

ABSTRACT

The Charlie One Community Service Program is a problem solving initiative developed by Officer Ken Sims. Officer Sims is assigned to a patrol response area that encompasses the University of North Carolina at Charlotte, a large number of new apartment and condominium complexes that are primarily occupied by students, and a number of older stable residential neighborhoods that surround the university community.

Officer Sims became aware that the number of calls for service in the area was increasing even more rapidly than the population growth in the area. His scanning and analysis of the problem showed him that the major part of the calls for service increase was generated by student parties which resulted in noise, alcohol, and other disorder violations that were creating problems for the more stable residential neighborhoods in the area. Many of the party locations generated repeat calls for service on an almost weekly basis.

Analysis also showed that the criminal justice system provided no meaningful sanctions for these youthful offenders and that they had no incentive to correct the behavior that was causing harm to the neighborhood. Officer Sims set out to find a solution that would force the youthful offender to accept the consequences of his illegal act and to make restitution to the community. At the same time , Officer Sims did not want the youthful offender to have a criminal record as the result of a youthful mistake.

Officer Sims' response to the problem was to create a Community service program under which the youthful offender would be sentenced to community service under the officer's direct supervision. The community service work would be performed in the neighborhoods where the offense occurred so that the community and the offender's peers could see the offender making restitution to the community. The officer works alongside the offenders so that he can serve as a positive influence and instill respect for the law.

The offenders who have participated in the program indicate that it has taught them that there are consequences for their actions and has helped them see they are a part of a larger community. The work they have performed has also resulted in cleaner neighborhoods, the construction of new playgrounds for children, and other worthwhile community projects.

The project exemplifies the officer initiative and sense of empowerment that are integral to the success of community policing.

SCANNING

With the consolidation of the Charlotte and Mecklenburg County Police Departments in October, 1993, the consolidated Charlotte-Mecklenburg Police Department gained jurisdiction over one of the most rapidly growing areas in Mecklenburg County. This area encompassed the University of North Carolina at Charlotte, a large number of apartment and condominium complexes occupied primarily by college students, older single family residential neighborhoods, and a growing concentration of shopping areas and office parks. Growth in this area was extremely rapid, fueled by the emergence of the university from an essentially commuter campus to a major educational institution with a growing number of students who either lived on campus or in the surrounding area.

With the growth of the area came an increase in the number of calls for police service. While some of the increase in calls could be attributed to the growth in the number of crime targets in the area, it became clear to the officers in the Charlie One District, which patrols the area, that the increase in calls was out pacing the rate of growth. Officer Ken Sims began tracking the calls to which he responded to see what types of patterns emerged. It soon became apparent that much of the increase in calls for service activity was not generated by major crimes. Indeed much of the increase centered around disorder problems at parties hosted by college students living in the area. Officers responding to these calls for service found a number of recurring problems including binge drinking, drugs, loud music, assaults, fights, damage to property, littering, drunk driving, traffic accidents, and underage possession and consumption of alcohol. The officers also became aware that they were responding to the same locations week after week.

The officers and the community essentially identified the problem simultaneously. Many of the residential communities in the area were established stable neighborhoods with older residents. The residents began to notice the obvious changes in their neighborhoods with the addition of large multi-family complexes that catered primarily to students and the disorder that resulted from large parties. Officers saw clear patterns in both the location and type of calls to which they responded on a weekly basis. The problem became a high priority due to the significant impact that the changes had on what were essentially some of the most stable neighborhoods in the city. The repeat calls for service also had an obvious impact on police resources with multiple police units forced to respond repeatedly to the same locations. The Police Department also had a strong desire to develop a good working relationship with the university so officers felt that it was imperative that they address the disorder problem in a meaningful way. The initial level of diagnosis made it apparent that virtually all of the offenders were college students committing disorder offenses in the neighborhoods surrounding the university.

ANALYSIS

Officer Ken Sims began collecting information on the response area which included the university and the multi-family complexes where the loud parties and the disorder offenses were occurring. He found that the University of North Carolina had a fall 1997 enrollment of 16,370 students with enrollment projected at 22,000 students by 2005. The business community which supported the population growth in the area had grown to over 555 businesses. There are 26 apartment and condominium complexes with a culturally diverse population reflective of the larger university community. Many of the new residents in the community are planning to live

there on a temporary basis while attending college and, as a result, have little vested interest in the neighborhood. The community has eight active fraternities and fourteen active sororities that hold a large number of social events that draw college age students from all over the city. Officer Sims was aware that the problem had been steadily increasing over several years and that it was likely to increase as the university continued to grow.

Officers Sims realized that the offenders were a unique population. Most of them were college students away from their parents for the first time, getting their first taste of adult freedom.

While the students did not intend any harm to the surrounding community, many of them had little understanding of the effects of their actions on neighborhoods unaccustomed to the noise, public urination, and other disorder violations that were a byproduct of the large and frequent student parties. Equally important, the students committing these offenses did not realize the consequences that they would face by having a criminal record. While the offenses themselves were relatively minor, they would give the student a criminal record that could impact future employment prospects.

Initially, police decided to address the problem by adopting a "zero tolerance" stance in regard to the offenses related to the parties. The community policing officers in the Charlie One District set their work schedules to coincide with the nights and hours when most of the parties occurred. All of the officers responded to every call within the area surrounding the university. Each student soon knew what to expect when the police arrived at one of their parties. The person on the lease or in charge of the location where the party was held was going to either receive a citation or go to jail for the violation.

For a brief period, this approach was successful. Calls for service decreased and the officers felt that students had gotten the message. However, the officers' success was short-lived. Once the students got to court, an overburdened criminal justice system gave them no meaningful sanctions. Most of the cases were either dismissed or given a prayer for judgment. Once the students found that there were no serious consequences for their actions, they again scheduled and hosted the parties that were creating consternation for their non-student neighbors. The students began collecting money at the door, usually two to three dollars per guest, to cover the cost of any fine they might receive from the courts. As word spread that the criminal justice system did not take these cases seriously, the parties increased as did the calls for service. In the few cases that were actually tried, the student had a misdemeanor conviction placed on his permanent record. The student felt that he or she had gotten off with virtually no punishment and did not realize the consequences of having a criminal record.

RESPONSE

Realizing that the enforcement plan using traditional police tactics was no longer an effective solution, Officer Sims began searching for another viable solution to the problem. His goals were (1) to reduce crime and calls for service in the university area; (2) to make the student offenders realize that they were part of a larger community which was being negatively impacted by their actions and help them learn to have a good time without infringing on the rights of others; (3) have the violator pay the community back for their actions and hopefully develop some small stake in the liveability of the neighborhood; (4) build a positive partnership between these neighborhoods, the students, and the Police Department; (5) reduce the case load for

already overcrowded courts; and (6) help the violator take responsibility for his actions while allowing him to avoid the negative effects of a criminal conviction for a relatively minor offense.

Officers Sims felt that it was critically important that the students understand the consequences of their actions. Many of the students were extremely intoxicated when they were arrested or issued a citation. They had no concept of the severity of the situation, its impact on the neighborhood, or the amount of police resources being consumed to address the problem. At the same time Officer Sims wanted to build a problem solving partnership with the student offender to educate him about the consequences of his behavior and about law enforcement efforts to build a viable, safe, and liveable community. Officer Sims felt strongly that most of these students were simply making youthful mistakes and, while he wanted to deter unlawful behavior, he felt that students should not be permanently punished for a mistake that occurred while they were in college.

Officer Sims decided that the most effective way to incorporate all of these goals would be the development of a community service program which would allow the student to acknowledge the harm that his actions had caused the community and make some type of restitution. At the same time, it would allow the student offender to avoid the stigma of a criminal conviction for a youthful mistake.

Officer Sims first contacted Mecklenburg County Probation and Parole about administering the program but found that was not an option because the violator would have to have pled guilty or been found guilty in the courts. Officer Sims found no way to avoid the criminal conviction for

the student unless he volunteered to sponsor the community service program himself. He began working with his supervisors and the judicial system on the most viable way to implement community service as an alternative to criminal prosecution. He requested that Assistant District Attorneys offer the student defendants the opportunity to perform community service and then have their cases dismissed in lieu of either criminal prosecution or a straight dismissal with no consequences to the violator.

After obtaining the cooperation of the District Attorney's Office, Officer Sims began the actual design of the program. He and the District Attorney's Office agreed that violators charged with one of the following offenses would be eligible for the program. Those offenses are noise, littering, purchase or possession of beer or unfortified wine by persons less than 19 years old or persons 19 or 20 years old, possession of fortified wine or spirituous liquor while under 21, obtaining alcoholic beverages with fraudulent identification, giving alcoholic beverages to a person under the age of 21, consuming liquor on public streets or sidewalks, intoxicated and disruptive behavior, possession of marijuana, possession of drug paraphernalia, beer and wine consumption from an open container, and urinating in public. There were also defined parameters on the location of the offense with offenses occurring at sorority and fraternity houses, apartment complexes, condominiums, businesses, streets or sidewalks within a specified area around the university targeted for community service adjudication.

Each community service program participant is required to read and sign a Charlie One Community Service Rules and Release Form before starting the program. The form states that participation in the program is voluntary; that the student is required to be in court on all

scheduled court dates; that misconduct or failing to follow the instructions of the supervising police officer could be grounds for dismissal from the program; failure to complete the program within the allowed time (10 hours of community service within 30 days of registration in the program) would be grounds for termination; the assigned work is subject to change on a daily basis; and it is the student's responsibility to verify the schedule.

Officer Sims then began to identify community service projects that would enable the student to "pay back" the community while, at the same time, gaining a broader perspective on his role as a participant in a larger community. The tasks identified included trash clearing of a specific area such as a roadside, apartment complex, or neighborhood; washing police, fire, and other government vehicles; and assisting with community functions including yard sales, festivals, construction of playgrounds, and fingerprinting children. One particularly unique feature of the program is Officer Sims' insistence that the community service take place in the community where the offense occurred, both so the community can see the student making restitution and so that the student's peers can see that there are indeed consequences to illegal acts. In preparation for the trash clearing activities, Officer Sims contacted the city's Department of Transportation to provide traffic signs to warn approaching motorists that community service workers were in the area. He also obtained ten orange traffic vests from the Police Department's Property Control Bureau for the safety of the community service workers.

Another unique feature of this program is that Officer Sims personally supervises the community service workers and, in most cases, works with them. He is hopeful that he can serve as a positive role model and instill respect for the police and the law in the youthful offenders. By

establishing rapport with the student participants in the program, he can give them guidance on staying out of trouble and becoming responsible contributing members of their community.

ASSESSMENT

The first cases in this program were heard in Mecklenburg County District Court in January, 1997. The first group of youthful offenders were offered community service in lieu of a guilty plea and several quickly accepted the offer. Word of the program quickly spread through the university community. Most of the violators appreciate that they are able to pay for their mistake without incurring a criminal record. The down side of the program from the student violator's perspective is that the work is often difficult and labor intensive. In many cases, the offender's peers are often in the area watching the student perform his community service. This creates embarrassment for the student, especially if he is met with ridicule by his peers, but it is another valuable lesson in accepting the consequences of his actions.

The feedback from the residential communities in the university area has been extremely positive. Residents appreciate that violators are being punished and that they are paying for their mistake with work which is of benefit to the community harmed by the offense. In some cases, the violators have formed a bond with the people they are helping. One young man, who performed his community service by assisting the Police Explorer Scout Troop with preparing and distributing Christmas gifts and food to needy families, was so caught up in the project that he worked additional hours and vowed that, if circumstances permit, he will volunteer for the project next year.

Approximately 80% of the violators that appear in court have chosen to participate in the community service program. 90% of the participants complete the program and subsequently have their charges dismissed by the District Attorney. The 10% who fail to complete the program are brought back into court and arraigned on the original charges. During 1997, 108 individuals participated in the program, performing 1,490 hours of community service in the area around the university and in the Charlie One District. These young people picked up approximately 4,350 pounds of trash, washed a total of 238 vehicles, spent 188 hours working at the University City YMCA, and devoted 223 hours to the Police Explorer Christmas Project. They also participated in a Kids Day at a local Wal-Mart, built a playground for young children living in a trailer park, spent 209 hours building and dedicating a playground in the Wildwood Green neighborhood, and participated in several neighborhood clean-ups.

While it is too early to have an assessment of whether all of the student violators avoid any future illegal activity, there are clearly some immediate benefits to the program. Unlike conventional prosecution, it educates the violator while providing a service to the community. It reduces the caseload for the District Attorney and the courts. It also saves the taxpayer money because it does not require tracking the offender through the court system.

Most important, the student violators leave the program with a heightened sense of responsibility. One female who was cited for an open beer container said that she had learned her lesson and had told all her friends about the incident and the subsequent community service. One student who was in the program for littering said that he would never commit the offense again because "it is not fun when you are the one who has to pick up someone else's litter." He

further stated that "I regret getting in trouble but do not regret having to do my community service. This has been a good reminder to think about someone else instead of just myself."

These testimonials are certainly proof that the program is achieving its ultimate goal of helping young impressionable college students become thoughtful responsible adults.

AGENCY AND OFFICER INFORMATION

This problem solving initiative was adopted at the individual officer level of the organization and is illustrative of the empowerment and problem solving ability that the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Police Department has tried to instill in all of its employees. All employees of the department, both sworn and non-sworn, have received training in problem solving and the use of the SARA problem solving model. Problem solving is considered the basic unit of work for all police employees and there are no special incentives provided for problem solving. The department does try to insure that officers who engage in successful problem solving efforts are recognized for their efforts. The first part of each departmental command staff meeting is set aside for employee recognition and employees regularly receive certificates of commendation for their good work.

Most of the work in Officer Sims' program was an original effort. He saw a problem that affected a unique area of the city and in which the offenses and the offender all shared common characteristics. He established the goals of restitution to the community, a heightened sense of responsibility for the offender, and the desire to not see the offender irrevocably harmed by a youthful mistake. He then developed the community service program because he believed that it

would be an effective way of addressing all of these goals. The department committed no additional resources to the project; much of the work has been performed on Officer Sims' own time and own initiative. The officer was able to successfully apply the problem solving model although hard data was not always available to support every hypothesis.

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Population and Calls for Service Comparisons at University Terrace & University Terrace North

Year	Population	% Change	Calls	% Change
1994	928	NA	324	NA
1995	1088	17.2	512	58.0
1996	1192	9.6	684	33.6
1997	1344	12.8	646	-5.6

CFS / Population Comparisons at UT & UT North

