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Domestic Violence Intervention in Charlotte-Mecklenberg

This project was created after apparent increases in domestic assaults in the Charlotte-Mecklenburg (N.C.) Police Department's Baker One District.

Summary Analysis: Analysis of domestic assault reports showed that the average victim had filed nine previous police reports, most involving the same suspect but sometimes crossing police district boundaries. Many of the prior reports were for indicator crimes—offenses such as trespassing, threatening, and stalking. Within the Baker One District, most repeat call locations were domestic situations. Further analysis suggested the desirability of regarding the victim and suspect as "hot spots" instead of the traditional fixed geographic location.

Summary Response: Baker One officers developed a tailored response plan for each repeat offense case, including zero tolerance of criminal behavior by the suspect and the use of other criminal justice and social service agencies. A Police Watch Program and a Domestic Violence Hotline voice mail system for victims were implemented. Officers developed detailed case files and created a database with victim/offender background data. The database tracks victims and offenders as moving "hot spots" from one address to another and across district boundaries.

Summary Assessment: Repeat calls for service were reduced by 98.9 percent at seven target locations. Domestic assaults decreased 7 percent in Baker One while rising 29 percent in the rest of city. In 105 cases with indicator crimes, only three victims later reported a domestic assault. Only

14.8 percent of domestic violence victims reported repeat victimization as opposed to a benchmark figure of 35 percent. No Internal Affairs complaints were generated by officer contacts with suspects.

Scanning

The police response to domestic violence has gradually improved since the early 1970s, when research showed that police frequently had prior contacts with the victims and/or suspects of serious aggravated assaults and homicides) Over the years we have learned that these encounters escalated from verbal arguments and threats of violence between the participants. Nevertheless, for most police departments, finding an effective way to prevent domestic violence cases is sometimes an elusive goal. Police have tried and continue to use a variety of approaches. They include separating and counseling the victim and suspect; mandatory arrest policies; special domestic violence units to provide follow-up investigations, focusing on repeat call locations; the use of court ordered counseling and referral services; and special programs for batterers and victims.' While these approaches have had varying levels of success, they all tended to address the problem after a series of domestic calls or assaults had occurred and typically focused on the victim, not the aggressor.

The police department had made domestic violence a priority for a number of years and worked to reduce the number of assaults in its community. An intensive effort has been made to intervene at locations where there have been repeat domestic violence disturbance calls. The depart-

ment established a Domestic Violence Unit that pairs investigators and counselors who look at locations where there were repeat calls. In 2000, Charlotte-Mecklenberg had 14 homicides classified as domestic related—18.7 percent of its total of 75. The department has always analyzed those cases to determine if there was an earlier opportunity to intervene. These efforts previously had a minimal impact on the ultimate goal of preventing domestic assaults or homicides from occurring.

In October 2000, Officer Keith Way of the department's Baker One District was investigating a serious domestic assault case. Officer Way had been concerned about the number of domestic assaults that he saw in his district. In 2000, Baker One investigated 305 domestic assaults, which was 30 percent of the total assaults in that district that year. He had also been researching indicator crimes—incidents that could suggest the potential for escalating criminal activity. Officer Way decided to apply that research to the case that he was investigating and looked for previous reports involving the victim and suspect. He found a number of reports for other offenses such as vandalism and communicating threats. Some of those offenses had occurred outside his patrol district. An examination of all the case reports clearly suggested that trouble followed the couple around the county and, had the reports been linked earlier, police might have been able to intervene before the situation escalated into a violent encounter. Officer Way was intrigued by what he found with this one case and wanted to pursue the approach, which he defined as reducing

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domestic violence calls by utilizing indicators to target potential victims/suspects. Rather than the repeat call location being the "hot spot," he surmised that tracking all incidents involving the participants might be a better indicator of future violence. In December 2000, Officer Way approached Baker One Captain David Graham for approval to further explore the concept. Given the number of domestic assaults occurring both citywide and in the Baker One District, as well as the escalating rate of domestic-related homicides, Captain Graham gave his support.

Analysis

Officer Way and Officer Karl Bannerman began analyzing all domestic assault reports received by the district. They reviewed all incident reports involving both the victim and the suspect in each case and found that, on average, each victim had filed nine previous police reports, most involving the same suspect as in the domestic assault case. In many instances, these previous reports were not domestic assaults but other crimes, which were indicative of a troubled relationship, and a suspect who appeared to be involved in a pattern of escalating criminal activity. These crimes ranged from hit-and-run to check fraud. Prior to the inception of this project, the criminal history of the relationship between the victim and the offender would not have been apparent until a serious domestic assault had actually occurred and been referred to investigators for follow-up. The focus had been primarily on the location where the participants lived and the domestic disturbances took place. No organized effort had been made to examine interactions between participants that might have taken place at other locations or involved incidents that were not related to domestic assault.

From the analysis of these cases and their research, the officers developed a list of indicator crimes that, in situations involving the same victim and suspect, could establish a pattern of events that demonstrated an abusive relationship.' These indicator crimes can range from harassing phone calls to hit-and-run, depending upon the particular victim-sus-

pest pair. In many cases, the pattern of behavior that the suspect displayed against the victim followed the accepted domestic violence continuum of verbal abuse, harassment, stalking-related offenses, escalating violence, and, finally serious assault or death.'

One of the ways that the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Police Department identifies chronic crime problems is through an analysis of repeat calls for service to the same location. The departmental standard had been that five calls for service per month at the same location was an indication of a more serious crime or disorder problem that should merit police attention. This level of calls for service was not based on any analysis. In analyzing domestic cases, it became clear that one way of identifying locations where the indicator crimes for domestic violence might be present would be to look at the repeat call locations.' The district felt that, if they were going to work toward the goal of developing meaningful intervention in potential domestic violence cases, waiting until there were five repeat calls at a location in a month would be too long. They changed the parameters for repeat call locations for their district so that addresses were flagged after three calls for service in a month. While this significantly increased the number of repeat call locations the district would need to analyze and monitor, officers felt that it would provide enhanced opportunities for early intervention.

The officers were aided in their analysis of these cases by the department's implementation of an automated records management system that enabled officers to search multiple departmental databases to build a complete history of the victim and suspect. They found that the activity in many of these cases crossed district boundaries. For example, a victim could live in Baker One but work in another district where the suspect harassed the victim at her place of employment. As they looked closer at these cases, the officers realized that they needed to track victims and suspects whose involvement in criminal activity occurred in different parts of the city,

For some years, the department concentrated much of its enforcement activity on

chronic "hot spots"—areas where there have been patterns of offenses over an extended period of time. These locations were identified through GIS mapping and analysis of cases by the patrol districts in conjunction with their assigned crime analyst. This has become a cornerstone of the problem-solving activity that accompanies the Charlotte--Mecklenburg's community-policing efforts. The concept has largely been based on a particular location or geographic area designated as the hot spot. Baker One officers saw that the hot spot concept was a critical component of this project. They realized that the hot spot was the victim and suspect, who moved around the city, not one specific geographic location.' This was the first time that the department considered anything other than a fixed geographic location as a hot spot. The officers knew that a key component of their response would be finding a way to track victims and offenders across district boundaries and sharing information on these cases throughout the department.

As Officers Way and Bannerman worked through this problem, they used other available resources to assist in their analysis. They talked with an Assistant District Attorney about the prosecution of these cases, as domestic assaults are often not prosecuted. The goal was to present the linked cases to the District Attorney in a manner that would increase the chances that the assault charges would be prosecuted and the offender would experience judicial consequences for his or her actions. They talked with both investigators and counselors from the department's Domestic Violence Unit to validate the approach and discussed ways to intervene effectively. The Officers also talked with community agencies that deal with the domestic violence issue including NOVA (New Options for Violent Abusers), a program that deals with batterers.

Response

Once the officers had determined that indicator crimes and repeat calls for service could be used to identify relationships between victims and offenders where there was a significant risk of domestic assault, they began to devise an action plan. They

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knew that the circumstances in these cases varied widely and that they would need to develop an arsenal of potential intervention strategies that could be tailored to fit each individual case.' The potential responses included referring both the victim and the offender to agencies and programs that could help them deal with abusive behavior and with building the life skills needed to move beyond that phase of their lives. Another form of intervention would involve a zero-tolerance policy toward those offenders who displayed escalating patterns of criminal behavior. Police officers would make arrests for even the most minor offense in hopes of getting the suspect into the criminal justice system and where possible, would use the habitual misdemeanor assault statute to get longer sentences for the suspect. The zero-tolerance policy included maintaining a strong presence in the life of the suspect, and using all resources available to change his or her behavior. Officers make it abundantly clear to suspects that they are aware of their behavior and that they will be receiving close scrutiny from the police. Officers discussed this concept with the police attorneys to ensure that some basic tactics they planned to use, such as surveillance, would not constitute harassment.

One additional intervention tactic was to check the driving records of some of the suspects. In cases where the officers found that the suspect's license had been revoked, the officers set up surveillance of the suspect and, as the suspect left home behind the wheel of a car, conducted a probable cause traffic stop. The traffic stop is one more way of reinforcing with the suspect that police are watching his other behavior and using a zero-tolerance approach. The victims in these cases also benefit from an increased police presence through the Police Watch Program, which is patterned after a program in Great Britain.' This includes systematic zone checks, of both the victim's residence and work place when appropriate. The frequency of the checks on the victim is based on the severity of the case and can, in some instances, include neighbors and family members. In conjunction with the increased police presence, officers may conduct surveys of places the victim fre-

quents, such as the home and workplace, in order to provide the victim with more options for protection.

The officers also felt that it was critical to build on existing partnerships with other components of the criminal justice system in order to intervene effectively in these cases.' The officers established a stronger partnership with the District Attorney's Office to achieve increased evidence-based prosecution of these cases. The department's research showed that many of the offenders had prior criminal records and were frequently still on probation for prior offenses. The Baker One officers reached out to Community Corrections, the probation and parole officers for Mecklenburg County, to garner their support and understanding of the approach and to get them to focus on the behavior of the domestic violence suspects who were in violation of the terms of their probation and/or parole.

A variety of stakeholders developed these intervention tactics, including domestic violence investigators and counselors, prosecutors, probation officers and practitioners in social programs that offer services to domestic violence victims and offenders. The social services agencies participating included NOVA, Victim Assistance, Legal Services of the Southern Piedmont, and the Battered Women's Shelter. All of these entities agreed to work with Baker One in dealing with these complex cases. Guidelines were established to provide as uniform a response as possible to each case.

All of the standard criteria were considered in evaluating the potential responses including legality, effectiveness, community values, cost and practicality. Ultimately, the partners' overriding concern was to identify tactics that protected the victim and did not result in an escalation of the violence. Cost and practicality also played a critical role as the Baker One District had to implement the project (including all of the research associated with it) adjusting existing resources, as the department was unable to reassign any additional personnel to the district.

In this response phase, officers

reviewed all cases involving indicator crimes, domestic relationships and repeat calls for service. As soon as a potential victim and suspect have been identified, Officer Bannerman opens a case file. Interviews with the victim, suspect and others are included in the case file, along with photos, documentation on warrants, court appearances and any referrals to other agencies, including those made on behalf of any children. This information facilitates criminal and civil prosecution of the suspect and is useful background information in making referrals to self-help agencies for the victim and/or the aggressor. The agencies that victims and suspects are referred to are determined by interviews with the parties involved, responding officers' reports and background investigations of past incidents.

The Baker One District also established a Domestic Violence Hotline that is a dedicated voice mail that victims can use to report miscellaneous incidents involving the suspect in their case. Much of the information reported has been about non-criminal matters that warrant documentation in the case file. The hotline facilitates a more open flow of timely information.

The officers also established a separate database for the project that initially consisted of two or more cases involving the same suspect and victim and cases involving a domestic relationship in which indicator crimes were present. As the project has progressed, the database has been expanded to include any case involving a victim and suspect involved in a domestic relationship as defined by the department's directives; any case with an indicator crime where the suspect is the opposite gender of the victim; and any location with three or more calls for service in one month. Once the district lowered its threshold for repeat calls for service to three calls at one location in a month, they found that the majority of those locations involved domestic calls.

The incident location is not used as the "hot spot" because of the transient nature of victim-suspect interactions. The database that helps track the victim and suspect treats the victim as the hot spot. The

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victim and suspect are kept separate for tracking purposes. Research has shown that when a victim ends an abusive relationship, they tend to fall back into another abusive relationship with a different abuser. This particular database is evolving into an information warehouse with report generating capabilities for police, district attorneys and probation officers. After reviewing each case file, the officers plan a tailor-made intervention response that includes contacting the suspects and informing them that their actions are being monitored. In a number of instances, these intervention tactics have alleviated the domestic problem and have enabled the victims to rebuild their lives.

One of the greatest challenges that the officers have faced is dealing with those victims and suspects whose interactions cross district boundaries. Ultimately, the department wants to establish a master database that can be used by officers in all 12 districts to link domestic assault cases and those with indicator crimes. Currently, the database for this project encompasses only the Baker One District. When officers find that the activity involving one of their victims and/or suspects has moved into another district, they contact the officer assigned as the domestic violence liaison in that district and pass along the information. They have also contacted other district captains and have cooperated with their officers in enforcement activities in their districts. This has enabled them to have some continuity in enforcement and to maintain the relationships they have established with victims and suspects.

Assessment

Although the concept of the offender/victim hot spot is relatively new and is being used in only one patrol district, Baker One and the department's administration believe it is an innovative way to lower the number of domestic assaults and homicides. During 2001, the Baker One officer assigned to the project reviewed 229 misdemeanor cases (felony cases are assigned to a felony investigations unit). Of those cases, 46 percent (105 cases) had indicator crimes. Once the district began looking at repeat call locations at three calls per

month instead of five, they found that the majority of the repeat locations were related to domestic assault. After applying their intervention tactics at seven initial locations, they reduced the calls for service by 98.9 percent at those locations.

Perhaps the most significant indicator of success is the domestic violence assault rate for the Baker One District compared to the rate jurisdictionwide in 2001. Domestic assaults increased 29 percent in Charlotte-Mecklenburg during 2001, while decreasing 7 percent in Baker One during 2001. Officers attribute this to their early intervention in these cases, their tracking of the suspects and their work with the victims, including walking them through the court process. In the 105 cases where indicator crimes were present, only three of the victims reported an actual assault after the intervention. Officers feel that aggressive early intervention played a major role in reducing the number of victim/suspect pairs where the criminal activity escalated. The aggressive intervention with suspects has not generated any complaints to Internal Affairs, another indication of the viability of the concept. The rate of repeat victimizations is yet another major indicator of the success of this initiative. Of the 124 victims of domestic assault in Baker One in 2001, only 14.8 percent of the victims were victimized again during 2001-11.2 percent were victimized by the same suspect; 3.6 percent were victimized by a different suspect. Benchmark estimates were only found for Britain, where 35 percent of victims of domestic violence become repeat victims within a year.¹⁰ (These two repeat victimization figures, 14.8 percent in Baker One and 35 percent in Britain, are not directly comparable, because the Baker One victims were only tracked through the end of 2001, rather than for an entire year following their victimization.)

Other patrol districts in the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Police Department have taken note of Baker One's success in reducing the level of domestic violence while it has increased significantly in the rest of the city. Chief Darrell Stephens would eventually like to see this approach used departmentwide, supported by a master domestic violence victim/suspect data-

base. While this approach can be labor-intensive, the police department believes that the dividends will be worth the investment. Most important, early intervention with the victim and suspect tracked as the hot spot, gives police officers a new way to look at an old problem.

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4 Paolucci, E.O., Violate, C. and Scholfield, M., A Review of Marital and Family Variables as they Relate to Adult Criminal Recidivism, National Foundation for Family Research and Education (2000).

5 Farrell, G. and Buckley, A., Evaluation of a UK Police Domestic Violence Unit using Repeat Victimization as a Performance Indicator, The Howard Journal Vol. 38 No. 1 (Feb 1999)

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7 Dobash, R.E. and Dobash, R.P., "Evaluating Criminal Justice Intervention For Domestic Violence", Crime and Delinquency Vol. 46 Issue 2 (April 2000)

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9 Matthews, Nancy A. Generic Violence Prevention and Gendered Violence, Violence Against Women Vol. 6 Issue 3 (March 2000).

10 In the United States, statistics are kept by the Department of Justice for repeat victimizations of certain crimes such as robbery, rape and burglary, however, no such data is maintained for domestic assaults.

For more on this project contact Officer Bannerman at cbannerman@cmpd.org



LEGISLATIVE UPDATE

President Bush signed the long-awaited omnibus fiscal year 2003 appropriations package, H.J.Res. 2, on February 20. The bill contained the 11 remaining discretionary spending bills totaling \$397.4 billion for FY03, which began on October 1. It restored funding for the Byrne Grant program, which had its \$500 million formula grants removed in the Senate bill. The Byrne program's final appropriation is \$650,914,000—an increase of \$56 million.

The Office of Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS) received an appropriation of \$928,912,000 (down from \$1.05 in FY02). The program's total Public Safety and Community Policing grants were cut from \$496 million to \$353 million. Total funding for hiring police officers was cut by more than 39 percent to \$200 million. The COPS technology budget increased from \$351 million to \$400 million. This includes a new interoperable communications program funded at \$20 million (down from the original Senate proposal of \$100 million).

The State Criminal Alien Assistance Program (SCAAP) was not funded in the Senate bill, but was reinserted during the conference. Its FY03 budget of \$250 million is less than 45 percent of its \$565 million FY02 appropriation. The Public Safety Officers Benefits program was also

cut from \$4.5 million to \$4 million.

The President's FY04 budget request was released on February 3 and contained significant cuts to local law enforcement programs such as COPS, Byrne and Local Law Enforcement Block Grants (LLEBG). In addition, the budget recommended cuts to afterschool youth programs. The 21st Century Community Learning Centers Program received a request of \$600 million (a cut of almost 40 percent from its FY02 allocation of \$984 million). This program funds academic opportunities and activities primarily to low-income students during afterschool, weekend and summer hours. A summary prepared by the Afterschool Alliance is available at www.afterschoolalliance.org/backgrounder.doc. For more information on the President's budget, see the Office of Management and Budget's website at www.whitehouse.gov/lomb.

Medal of Valor

Ten individuals were presented the Public Safety Officer Medal of Valor at a ceremony with U.S. Attorney General Ashcroft and Vice President Cheney on February 14. The 2002 recipients are Officer Keith N. Borders of Las Vegas, NV; Firefighters Robert Borer, Jeremy Hosek, Guy Jones, Ron Kennett, Rick Klein, and Mike Wright of Lincoln, NE; Fire Chief Robert Giorgio

of Cherry Hill, NJ; Volunteer Firefighter Eric Svihovec of Miller Place, NY; and Firefighter Sean VanAtter of Tampa, FL. The Public Safety Officer Medal of Valor is the nation's highest award for valor by a public safety officer. Congress created the award in 2001 and this is the first presentation. For a synopsis of the recipients' actions visit the Office of Justice Programs' website at <http://www.ojp.gov/medalofvalor/welcome.html>.

Acquisition Comments Due

The General Services Administration proposed a rule change that would allow state and local governments to use their federal supply schedule to purchase automated data processing equipment (including firmware), software, supplies, support equipment and services. PERF members interested in submitting comments on the proposed rule change must send them to the Regulation Secretariat by March 24. More information on the proposed rule change as well as instructions for submitting comments is available on page 3220 of the Federal Register / Vol. 68, No. 15 1 Thursday, Jan. 23, 2003. The Federal Register is available online at http://www.gpo.gov/su_docs/laces/aces140.html. Please fax a copy of your comments to PERF Attn: David Bright at (202) 466-7826.

COPS Funding Highlights					
	FY02	Senate FY03	House FY03	FY03 Enacted	President's FY04 Request
Universal Hiring Program	\$150,000,000	\$150,000,000	\$200,000,000	\$200,000,000	\$-
Cops in Schools	\$180,000,000	\$180,000,000	In UHP	In UHP	\$-
SRO Terrorism Training	N/A	\$10,000,000	\$-	In UHP	\$-
Meth and "Drug Hot Spots"	\$70,473,000	\$50,000,000	\$75,000,000	\$57,132,000	\$20,000,000
COPS Technology Program	\$154,345,000	\$158,815,000	\$130,000,000	\$189,954,000	\$50,000,000
Interoperable Communications	NIA	\$100,000,000	\$-	\$20,000,000	
Total COPS Funding	\$1,050,440,000	\$1,120,288,000	\$896,220,000	\$928,912,000	\$163,755,000
Other Funding Highlights					
	FY02	Senate FY03	House FY03	FY03 Enacted	President's FY04 Request
Byrne Formula	\$500,000,000	\$-	\$500,000,000	\$500,000,000	N/A
Byrne Discretionary	\$94,489,000	\$134,700,000	\$94,489,000	\$150,914,000	N/A
LLEBG	\$400,000,000	\$400,000,000	\$400,000,000	\$400,000,000	NIA
Justice Assistance Grant	N/A	N/A	NIA	NIA	\$585,990,000
SCAAP	\$565,000,000	\$-	\$500,000,000	\$250,000,000	\$-
Weed and Seed	\$58,925,000	\$58,925,000	\$58,925,000	\$58,925,000	\$51,811,000
Police Corps	\$14,435,000	\$15,000,000	\$25,000,000	\$15,000,000	\$28,315,000