reduced overall levels of crime.

Benefits

Enforcing laws for even the lowest levels of crime creates the impression of law and order and raises the bar for committing illegal acts. This, combined with additional police on the street and patrols at night in high crime areas, creates a visible police presence and the image that crime is not tolerated.

Restrictions

This theory relies on a very active police force, which St. Maarten may not have the resources to implement successfully. The restraints of a small community also need to be taken into account, as police officers often know many people in the community and may be inclined to overlook small infractions.

Suggestions

- *Enforce existing laws*
Strengthening the resources of the police force will improve the ability of the police force to enforce existing laws. By enforcing even the lowest levels of crime, police officers create an atmosphere of lawfulness and order. This raises the entrance barrier to crime, making it more difficult to get involved in petty crimes. This also includes the enforcement of traffic rules, and other offenses, such as sewage running freely in the street, illegal businesses along the roads, visitor harassment, noise pollution and undocumented workers.
- *Increased police presence on the streets*
Increased police presence on the streets leads to a feeling of safety in the community, and reduces crime. The community demands more blue on the street. This also includes increased police patrols at sensitive times and in sensitive areas, especially in high and known crime areas, increased controls, for example traffic, weapons and alcohol, and increased outposts such as district police.
- *Shorter response time to crime by police officers*
Increased resources and staff will also allow police officers to respond to reported crimes quicker, increasing the number of convictions and creating a more secure environment for victims, who will believe that they will be assisted when calling for help and crimes will be processed and investigated properly.
- *Increasing revenues from crime*
By increasing the amount and number of fines issued, these revenues could then be used to fund the police force. The police would then have an additional incentive to penalize petty crimes.
- *Regulate the illegal population*
Resolving bottlenecks in the current work permit application process, such as the lengthy process to obtain police records, creating a one-stop immigration center and strongly discouraging favoritism / discrimination during the application process, will help to regulate the illegal population on St. Maarten. An Airport Statistical Information System (ASIIS) can also assist in tracking criminals and illegal citizens that have not left the island. This system also helps in tracking where our tourism visitors come from, so that we are able to use our



limited marketing funds wisely and attract only the specific groups of tourists that are interested in St. Maarten. This ASIIS would need fair enforcement and control in order for it to realistically assist in tracking illegal citizens. Another solution would be to create a low level radar, which would prevent illegal immigration by boat.

- *Uniform application of the law*
To combat the sense of lawlessness, all crimes must be penalized and citizens should feel that the laws apply to everyone without exception. This also includes penalizing white-collar crime.

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Better Judicial Facilities

Description

After existing laws have been enforced and offenders have been brought to justice and served their time, they need to be reintroduced to society. It is very important to counteract the cyclical nature of crime and prevent criminals from falling into their old habits and circles. By establishing a safety net for offenders that have been released from prison, we can ensure that offenders reenter society with the potential of gaining employment and contributing to society.

Benefits

Giving ex-offenders a fair chance at re-entering society, and the job market to earn a living, assists in preventing these offenders from returning to a life of crime.

Restrictions

The Government of St. Maarten has limited financial resources. Funding agencies such as AMFO or USONA may be interested in such projects as they alleviate poverty.

Suggestions:

- *Ex-offender support programs*
Existing rehabilitation programs should be reinforced, a rehabilitation center or office should be established and facilities and programs should be put in place as support to prevent released ex-offenders from falling back into their old circles. Engage ex-offenders in developing solutions for and analyzing crime data. A mandatory halfway house is also necessary to assist in the transition from prison to society. Juvenile institutes should also be established to ensure that the youth are not influenced by their adult counterparts.
- *Financial incentives for the business community to hire ex-offenders*
Programs such as "Alternatives to incarceration" provide training necessary to give ex-offenders the skills to (re)enter the job market. Financial (tax) incentives should also be provided to the business community to encourage them to hire ex-offenders. In such a case, government should lead by example and employ ex-offenders, in order for businesses to follow.
- *Ensuring adequate prison facilities*
Research should be conducted as to whether current facilities should be expanded, as prisoners are often released early due to lack of adequate space. Investments in the expansion of the prison need to be balanced against investments in preventative measures. Prison facilities should also be upgraded, juveniles should be separated from adult criminals, and the prison facilities should become more of a correctional facility, with prison programs such as hard labor in the community.
- *Gang / Ghetto prevention*
Strengthening community and cultural programs should be considered to create awareness and to try to prevent gangs. Investing and upgrading poor neighborhoods on the island to prevent "ghettos" also removes much of the breeding ground of crime. Also, strengthening the family unit and promoting the idea of community role models (big brother/ big sister program) can assist in preventing gangs or ghettos.
- *Appoint an Ombudsman*
Having a local Ombudsman would resolve most of the issues between the government and citizens of St. Maarten.

Awareness and Action

Description

There are many ways that communities can band together to prevent crime in their neighborhoods. By creating sustainable neighborhood watches and plans of action in the event of a crime, communities can feel empowered to prevent crime in their areas. Community teams together with police officers, the media and ex-offenders can work together to share information and build trust in the fact that something is being done about crime.

Benefits

Awareness and education play an important role in changing the image of crime. Shining a light on illicit activities and making them more public can have a big impact in a small community. The media can play an important role in highlighting examples of people that have taken the wrong turn in life, creating a realistic picture to combat the image that crime is cool and acts as a deterrent for others to make the same mistake. Highlighting crimes that take place in the paper also communicates an accurate picture of the extent of crime on the island and adds pressure to get crimes solved.

Suggestions:

- *Promote neighborhood action*
Neighborhood watches should be developed. Neighborhoods can also be made safer by ensuring proper lighting and installing security systems for residences and businesses. A hotline number needs to be publicized that guarantees confidentiality.
- *Role of the media in reporting crimes.*
Crimes that are published in the newspaper receive more attention and more is done to try and solve them. This also creates a more accurate picture of the extent of crime on the island. The media can also contribute by publicizing examples of people that chose a life of crime and were convicted. It is not the role of the media to publicize crime; instead they should practice responsible and investigative journalism. They should also try to build a better relationship between themselves and the community.
- *Awareness of Preventing crimes*
Inform and educate residents, businesses and visitors on how they can report crime and the confidentiality of their information. In small communities, it is often difficult to report crimes due to fear of retribution. Awareness programs on Safety and Security programs in schools build a good basis in the community. Active and retired police officers can volunteer their time to give presentations to schools, community groups and businesses as needed. This also supports the overall public relations efforts of the Police Force.
- *Establish a non-profit organization against crime*
Businesses, associations and governments should support existing NGO's specifically to fight crime.

Community Program – Youth Activities

Description

Idle hands lead to the devil's work. More supervised and mandatory after school programs give the youth the opportunity to develop skills in a positive and encouraging environment that keeps them busy and supervised.

Benefits

Children and teens that are positively influenced and have role models are less likely to become involved in crime.

Restrictions

Currently, after school programs are limited and often under-funded. There are also few solutions for parents with limited financial means.

Suggestions:

- *Develop relationships with various communities to address crime in these groups*
- *Youth Outreach for Victim Assistance*
Develop youth groups that help their peers deal with falling victim to crime as well as showing them how to protect themselves. Have these groups speak out in schools and on the radio.
- *Mentorship Programs*
With parents working double jobs, kids spend too much time unsupervised. Mentorship programs offer kids quality time with a positive role model. This additional attention from an adult that is not their parent often leads to higher self-esteem and is also a good sounding board for problems that kids may experience at home. Employers should also encourage flexible working hours within the business community. Family planning –counseling sessions should also be available for single mothers.
- *Affordable Recreational Programs*
Affordable recreational programs or activities give kids role models, teach them rules and keep them active and involved in supervised activities while teaching them new skills, such as sports, art or home economics. To realize such programs or activities, there should be availability of subsidized fees.
- *Affordable spaces at art schools, sport programs or after school activities*
This ensures that all kids, especially those that need it most, benefit from the additional programs being developed.
- *Scholarships to local schools*
By providing scholarships to local high schools, the image of education and studying hard is conveyed to kids. This gives children from financially challenged families an equal opportunity for an education.
- *Mandatory social workers in schools*
Children do not study in isolation. The conditions or circumstances outside of school can have a large impact on how children perform or interact in school. Social workers would meet with parents to ensure suitable living conditions, identify problems that stem from the home situation and signal mandatory after school programs or other areas of assistance.

Strengthening the Family Unit

Description

As parents work harder to support their families, the traditional family unit suffers. Parents often do not have time to guide their kids. Traditional family supports, such as extended family and the church, play a weaker role in society and social controls do not play as important a role as they have in the past. This trend has taken place globally, but we are starting to see the effects of it here on St. Maarten as well.

St. Maarten is also a community where a relatively high percentage of single mothers are placed with the burden of putting bread on the table, being the disciplinarian and care giver. "Idle hands are the devil's tools". As many parents on St. Maarten work long hours or several jobs to maintain a standard of living for their families, kids are increasingly coming home from school to empty homes and forced to entertain themselves until their parents come home from work. With little supervision or guidance, it becomes easier to fall into the wrong circle of friends.

Benefits

Parenting courses provide a support system for parents and also serve as an outlet, a place for parents to vent, let out stress, anger and other issues. Should these courses be arranged in the evening, childcare would have to be provided. For daytime courses, the private sector would have to contribute by giving their employees time off from work.

By developing after school programs, such as ASA, kids spend supervised time working on their homework or other fun activities in supervised environment with other kids their age. This improves their performance in school and provides a security net to prevent those kids from falling into the wrong circles. Developing after school programs or mandatory employment programs for older kids and young adults, keeps this high-risk group in a positive environment where they are building their future.

Suggestions:

- *Family Education Courses*
Parenting courses with language courses, how the education system works, health awareness, communication skills and how to discipline children. These courses would be given every school year, from September – May. Also, (mandatory) parenting courses should be available for parents with children at risk of becoming involved in criminal activities.
- *Build support with church groups*
- *Sustainable After School Programs (kids younger than 12)*
After school programs are often under funded and under staffed, leading to lack of adequate supervision and educational tools, such as computers.
- *Sustainable After School Programs (kids older than 12)*
Teenagers (12 – 18 years of age) are often a high target group for crime. Without proper after school activities, youth programs, sports organizations etc, this group can easily fall into the wrong circles.
- *Keep kids busy in the afternoon.* Changing school hours may also keep kids in school longer, and thus keep them off the street.
- *Developing a PR program to promote family time*

Literacy and Education

Description

Literacy and Education have been known to have an impact on crime. High rates of illegal immigration on St. Maarten have led to a large number of illegal children that do not attend school. According to the 2001 census, St. Maarten has the highest illiteracy rate in the Netherlands Antilles, with 4,2% of the adult population (older than 15 years) being illiterate. These children do not have the paperwork necessary to attend local schools and are forced to attend school for illegal children (illegal schools) or do not attend school at all.

Benefits

By making education compulsory on St. Maarten, whether children are legal residents of the island or not, increases the literacy level on St. Maarten. By giving all children a future through education, you remove the shame of illegality and encourage participating in society.

Restrictions

Compulsory education may increase the flow of illegal immigrants looking for proper schooling for their children.

Suggestions:

- *Compulsory education for all children*
Education should be compulsory for all children, legal or illegal. This will improve the literacy rates on St. Maarten and discourage children from turning to a life of crime.
- *Compulsory education (ages 16 to 24)*
To prevent high school dropouts from falling into a life of crime, education and/or employment programs should also be made compulsory at this age. This is a law that already exists and the community should put pressure on the responsible parties to ensure that it is implemented. In addition, a vocational or technical school should be implemented on St. Maarten.
- *Taxes are collected for legal and illegal workers*
Workers that pay tax should also be entitled to benefits of the social system, such as education for their children. Ideally, all workers should be properly documented through a transparent and timely work permit process, allowing their children access to social services and education will temporarily resolve some issues.

Increasing purchasing power

Description

The cost of living on St. Maarten is high compared to other islands in the Netherlands Antilles as well as other islands in the region. The high cost of living forces earners in lower brackets to get several jobs to maintain a certain standard of living for their families. If parents cannot support their families through legitimate employment, they may feel the need to venture into more illicit endeavors to earn a living. According to CBS statistics, 80% of all crimes reported are theft. This could possibly suggest that there are economic motives behind the crime that takes place.

Benefits

By increasing the spending power of the lower earners on St. Maarten, these parents have the opportunity to spend more time with their families as well as support their families through legitimate activities.

Suggestions:

- *Increase purchasing power*
Stakeholders should work together towards structural improvements in purchasing power. Through increased efficiency and economic growth, cost of doing business can be reduced and the purchasing power of consumers can be increased.
- *Career opportunities and certification*
Improving career opportunities for workers creates a mentality that hard work eventually pays off. Programs, such as CaribCert, that certify and promote employees should be embraced to encourage upward mobility and better earnings.
- *Training and Development*
By continuing to invest in training, personnel development and growth opportunities by the private sector, the government and the employees themselves, will result in improved career opportunities and earning power for staff, higher profitability for companies and sustainable economic growth for government. The solid base will not only form a strong deterrent against crime and improve the safety and security of St. Maarten, but will also form the basis of a sustainable community.
- *Childcare, after school programs, sports or scholarships*
Providing affordable childcare or after school programs can have a very positive impact on the cost of living for families with young children. These programs should be continued into high school to ensure that youth are being supervised accordingly and become less susceptible to following a life of crime.
- *Affordable social housing*
Providing social housing helps to combat the high cost of rent and place a downward pressure and rental prices, reducing the overall cost of living. This gives earners more disposable income, improving their purchasing power and reducing the incentive to turn to a life of crime.

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