

ABC World News Tonight
With Peter Jennings
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PETER JENNINGS: Tomorrow, the Milton Eisenhower Foundation is going to release a report on a program that is reducing the crime rates in a number of American cities with remarkable success. It is a simple, but very effective idea called the koban. And it comes from Japan. Here's ABC's Deborah Amos.

DEBORAH AMOS, ABC News (Voice Over): This is a Japanese koban, a neighborhood center where police are also neighborhood helpers. With thousands of kobans in Japan, the country is one of the safest in the world. This is a koban in Columbia, South Carolina, and a model for community policing borrowed from Japan. Home base is Gonzales Gardens, a housing project once plagued by drugs and nightly gunfire.

JEROME CARDWELL, Koban, Inc.: The reason why the koban is located in this building is because that corner was a drug-infested corner. Now the corner is drug free.

DEBORAH AMOS (On Camera): In fact, serious crime has dropped by about a third with the koban program. The crime rate in the rest of Columbia stayed the same. But there's more to this new kind of community policing. Borrowing another idea from Japan, officers are all-purpose neighborhood helpers.

DEBORAH AMOS (Voice-Over) With the koban right in the neighborhood, police come when there's family trouble.

Officer ALBERTUS COCKLIN, Columbia, South Carolina Police: If they have a problem, the first place they run is to me, you know? If their parents are not home, they run and get Officer Cocklin.

Officer MARGARET YARBOROUGH, Columbia South Carolina Police: Part of the koban program is being there all the time. They see us as human beings. We take off the uniform sometimes and go out and play a basketball game.

DEBORAH AMOS (Voice-Over): Or toss a football with teenagers, encouraging long-term relationships that expand the koban program well beyond American standards of community policing -- with a mentoring program, coordination with community groups, and cooperation with local schools. Police officers even check on schoolwork.

MARGARET YARBOROUGH: Have you done your homework today?

CHILD: Yeah.

MARGARET YARBOROUGH: Who checked it for you?

DEBORAH AMOS (Voice-Over): They provide a safe haven to go after school, when crime is most likely to happen. Here, they meet role models and learn paths to success. The best measure of success is in these faces here. Deborah Amos, ABC News, Columbia, South Carolina.