

Problem Solving Quarterly

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Problem-Solving in Practice: Crime and the Homeless

By Margaret Knoche

Savannah, GA—In the past six or seven years there has been a marked increase across the country in the number of people living on the street. A recent study by the U.S. Conference of Mayors (December, 1990) found that of the cities reporting, 43 percent felt that public sentiment towards homeless people is changing for the worse. There has been what Loni Hancock, Mayor of Berkeley, calls a "compassion fatigue" and, if the study is any indication, many Americans have begun to identify street people as a threat to public safety and rely on their local police to solve the problem.

Description of the Problem (Scanning)

Such was the case in Savannah. A portion of the community was convinced that the homeless population contributed significantly to the crime rate. This

perception had been reinforced by a series of isolated incidents involving homeless individuals in the downtown area. Some of these incidents involved homeless victims; but individual members of the homeless community were also reported as being responsible for criminal activity. There were several publicized cases of homeless people violating the law in order to be placed in jail, where they could receive food and shelter from the cold. Still others involved intoxicated homeless individuals disturbing the public or exhibiting self-threatening behavior.

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The local shelters in Savannah did not accept intoxicated homeless individuals, leaving police with little choice but to take them to jail, exacerbating the jail

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Problem-Oriented Policing Conference Update

By Rana Sampson

PERF and the San Diego Police Department (SDPD) are cosponsoring the second **National Problem-Oriented Policing Conference** from November 6-8 in La Jolla (CA). The conference will provide practitioners with invaluable information on how to address common community complaints and will give practitioners an opportunity to discuss the concerns and barriers they face in their effort to implement problem-oriented policing.

Workshops will focus on specific police-community problems such as homicides, gangs, drug markets, the homeless, alarms and noise complaints. The conference will also address a host of thorny issues that must be examined when a department decides to implement a problem-oriented approach to policing.

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overcrowding problem. In addition, homeless individuals frequented popular business and tourist areas, prompting concern from community leaders that citizens and tourists might think that these areas were not safe.

There was an increasing sense of frustration among police officers, **public officials** and citizens. The very lifestyles of homeless people caused frequent encounters with officers, consumed valuable manpower resources, and left the police searching for an effective response.

A portion of the community was convinced that the homeless population contributed significantly to the crime rate.

In an effort to get an accurate assessment of the nature of the problem, Chief of Police David Gellatly commissioned his planning **and** research section to conduct a comprehensive study of those homeless people who came into contact with the police. He wanted to know if there was a profile of homeless persons who tended to victimize or be victimized and whether it differed from that of the general population. Gellatly also asked the department's special operations unit to conduct a survey that would identify the characteristics of the homeless people with whom the police had the most contact.

The interrelatedness of these two directives prompted the **planning and** research section and the special operations unit to collaborate on the information-

gathering and analysis phases of the project. Prior to launching the two efforts police personnel met with a representative from the Coalition for the Homeless to gain the coalition's support and to assure them that the current interest of the police in the homeless was not intended to be harassment.

Gathering Information

As a member of the planning and research section I was asked to gather the data on police response to people who were homeless. Unfortunately, the police computer system was not able to weed out incidents involving people who appear to be homeless. I had to search the database for incidents involving shelter addresses. An analysis of this data provided statistics on the frequency and types of incidents which helped identify a body of specific cases from which I was able to derive more detailed information such as the time of day, day of week and method of operation.

The second source I used was one-on-one interviews with police officers who had the most frequent encounters with homeless individuals and with shelter or social service personnel who deal with the homeless on a daily basis. While this source was subjective, it was valuable because of the experience of the people interviewed. I wanted to determine if there was a pattern to the responses of individuals who had frequent contact with homeless people.

Finally, I read approximately twenty articles on crime, homelessness and the relationship (if any) between the two. Four of these were particularly pertinent to the problem in Savannah.

While I collected data, the special operations unit designed a survey instrument with which police officers could survey the homeless individuals with whom they had the most frequent contact. The survey was designed to elicit several types of information: demography, employment skills and involvement with alcohol, drugs and crime.

Most individuals agreed to answer the questions. The results of the interviews were entered into a computer database and analyzed collectively for the entire city and for neighborhood areas.

Analysis

The information gathered by the planning and research section and the special operations unit was analyzed jointly and consolidated into a single report. This report outlined the background of the study, explained the survey methodology, discussed the findings and presented a number of recommendations.

Homeless people contributed to less than one percent of all calls for service and Part I crimes city-wide

The major findings indicated that people who appeared to be homeless contributed to less than one percent of all calls for service and Part I crimes city-wide. Most crime that homeless people committed was Part II offenses, like petty larceny (mostly of food, liquor and clothing) and shoplifting, and were generally non-violent. The overwhelming majority of police involvement

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Fighting Home Improvement Fraud

By Officer Diane Salen

Prince George's County (MD) —During a recent civic association meeting in Chapel Oaks, Louise Johnson, a neighborhood resident, told me of a possible home improvement scam. She said that Quest Remodeling, a home remodeling company had solicited in the neighborhood during November 1990. A company representative approached Johnson and she decided to hire them to convert her basement into a living space.

Quest Remodeling dug up her front yard, forcing Johnson to walk across a plank to get to her front door. The contractor framed up the basement and installed plumbing fixtures, however, these fixtures did not function. No other work was done.

After repeated pressure by the company owner, Johnson paid the contractor the full amount of the contracted price, \$21,000, before the work was completed.

Johnson was dissatisfied with the quality of the work done thus far and the excessive amount of time it was taking to complete. She called the owner of the company, Robert Tinsley, who was also the contractor, and expressed her concern. She wanted to verify the contractor's home improvement license and other credentials. Tinsley could not produce any current credentials in his name.

After hearing about Johnson's problem, I contacted Detective Steve Kerpelman in the check and

fraud unit (Kerpelman handles all home improvement frauds) and asked him about the laws governing home improvement fraud.

Kerpelman provided me with a copy of the home improvement law. Tinsley was in violation of two laws: providing home improvement services without a current license and abandoning the site before completion.

I ran a warrant check on Tinsley and it was soon apparent why he could not get a current license. He had six open warrants, one identical to the current case—contracting to do home improvement without a license. Further inquiry found that Tinsley **had done two other remodeling jobs in the neighborhood** and, though those jobs were finished, they were of poor quality.

Tinsley was in violation of two laws: providing home improvement services without a current license and abandoning the site before completion.

I asked Kerpelman to contact Tinsley to ask him when Johnson's home would be completed. When Kerpelman did reach Tinsley, he was told that he would be charged with **abandonment** if the job was not completed as contracted. Tinsley said that he would be at the house sometime during the following week to finish the job but was unwilling to give a specific day.

From further phone calls to **Johnson, I learned** that Tinsley had advised her that he would be

finishing the job on Thursday and Friday of the following week.

I conducted periodic checks of the residence on Thursday and Friday. On Friday morning I saw two men in front of the house taking measurements, neither of whom were Tinsley. Apparently they were subcontractors of Quest Remodeling. They said that they expected Tinsley at the property that afternoon.

I set up surveillance of the residence with the assistance of the Fairmont Heights and Seat Pleasant (MD) village police. Tinsley drove up in front of the residence later that afternoon and was arrested on the six outstanding warrants as well as the new complaint for providing home improvement services without a license.

Tinsley's bond for the most current offense was set at \$7,500. Bond for the other **outstanding** warrants totalled over \$200,000. Tinsley was unable to make bond and was ordered into a detention center in Prince George's County.

I advised Johnson that she could file in civil court to recoup the money she had expended thus far. I also informed Tinsley that his company, which is jointly owned by his cousin, is still legally responsible for the completion of the remodeling on Johnson's home. I then spoke with the county attorney and asked that restitution be a part of Tinsley's sentencing recommendation.

I have since alerted other local residents of this scam by placing an article in the local civic association newsletter. The article gives residents tips on how to avoid becoming a victim of home

(Continued on next page)

Community-Based Policing and the Evaluation of Officers

By Corporal Tim Stadler

Tulsa, OK— In the last issue of **Problem-Solving Quarterly** there was an article by John Stedman, senior research associate at PERF, about the importance of modifying personnel evaluations to make them consistent with the expressed philosophy of the department. Recently, the Tulsa Police Department reviewed and modified its own officer evaluations to bring them into line with the new duties created by the implementation of problem-oriented policing.

The change in Tulsa was spearheaded by an evaluation committee — a group of officers representing a cross-section of the department. The committee consisted of an officer and supervisor from all three uniform divisions and each of the specialty units (detectives and undercover).

The committee's goal was to incorporate the Tulsa Police Department's community-based problem-solving philosophy into their evaluation forms. They wanted to provide organizational support for the philosophy and inclusion in the evaluation process seemed one way of doing that.

The committee began by reviewing the old evaluation form. They decided that the format was appropriate (behavior-anchored criteria describing superior, acceptable and below-standard categories), but some of the criteria needed to be changed.

One of the most profound changes they made was in the

criteria used to evaluate traffic enforcement.

The old evaluation form contributed to the "ticket for ticket's sake" mentality. The new evaluation form has the same traffic section but it now states that "When traffic problems are present within his or her beat, the officer used the traffic code **and** citations to assist in addressing these problems." This means that if the patrol officer becomes aware of a location with a traffic problem (i.e. an intersection where there have been six non-injury and one injury accident in the past six months) then writing citations might be **one** of several responses used to solve the problem. By the same token, if an officer does not have a traffic problem but has identified a problem with burglaries, the officer should be using his or her time to analyze the burglary problem rather than using it to write citations.

Another way to look at Tulsa's new traffic code evaluation section is Officer A writes one citation a day, without regard to whether the location was a problem location. Officer B identifies a location where there have been six non-injury and one accident involving injury in the past six months. Officer B averages one citation every two days at that location. Officer B is entitled to the higher rating because the officer used the citation to address an ongoing problem.

Community-based policing and problem-oriented policing were also incorporated in the evaluation

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PERF Offers Problem-Oriented Policing Training

PERE provides POP training for command staff, inid-manage ment, first line supervisors and field officers. Each training program covers:

- The evolution of problem oriented policing
- Its basic elements
- **The problem-solving process**
- Examples and case studies
- flow to implement problem-solving

If your agency is interested in training, please contact Rana Sampson at PERF, (202) 466-7820.

(Home, cont. from page 3)

improvement fraud. It tells them that home improvement without a license and abandonment of a home improvement contract are criminal offenses. It suggests that before hiring a contractor, be sure that he or she is licensed, bonded and insured and that they get a written contract before the work begins.

I have since made several presentations to civic associations and neighborhood watch groups on home improvement fraud and con artists.

For more information contact: **Officer Diane Salen**, Prince George's County at (301) 772-4900.

Problem-oriented Policing, Netherlands Style

Utrecht, The Netherlands—In 1983, about 30 prostitutes worked the streets of Utrecht, a city of over 200,000 people in the Netherlands. The majority of the prostitutes in Utrecht were addicted to drugs, generally heroin or cocaine, and streetwalking was and continues to be the means of supporting their habit. Like prostitutes in the United States, those in Utrecht consistently worked in unsafe areas and **under unhygienic** conditions. They also were vulnerable to a high incidence of sexually transmitted diseases such as AIDS.

In the Netherlands, prostitution is not **punishable** by law. However, municipal governments have the right to prohibit certain forms of prostitution and regulate it when it becomes a nuisance to the community. The A.P.V. (General Police Regulations) of the City of Utrecht prohibited streetwalking in the most highly populated part of town.

In September 1984, the courts found this article of the A.P.V. too restrictive because it limited the freedom of movement of prostitutes, especially those that lived in the center of the city. As a result of the court decision, prostitutes started working in the most populated areas of the city, particularly the residential areas close to downtown.

Complaints from Residents

The residents of the neighborhoods affected by the

streetwalling were not upset by prostitution per se, but rather by the annoyances that accompanied it. The residents of downtown Utrecht's neighborhoods began to complain about traffic congestion, the noise created by the slamming of car doors, and the voices of the streetwalkers soliciting their clients.

The police also had some concerns. They suspected that there was a high incidence of victimization among the prostitutes. These women were frequently victims of crimes such as rape, assault and robbery, even though complaints were seldom filed.

The residents of the neighborhoods affected by the streetwalking were not upset by prostitution but by the annoyances that accompanied it.

The Utrecht patrol force and the vice squad were jointly responsible for the problems associated with prostitution. In addressing the problem they faced two issues:

- In what way can streetwalking be better controlled to alleviate the traffic congestion and noise, and
- In what way can the police reduce the victimization of these women?

After consulting at length with the municipal board, Greta Kostwinder, the chief of the vice squad, recommended establishment of a "tolerance zone" in a

portion of downtown Utrecht. Within this tolerance zone, streetwalking would be permitted. This strategy was chosen over making streetwalking illegal in certain areas, since the court might again find this measure too restrictive.

In making her recommendation, Kostwinder was hoping to **minimize** the **annoyance** to the **surrounding community** caused by prostitution, reduce traffic congestion, and improve the physical security of the prostitutes.

Three potential tolerance zones were selected. Kostwinder presented the proposed zones before the municipal board. Kostwinder and the mayor attended hearings and testified before municipal committees. Neighborhood residents and business people were informed of the proposal through the media. The police and the **municipal** board held community meetings to discuss the proposed zones so that members of the community could voice their concerns.

In November of 1985, the municipal board officially established the tolerance zone. The section of the city decided upon was an industrial area in downtown Utrecht. Most of the businesses were closed at night. One drawback to it was that it was not as safe for the prostitutes as the residential areas. The new area was deserted at night. The prostitutes would no longer have the safety that the residential areas had provided to them. However, other factors made the area ideal as a tolerance zone.

Providing Assistance

The municipal board, concerned about the health and

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(Community, cont. from pg.4)

section which rated "self-initiated field/investigative problem-solving activity." To obtain an acceptable rating the officer must recognize and identify suspected criminal activity and must know how to incorporate the appropriate problem-solving techniques.

Another area needing revision was the criteria for evaluating the officer's attitude toward police work. The committee determined that in order to obtain an acceptable rating, an officer must "demonstrate an active interest in [their] career; take [the] responsibility [of their] profession seriously; recognize and accept the community-based policing and public service responsibilities of the department." To obtain the highest ranking possible an officer must "utilize free time to further professional knowledge and expertise; solicit assistance from others to broaden knowledge of the work; [and] work to fulfill the community-based policing, problem-solving and public service responsibilities of the department."

While this form will become effective this fall, the first round of these evaluations will not be used by supervisors to evaluate officers until June of 1992. Supervisors and officers are currently studying the new criteria and identifying the needs of their beats in preparation for next year's review.

For more information contact **the author, Cpl. Tim Stadler**, Tulsa Police Department at (918) 596-9329.

(Netherlands, cont from pg. 5)

safety of the prostitutes, made provision of medical assistance and improved safety for the prostitutes an explicit condition of the city's establishment of the tolerance zone. The police were interested in establishing a rehabilitation program tailored to the prostitutes, but their experience had shown them that prostitutes who are addicted to heroin and cocaine do not benefit from a drug rehabilitation program if it requires a drastic change in the user's lifestyle. For this reason, Kostwinder contacted the DeGraaff Foundation, a foundation that funds programs which identify workable solutions for drug-addicted prostitutes.

One drawback to the area was that it was not as safe for the prostitutes as the residential areas had been.

After consulting with the foundation she decided to establish a hospitality room in the tolerance zone. The primary goal of the project would be to prevent the transmission of sexually transmitted diseases, specifically AIDS. Secondary goals were to prevent unwanted pregnancies and to introduce the street-walkers to the various medical services available to them.

With these aims in mind it was proposed that a physician hold consulting hours two evenings a week, providing routine health care such as prescribing birth control and assisting in venereal disease control. The hospitality room also gave the municipality the opportunity to educate the streetwalkers on the use of condoms and sterilized needles. In addition, police hoped that the hospitality room and the increased contact with police which it provi-

ded would encourage the prostitutes to report crimes committed against them more frequently.

With the cooperation of the DeGraaff Foundation, Kostwinder prepared a request for funding to support the operating costs and overhead of the Hospitality Project for Prostitutes (in Dutch, H.A.P.).

The City of Utrecht agreed to fund the project and Kostwinder set up a board to oversee the H.A.P. A police official would have a seat on the board. The board selected three prostitutes and several volunteers to work in the hospitality room.

In the spring of 1986, the hospitality room was in place and on April 1 of that year the tolerance zone was officially designated. The zone and the H.A.P. have produced satisfactory results. Complaints from the neighborhood have been virtually eliminated. The willingness of the prostitutes to report serious, punishable crimes such as rape and assault has also greatly increased. The increased contact between the women and the police provided by the H.A.P. and the work done together in establishing it, has made the prostitutes more willing to report crime.

Continued Success

As of the summer of 1991, the Utrecht police report that the project remains a tremendous success and continues to provide the city with a way to offer education and services to an otherwise disenfranchised group of citizens. The example has been followed in several Dutch towns with varying degrees of success.

For more information contact: **Sgt. Bart Harskamp**, Juvenile Division, Gemeentepolitie Utrecht, Kroonstraat 25, Postbus 8300, 3503 RH Utrecht (NL)
Phone: 01131-30325466

(*Problem-Solving cont. from pg. 3*) with homeless people was downtown **and** in areas close to shelters.

Another **important finding** from the study was that most of the homeless **individuals** were from **Savannah**; many of those who appeared homeless, in fact, had a place to stay if they chose.

During the course of the study the department was able to identify specific concerns they had when dealing with homeless people. The report made the following **recommendations**:

- That a protocol be developed outlining the relationship between the police department and the various institutions to which officers frequently refer individuals who are homeless (shelters, courts and churches).
- That the city establish a "wet shelter" designed exclusively for detaining people who are intoxicated. This idea has been used in **San Diego** and proved to be cheaper **and** more efficient than arrest.
- That the police department **not** implement a system for tracking police officers' encounters with homeless people. The study team reasoned that since encounters with people who are homeless represent less than one percent of all incidents, it would not be a valuable expenditure of scarce resources to spend time developing a system to track them.

On September 11, 1991 the city **manager and several municipal and** non-profit agencies met to discuss the implementation of the recommendations of the report. The bureau of public development established a task force chaired by a

representative from the Coalition for the Homeless. The task force was given three weeks to develop a proposal for a "wet shelter" and a **day** shelter for homeless people. The **Savannah** Police Department is currently in the process of developing the protocol for referrals to shelters recommended in the report.

For More Information Contact **Margaret Knoche, former** management analyst in the **Savannah** Police Department, now program coordinator for the City of **Savannah** Department of Housing at (912) 596-9378.

(*Conference, cont. from pg. 1*) Workshops will address how to effectively lead the change process, supervising and evaluating problem-solving officers, stimulating creativity, measuring the effectiveness of problem-solving efforts, and marketing problem-oriented policing to your community, your city manager and the rest of your city government.

Herman Goldstein, author of **Problem-Oriented Policing** will deliver the keynote address. Practitioners and other experts in the field will present the workshops.

The conference cost is \$295. Conference space is filling up **quickly**. We expect some cancellations due to unexpected schedule conflicts so sign up on our waiting list now. For further information or to register by **phone** call PERF at (202) **466-7820**.

Rana Sampson is a senior research associate at PERF

Submissions

When:: submitting descriptions of problem-solving efforts for the newsletters remember to consider the following questions:

- What is the problem?
- For whom is it a problem?
- How has the department banded the problem in the past?

What information was collected; about the problem?

Were *there any* difficulties in getting the information?

What was the goal of the problem-solving effort?

What strategies were developed to reach *that goal*..

What agencies assisted the police department in achieving the goal?

Was the goal accomplished?

What would you recommend to other police agencies interested in addressing similar problems

Send submissions to:

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