

HERMAN GOLDSTEIN EXCELLENCE IN PROBLEM SOLVING AWARD APPLICATION

AWARD CATEGORY: Team Award (Officers Kevin Grout, Brad Ray, Carlos Ramos, Garrett Jorgensen, Peter Linde and Nate Elledge)

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On June 1, 1995, the King County Police Department completed organizing and formed an Anti-Violence Team consisting of six officers. The team's area of responsibility consisted of the un-incorporated areas of King County abutting the south Seattle city limits. The purpose of the team was to specifically apply problem solving approaches to identified problems within the area of responsibility. By solving problems on a more long term basis, calls for police service would be reduced, which in turn, would allow patrol officers to have more time to problem solve in their own district.

Mission Statement of the Anti-Violence Team: *"TO IMPROVE THE QUALITY OF LIFE IN THE UNINCORPORATED COMMUNITIES OF THE SOUTHWEST PRECINCT BY ATTACKING THE UNDERLYING CAUSES THAT CREATE PERSISTENT PROBLEMS AND VIOLENT CRIME."*

SCANNING:

The nature of the identified problem in this particular project was drug activity, prostitution problem and associated criminal activity occurring at the El Casino Apartments, 9627 16 Ave SW. Associated problems included life and safety issues related to the fire and structural code violations that were evident at the apartment complex. The apartment complex is located in an older established business neighborhood with a total of 12 units. The entire complex is located on the second floor of a two story building.

This problem was identified by patrol officers working this particular district which is one of the most active patrol districts within the King County jurisdiction. The apartments have existed for over ten years and was known for its high number of calls for service and criminal activity associated with the apartments. The apartments were also known to the local fire department as having a number of past code violations.

The reason this apartment complex was selected by the Anti-Violence Team as a project, was because of its long standing as a known location for a wide and varied types of crimes and its high number of calls for service. Officers knew that an active criminal element was constantly associated with the complex which affected the surrounding residential and business communities. Due to the formation of the Anti-Violence Team, it appeared to be a good target of some concentrated problem solving techniques.

Initial diagnosis for this problem was based on the specific apartment complex location and the associated crime activities. The overall view of this area indicated that this complex was intertwined with a number of criminal activities and in a geographically accessible area of the district.

ANALYSIS:

Data collection sources included talking with patrol and storefront officers, fire department officials, code enforcement personnel, health department officials, tenants, security officers working nearby businesses, labor and industry officials, police communications personnel, other police units (drug unit) and businesses. At scheduled roll call meetings, the contacting of these various agencies was divided up and assigned out to the team members in order to speed up the process of information gathering. Future meetings were then scheduled when the information was obtained in order to plan a response.

History was compiled from the above sources along with the computer resources available, A six month check of police calls were gleaned from the dispatch computer and it showed 48 calls for service occurring over a six month period of time. This did not include the number of "on-view" calls generated by officers which was routine. The fire department also provided information on the problems they found occurring at the location. A history of the known visitors and occupants showed criminal history in a variety of areas.

Problems originating from this complex included the tenants and their visitors. Drug activity was a main driving force which then led to prostitution, theft, burglary, assaults and disturbances occurring in and around the area. A sampling of the known participants showed past crimes such as arson, resisting arrest, vandalism, auto theft, assault, drugs, robbery, traffic crimes, rape, weapons violations, theft, burglary, forgery and stolen property arrests.

Businesses in this area include grocery stores, drug stores, pawn shops, taverns, small restaurants, pornography shops, check cashing stores, banks and several pool halls. Surrounding the business district was residential neighborhoods. The associated crimes to the complex filtered out into all surrounding areas. It was common practice to look for suspects in area crimes to be located in and around the B Casino complex.

The last known organized police mission in this area occurred about four years prior by the King County Police Drug Enforcement Unit. An informant was inserted into the business district to purchase drugs from known customers of the businesses. The investigation showed the focal point of some of the drug dealers was the apartment complex. After numerous drug buys were made, a sweep of the area was made to arrest the suspects. Several of the dealers were sent to prison and many others were driven from the area. One pool hall was bombed by unknown suspects across the street from the apartment complex and closed. Activity in the area slowed but grew again several months later. Since that time, no other missions were directed at the complex other than enhanced traditional police patrol of the area. This led to a Storefront police office being opened several businesses away and an officer assigned on a full time basis.

Once the complex itself was examined by the Anti-Violence Team, it showed an older building being owned by a distant owner who did not visit the premises. The building was slowly deteriorating under the lack of care. Inspections of the interior and exterior showed disrepair, safety hazards, collecting garbage, discarded syringes and condoms, little to no plumbing, failing electrical fixtures and general filthy conditions. Since no on site manager existed, control over the tenants was minimal. No control over upkeep and visitors appeared to exist. The situation led to the attraction of the criminal element who could safely take up loose residence of the complex and have a hangout for others to come to for various activities. Since care of the place was diminishing, those who took up staying at the complex did nothing

to help the problem and just added to the garbage and damage that was occurring. Access to the second floor was through two ground level locked doors that not all officers had keys for. People inside could access the roof of other adjoining businesses and exit from the roof into the rear alley. This provided for a good lookout position for those inside and for a slow police response to the apartments upstairs.

Since the area itself is considered older and below medium income, little money has ever been able to be spent to improve the overall quality of the business district. The area has formed a chamber of commerce and is still trying to slowly make the area more attractive to new businesses. Several business types in the area do continue to have a negative effects on who is attracted to the area. The history of the area is known to have a certain reputation dating back decades. Changing this reputation will be a slow process.

RESPONSE:

Two main response choices were made by the team for this problem. One was the identifying, locating and arresting of known offenders (short term goal). The second was to remove the attraction of the complex by criminals by either vastly improving the complex or closing it completely (long term goal).

The response was formed after compiling the data on the building and subjects involved. The Anti-Violence Team met as a group and discussed the main goals and set the plans in motion. First, Networking with the code enforcement and fire officials took place to work on the problems related to the building itself. More current inspections occurred of the property. The violations were documented and shared among these agencies with the team. The information was then sent to the owner in a coordinated fashion in order to show the seriousness of the problem and to give the impression of unity among the three agencies involved (fire, code enforcement, police). Second, intelligence was collected to bring pressure on the criminal element found to be present at the site. Officers in the team made spot inspections of the site to locate to locate wanted suspects and generate on-view arrests for whatever violations that could be found. Third, upon convincing the owner of the seriousness of the problem, a representative was brought to the site for a walk through to show first hand the obvious problems present. The decision by the representative was to close the place since it would not be cost effective to repair the building and contend with the pending fines that were converging from fire and code enforcement agencies due to the many violations. Fourth, since the location was to be vacated, alternative housing was found for several non criminal tenants. Fifth, the high profile enforcement action continued yielding more arrests along with a now added warning to the suspects that the apartments were closing permanently. This was designed to have the news of the closing spread by word of mouth among all the associated people who were connected to the complex. Sixth, once the tenants moved out after being notified in writing of the closure, the owner hired workers to entirely seal the apartments up with all windows being boarded up and all doors reinforced with locks changed. The interior was gutted so it could not be reopened as an apartment building. Future plans for the building was to find a new tenant and open up a new type of business. Finally, the premises were marked as a no trespassing zone with the owner representative giving authority to the King County Police to make arrests for trespass at any time day or night with the assurance of assisting with prosecution. Police were provided with new keys to the doors for possible access.

Since the Anti-Violence Team was specifically designed to work on this type of project, the

luxury of time was helpful in order to complete the assignments. The working relationship with the fire department and code enforcement was already good and it was found after starting the project the desire to fix the problem was universal among the different agencies. Once the owner's and representative's help was cultivated, their response was quick and definitive to close the complex. The project's conclusion was therefore very successful.

EVALUATION:

Both the short and long term goals for this project were deemed completed. The building was permanently closed and still remains closed at this time. No other business has taken up residency, but at the same time, no problem situation as replaced the old one. The building was so thoroughly sealed up, there have been no future problems with trespassing or squatters at the site.

The two main measurements for this project are (1)the reduced calls for service at this address and (2)the crime rate for this area. Since the conclusion of the project, no calls for service have occurred at this location which has saved patrol valuable time to work on other things in the district. The crime rate for this district is declining except in the categories of auto theft and larceny. The Storefront Officer is monitoring this area and associated crime statistics which appear to have no connection with the apartment complex itself. Both the Anti-Violence Team and Storefront Officer will continue to monitor the site for any future developments. This complex was not only known hangout for active criminals, but it was one of the most pervasive for this part of the county.

PHILOSOPHY AND ORGANIZATION:

The Anti-Violence Team was formed with the philosophy in mind that they would be empowered to seek out and initiate problem solving projects on their own within their area of responsibility. They were given the authority to decide their own measuring system for each project. The team also designed their own documentation form that would be filled out to serve as a SARA format to be followed and to document the progress in the project similar to a case file. Officers were chosen for this assignment because of their work ethic, experience and initiative.

When the team was formed, a two week training period was provided to all members including myself as the sergeant. The training was also provided to the Storefront Officers for all of the King County Police Department. The training consisted of a large block of SARA model training. It is this training that has been utilized on each of the projects initiated by the team. Training also included COP TALK training, patrol responses, team building and SOP formation.

Since the activation of the team, the most obvious problem with the problem solving model has been the time needed by the patrol officer to be able to implement a plan. The Anti-Violence Team was given the time and has been successful in applying the techniques. One of the next steps of the King County Police Department is to have the patrol officer trained in the SARA model for use on patrol. Since patrols work load is impossible to predict, the management of time will obviously be difficult. Combine this with trying to coordinate with other patrol officers, team type of efforts will also be difficult. Since our Department is still new to this approach, the convincing of management along with the street officer will take some actual success stories to show the potential.

Another problem that has surfaced is when working on a problem, the officer needs to have the authority to implement a plan of action and be able to take a "lead investigator" role so coordination runs smoothly and the project does not get sidetracked or diluted. This again is the area that will need supervisor support so the officer can be confident in the direction they take. It is difficult at times to have an officer take a lead role with peers unless there is a clear and comfortable relationship. This is not always possible.

This project had the full support of the team and the management of the precinct where the project took place. The team completed the project within their allotted shifts and did adjust their work hours in order to accommodate various meetings and assignments. Again, they had been given the latitude to do so in order to accomplish their goal. Total hours spent on this project was estimated at about 40 hours. Existing computers and equipment available to officers were used and provided sufficient intelligence to learn what was necessary in the course of the project. No extra budgetary costs were sustained.

In the Spring of 1996, this project was used as a training example for the department sponsored supervisory training classes held for all of the King County Police command staff involving sergeant's and above. The instruction lasted three days and included, as a major portion, SARA training. The next stage of SARA training will involve the field training officers of the department beginning in December of 1996.

Attachments: The October 1995 & March 1996 White Center Storefront Newsletters (2 pages). Newsletters are published monthly by Storefront Officer Don Davis and disseminated throughout the community.