

**HERMAN GOLDSTEIN EXCELLENCE IN  
PROBLEM-SOLVING**

**LEE WATKINS  
SAN BERNARDINO (CA) COUNTY  
SHERIFF'S DEPARTMENT  
HONORABLE MENTION  
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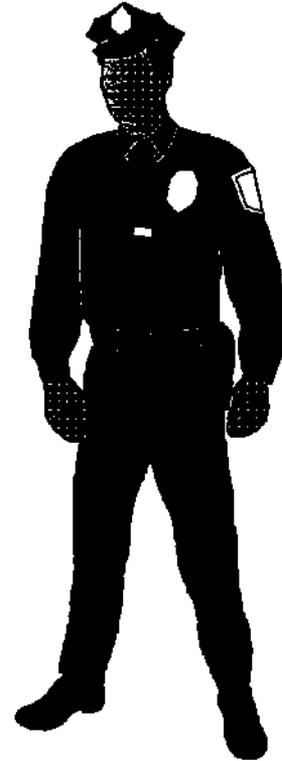
**Police Executive Research Forum**

# San Bernardino County Sheriff's Department

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## ***PROBLEM-ORIENTED POLICING FOOTHILL CORRIDOR PROJECT***

## **PROBLEM ORIENTED POLICING**

### **Foothill Corridor Project**

In December of 1992, the San Bernardino County Sheriff's Department implemented its first major Problem oriented Policing project by assigning a team of three officers to address a rapidly increasing crime rate in an unincorporated area of Fontana, California. Sergeant Lee Uatkins of the Sheriff's Yucaipa Station worked with local Fontana Station Detective Mike Howell and Deputy Michael Kleczko, on special assignment from the department's Chino Hills Station, to solve a 30 year old problem.

#### **ANALYSIS AND IDENTIFICATION:**

Using the SARA (Scanning, Analysis, Response and Assessment) method to develop a tactical plan, POP team members interviewed local patrol officers, citizens from recently constructed housing tracts, business owners, and suspects arrested for a variety of offenses. Our intent was to determine the underlying cause(s) for an overall 25% increase in robberies, auto thefts, burglaries, assaults, and other disturbances along a single mile corridor of Foothill Boulevard.

POP team members found the local Sheriff's Station was committing close to one-fourth of its total manpower to handle calls for service in this area and that California Highway Patrol studies had determined this stretch of road to have the highest traffic fatality rate in the state. The local citizen group, which was formed to assist the POP team, 60% of whom reported being victims of some theft related crime over the past year alone, described how they lived each day in fear and would avoid shopping in their city because it meant driving through this corridor. Legitimate business owners, like one long time family restaurant, would close their doors early to escape the increasing dangers that darkness would bring.

One of the difficulties in collecting information about the corridor was that crime

statistics were found in both the targeted pocket of unincorporated county territory and the City of Fontana's surrounding residential zone. Establishing a common relationship between the two service areas would not only mean a sharing of data but a sharing of responsibility for cause.

Our subsequent analysis of the corridor's crime problem revealed a fascinating "cause 'n effect" relationship between one of the fastest growing regions in the nation and the world's oldest profession: prostitution. Some 30-odd years ago, Foothill Boulevard (then Route 66) fell into financial distress when Interstate 10 and 15 provided travelers a quicker way back east or west to Los Angeles. Dozens of the historical motels, many favorite stops of Hollywood celebrities, soon died out. Those that survived did so by catering to a different clientele: the prostitute and her "Johns".

With phenomenal growth over the years came new business districts, residential zones, and changing jurisdictional boundaries. The target area of our POP Project had become a land-locked pocket of half century old, unimproved buildings (26 in all) and vacant lots (see attachment for specifics) that, at best, were eyesores and, at worse, had become havens for prostitutes, thieves, drug dealers and users. The problem was that these bars, motels, junk yards, adult book stores, and abandoned buildings had now become surrounded by new housing developments full of victimized and intolerant middle income families.

Our analysis revealed other contributing factors to the Foothill Corridor problem, one of which was the fact that traditional police approaches were essentially ineffective. POP team members learned that prostitutes arrested after any one of the 3 to 4 sting operations undertaken by the department each year were able to bypass any criminal penalty, including mandatory HIV testing, by failing to appear on their cite release arrests. Many received quick O.R. releases (due to crowded jails) from the warrant arrest they eventually faced, which took up to six months to be issued in most cases.

After their third or fourth arrest, the offenders would plead guilty and receive credit for time served (2-3 days). The icing on the cake, though, was that standard terms for probation had not been ordered by any local judges for the past two years!

But the root cause of the dilemma, the one which allowed some 40-plus prostitutes and their drug supplying cronies to infiltrate and corrupt the area per night, were the motel owners. Without their most welcomed invitation, the residual Johns, drunks, thieves, and junkies would not be making their "one stop" shopping trips to this part of town. It became apparent that even if all of today's prostitutes and drug dealers were put away for a year, new ones would set up shop within a matter of days. To the motel owners who were reaping profits from it all, this was nothing more than "a problem for the police".

#### **PROJECT GOAL:**

The goal of our effort, then, was to encourage these motel owners (and other Foothill Corridor businessmen who contributed to the problem) to take responsibility for the deteriorating quality of life in their area and work with law enforcement to restore some sense of pride to it. In terms of tradition, measurable results, we would strive to reduce our calls for service in the Foothill Corridor by 50%. Our goal included the elimination of prostitutes, drug dealers, addicts, and thieves from the area, as well as changing the motel owners' views, cleaning up the environment, and empowering local residents to act and feel safer.

#### **TACTICAL RESPONSE:**

The strategies to be used included:

- A. Traditional police methods; i.e., foot patrol, high visibility patrol, vice and narcotics enforcement.
- B. Approaching local judges and encouraging vigorous enforcement of prostitution and drug related statutes, to include the imposition of probation terms.

- C. Forming citizen groups to bring pressure on politicians, motel owners, their prostitutes and customers.
- D. Working with allied governmental agencies to enforce building and safety codes, business licensing, environmental health laws, fire safety codes and employment practices.
- E. Initiating "Red Light Abatement" procedures.
- F. Providing educational information to local business owners concerning the impact and consequences of negative business practices.

Tactical details of the strategies employed are as follows:

- A. Traditional Police Methods:** Over a 60 day period, the three POP team members specifically targeted those criminals working out of corridor motels, serving one search warrant and making a total of 48 prostitution, under the influence, or outstanding warrant arrests. Because we learned early on that prostitution arrests resulted in little or no sentencing, many of the prostitutes were arrested for being "under the influence" whenever possible. This carried a minimum mandatory 90 day sentence, depending on their record. This tactic kept many of the prostitutes out of the area long enough to deal with other problems.
- B- Working with the Courts:** After learning of the game the prostitutes were working against the legal system, FOP team members met with local judges and explained the problem we were faced with. Without hesitation, maximum sentences, HIV testing, and standard terms of probation were handed down. Members even followed their cases through the courts to insure that probation was imposed, OR'ed suspects showed up for court dates, and that warrants for Failure to Appear were served on those who did not.
- C. Forming Citizen Groups** With irate citizens having already approached members of Fontana's City Council and the County's Board of Supervisors, garnering citizen support was only a matter of empowering the most vocal. In all, POP team members organized a total of five community meetings with 20 to 40 people in attendance

at each, including city council members and county officials. Four subsequent "demonstrations" were held, with up to 80 angry residents marching, picket signs in hand, up and down the corridor in a successful effort to dissuade prostitutes from working and to pressure motel owners into complying with POP Team requests. Local newspapers loved it, of course, and many owners became anxious to cooperate because of the bad publicity.

**D. Code Enforcement:** POP team members realized the value of developing partnerships with city, county, and state agencies early on when it came to "cleaning" up the corridor. By working closely with County Fire, Environmental Health, Planning, California Department of Transportation (CalTrans), the Highway Patrol, the State's Division of Labor Standards, and Alcohol Beverage Control Board, six buildings were condemned, eight were found to be in violation of one or more fire safety codes (exposed wiring, alarms, extinguishers, etc.), and twelve were issued citations for miscellaneous environmental health violations, such as the improper storage of chemicals and sewage problems. Hefty fines for violating state labor and alcoholic beverage control laws also got the attention of allied bar owners (Worker's Compensation Law, permit violations, underage drinkers, etc.).

Three of the condemned buildings, including one of the targeted motels, were burned for fire department training purposes, a "win-win" situation for both the fire department and the land owners who could demolish their buildings at one-fifth the cost. Relentless code enforcement caused other land owners to clean their areas up or secure vacant buildings to prevent their being used for prostitution or drugs. Others, like one junk yard that "rented out" some of their wrecked cars to prostitutes, simply closed down and moved out.

Before long, many business owners became more than willing to cooperate with POP Team requests to stop catering to prostitutes. Most important of them all were the motel owners who cleaned up their lots, painted their buildings, and looked

for other ways to keep their rooms occupied (such as long term, low rent leases).

E. **Red Light Abatement:** Although persuasive as a legal muscle threat, such letters of action were destined to have a greater bark than bite (had not the owners cooperated) due to the District Attorney's inability to supply adequate manpower for prosecution. POP team members later persuaded the county to adopt an ordinance which would require all motels to have a conditional use permit to operate, the condition being that if any prostitution, fencing, or drug related activities were allowed to occur there, the permit would be revoked.

F. **Education of Business Owners:** Simply put, the owners of the targeted Foothill Corridor businesses were educated by officers about their responsibility to the community and the negative impact their dealings had on it. They most certainly "saw the light" when the pressures were brought to bear on them through law enforcement, code enforcement, and by members of the community when they failed to cooperate.

#### **PROJECT ASSESSMENT:**

In less than 90 days, calls for service in the targeted Foothill Corridor area were down by 80%. Calls for service in the surrounding residential areas were down by 50%. Buildings which were once vacant havens for prostitutes and drug users were either boarded up or burned to the ground. Motels that relied on prostitutes for business had cleaned them out, along with the environmental eyesores that had become an all too familiar and disgusting sight. Local bars now keep their patrons inside and pay special attention to their activities. One junk yard has closed and another body shop now reports that real women customers are stopping by for business.

Deputies assigned to work the corridor now report responding to calls there twice a week instead of 8 to 10 times per shift; and the Highway Patrol has had only one traffic fatality in the area (not related to the previous "stopped John" and jay-walking type accidents).

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, the County of San Bernardino has formed an official "Foothill Corridor Committee" comprised of a former POP team member, local citizens, and representatives from the county's Planning and Environmental Health Departments. The Board of Supervisors has also committed \$200,000.00 in general fund monies for future improvement projects.

Local residents remain vigilant and vocal to make sure the local government does not allow the problem to grow again.

**RECOMMENDATIONS TO OTHER POLICE AGENCIES:**

At the end of this project, we found several areas we would improve on:

1. Put together a resource council of different government and civilian agencies. The more you know each other, the better you will work together. Understand that this is a quid pro quo operation, in that while they are helping you, you must also be prepared to assist them.
2. A permanent team of Problem Oriented Policing professionals who understand the concepts and believe in POP. The advantages are: That they can continue developing contacts and relationships, which helps make the job easier; the methods of handling problems do not have to be re-invented over again by a new team; the POP team becomes the teaching and resource for the department.
3. The wholehearted buy-in by your law enforcement agency and the local government you serve; traditional measurement of work standards do not apply in this non-traditional method of dealing with a problem.