

Stemming the Drug Flow on 28 Street South.

By

St. Petersburg Police Department Project Respect

A Problem Oriented Policing Project Submitted to

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## Summary

This Problem Oriented Policing Project was conducted at 201 - 28 Street South, St. Petersburg, Florida. The problem at this property was rampant narcotic sales. The drug of choice was "crack" cocaine. Marijuana was being abused by property residents and drug dealers but there was no indication that marijuana was being sold. The drug buyers were pedestrians walking up to the property and people driving up to the property then driving out of the area. The drug sales at this property also led to other types of crimes such as burglaries and thefts, being conducted in the immediate neighborhood and the surrounding neighborhoods. We realized there was a problem at this property when we started getting complaints from neighbors and from other police officers and detectives. We used visual observations to confirm that narcotic dealing was going on from the property. Some of the responses used to address the problem included surveillance, undercover narcotic drug buys using detectives from our agency as well as another local police agency. The problem was worked from October 2001 until a search warrant was executed on the property by detectives from the Pinellas County Sheriff's Office and ourselves. The search warrant was executed on December 6<sup>th</sup>, 2002, approximately 14 months after we became aware of the narcotics activity. A drug dealer was arrested because of this search warrant and the other drug dealers who lived on and frequented the property moved away. This combination of events eliminated the narcotic dealing on this property. Only one person continues to live in the building and no drug sales are occurring at this property now.

This Problem Oriented Policing Project shows problems can be eliminated using the SARA

Method of Problem Solving of:

- SCANNING
- ANALYSIS
- RESPONSE
- ASSESSMENT

This method was used with great success. It brought our unit together with community members, other members of the police department, workers with other police agencies and workers with other departments within the City of St. Petersburg. The quality of life for the residents in the immediate area has been improved.

## **Description**

### **A. Scanning:**

The Street Narcotics Unit first identified the nature of the problem. Patrol Units were being dispatched to constant narcotics drug law violation calls at and in the immediate area of 201-28 Street South. The Unit also observed "open air" drug sales at the location involving large groups of subjects. Calls for police service increased in the area and three drug related homicides occurred along with other shootings.

The problem was identified by using the Police Department's Computer Aided Dispatch System. Street Narcotics Officers reviewed the calls for service to see the time of day that narcotic calls were being dispatched. Officers also monitored the area and viewed open drug sales. Community Police Officers also monitored the area and attended neighborhood meetings, specifically the Palmetto Park Neighborhood Association. Neighbors complained at these meetings about the open air drug sales and the negative effect on the entire neighborhood. Patrol Officers sent police reports to Street Narcotic Officers informing them of the open drug sales. The Vice and Narcotics Section had also viewed drug activity on the property.

The Street Narcotics Unit attended a meeting with upper staff personnel of the Police Department. The staff requested that the Unit choose a location that would be identified as one of the worst open air drug sales areas in the city. After reviewing calls for service, drug tips, and complaints from Patrol Officers, 201-28 Street was chosen as a special drug project. The Unit diagnosed the problem by using the police informational computer to analyze the offender group and

calls for service. Calls for service were checked for the surrounding neighborhood and increased calls for service were noticed. It was found that the dealers were teenagers who had prior criminal histories. The main dealer was identified as living in an apartment on the property. Confidential informants identified the dealer as running the drug sales.

The crime type identified were sales of cocaine and marijuana. Violent crimes were occurring in close proximity to the property which included homicide and shooting into occupied dwellings. Burglary detectives contacted Street Narcotics in reference to burglaries near the drug sales location. Drug dealers on the property were identified as suspects in at least one Home Invasion Robbery as well as other burglaries.

## B. Analysis.

Many sources were used to analyze the problem. All of the computer systems within the Department were used to identify the problem. The police information computer was used to identify all subjects involved and research their criminal records. The Computer Aided Dispatch computer system was used to track calls for service at the location and the surrounding neighborhood. The Street Narcotics Unit interviewed neighbors to ascertain the time and frequency of drug sales. The Unit employed the use of Americorps personnel, people who volunteer their time to pay for their college education, to hand out flyers requesting assistance from neighborhood residents. The flyers explained that the Police Department was working on the problem of open air drug sales and their assistance was needed. The drug tip line, 892-5000, was on the flyer along with the phone number for the Street Narcotics office. The Unit also conducted surveillance of the property in an undercover capacity. Heavy drug sales were viewed throughout the entire day. Drug sales started in the late morning and continued until late into the night. The history of drug sales for this location is long standing. The Unit reviewed calls for service from January 1<sup>st</sup>, 2000 to December 6<sup>th</sup>, 2002. Three hundred four dispatched calls for service concerning Narcotic violations were noted. Younger black males were the drug sellers and the drug dealer was identified as an adult black male with a criminal history. The motivation for selling these drugs was money.

The location was advantageous for drug sales because it was on a main roadway which allowed drug sellers high visibility and the ability to flag down vehicles. The poor lighting allowed for the sellers to hide their drugs and to sell the drugs without the police observing most of their

activity. The victims identified would be the neighbors who suffered losses in burglaries and other crime and who were afraid to walk around their neighborhood after dark because of the large group of young males loitering at the drug location. The suspects in the burglaries and other crimes were drug sellers from the location and addicted drug users who walked to, and lived in the immediate area. The significant harm in the area would be the homicides which were drug related. This problem was being addressed before the project was initiated. Patrol Officers were receiving drug calls at the location and were making some arrests. The Community Police Officers were also monitoring the property and were making some arrests. Their actions were not completely solving the problem. The main dealer who was running the location would just bring in additional drug sellers who were not concerned about being arrested and open air drug sales continued.

The analysis completed by the Street Narcotics Unit revealed that numerous conditions precipitated the problem. The narcotic calls for service were high, poor lighting and a great location for drug sales made the problem worse. In review of the calls for service, it was determined that surveillance was also needed to view the problem. The Unit observed that the drug sales started in the early afternoon and continued until about 1:00 A.M.. The problem affected the entire neighborhood. The unit noticed that sellers were riding bikes and selling drugs blocks away from the location. Surveillance revealed that the location was related to another drug sales area approximately three blocks to the east. Open discussion about the problem occurred in the neighborhood when Community Police Officers attended neighborhood meetings. Community Police Officers then shared this information with the Street Narcotics Unit. The Street Narcotics Sergeant also spoke with numerous neighbors while on patrol.

C. Response:

There were several response alternatives considered to deal with the drug sales problem. The surveillance of the property and the arrest of drug buyers and sellers. The use of high profile patrol by Patrol personnel, Community Police Officers and the Street Narcotics Unit. The use of the Vice and Narcotics Detectives for undercover street buys. The Street Narcotics Unit took the lead in the project and coordinated weekly drug operations at the location. Drug sales were monitored in an undercover vehicle. Drug buyers were stopped after purchasing drugs and arrested. This allowed for high-profile police presence in the area and also gave the Street Narcotics Unit intelligence information on the drug dealers. The Street Narcotics Unit also asked for assistance from the Vice and Narcotics Unit from the Pinellas County Sheriff's Office and from the St. Petersburg Police Department. Undercover detectives purchased cocaine from dealers on the property. The subjects were identified and later arrested.

The arrest of drug dealers on the property allowed the Legal Section of the Police Department to get involved with the Nuisance Abatement process. The Nuisance Abatement process was started in mid-February 2002 by the city of St. Petersburg in accordance with Florida State Statutes. The purpose of the abatement process is to give a city the ability to address nuisance properties. In this particular case, the nuisance was the selling of illegal drugs. To fulfill the guidelines of the nuisance process, two drug purchases from the property are required. In this case, that threshold was met. The Nuisance Abatement Hearing was conducted on April 10<sup>th</sup>, 2002. The property was found in violation and assessed a Fine of \$1,416.62 and Court Costs of \$1,750.00. It should be noted that Community Police Officers had attempted to work with the owners of the property in reference to

the open drug sales. The lighting issues were discussed along with the drug dealer living on the property. The owners did attempt to correct the lighting problem but did not put up high-intensity lighting as suggested. They refused to evict the drug dealer that was running the drug sales location. Another response used to address the problem was the use of Americorps personnel to hand out flyers to neighbors which explained the Police Department's effort in working the drug sales at the location and giving them phone numbers to contact. Neighbors now knew that we were working the drug problem and they now had numbers to call at the Police Department for assistance. The Fire Department was used to assist with fire code inspections and violations. The Street Narcotics Unit responded with Fire Department Inspectors who inspected the property for violations. City Code Inspectors were taken to the property to review code violations. Numerous code violations were found resulting in several thousand dollars in fines. The Street Narcotics Unit worked closely with the Legal Section when dealing with the Nuisance Abatement process. The cost of the project came from federal "block grant" dollars that had been applied. The practicality of the project had been discussed in meetings with staff who were updated by the Street Narcotics Sergeant. The goal of the Street Narcotics Unit was to stop drug sales at the location which would reduce calls for service in the area for patrol units. The goal also was to stop the violence in the area that was directly related to drug sales. There were difficulties that were involved in the response phase. Property owners would not cooperate with police. They would not evict the main drug dealer who resided on the property and they did not install proper lighting that would have discouraged drug sales. They did not properly monitor their property and issue trespass warnings when needed. Drug dealers monitored police radio transmissions with police scanners which allowed for them to hear calls for service being dispatched. The dealers also monitored the Street Narcotics Unit as the Unit

conducted surveillance. Usually the Street Narcotics Unit was able to spend some quality time doing surveillance of the property before the dealers observed us.

#### D. Assessment:

Street Narcotics Officers were assigned to assess the results of the operation. After a search warrant was served at the main drug dealers apartment, all drug sales on and from this property ceased. The main drug dealer was not present when the warrant was executed and presently has outstanding warrants for his arrest. All the other drug dealers that were living on the property moved out. The other drug dealers that just hung out on the property never returned after the dealers that lived there moved out.

Calls for service were checked in the Computer Aided Dispatch computer from December 7<sup>th</sup>, 2002 (day after search warrant was served) until March 1<sup>st</sup>, 2003. Only 23 narcotic sales calls were received for the area; none at 201 - 28 Street South. It should be noted that from January 1<sup>st</sup>, 2000 to December 6<sup>th</sup>, 2002, there were 304 narcotic sales calls for service. The impact of the drug operation has reduced calls for service and has ended the drug sales problem in the neighborhood. The Street Narcotics Unit kept track of the project weekly and the program was evaluated by upper staff members. Residents of the neighborhood expressed their satisfaction with the elimination of this drug activity in community meetings.

There were problems in implementing the project. Staffing was always an issue. Gaining assistance from all Units in the Police Department difficult when all specialized units have additional projects to work on. All response goals in this project have been accomplished. All drug sales have stopped on the property and the neighborhood drug sales have been reduced. Patrol calls for service related to drug violations have decreased dramatically. The property is currently in foreclosure and is for sale. The drug dealer has moved from the location and has pending drug charges. Nuisance Abatement has fined the property owners who now just want to sell the property.

The results of the project were measured by viewing the reduction of calls for service in the area. The Street Narcotics Sergeant was assigned to coordinate the project. There was a concern of displacement in this project. The areas surrounding the project have been monitored by the Community Police Officer and the Street Narcotics Unit. This area will not require continued maintenance as there only one apartment occupied and no drug sales are occurring.

**Agency and Officer Information:**

The problem solving issue was originally adopted as a result of the Chief of Police requesting drug projects to be assigned to the Street Narcotics Unit. The Community Policing Section was to assist in the project. Project days were scheduled and both Units worked together on the project. A Street Narcotics Officer was assigned to manage the project and he reported directly to the Street Narcotics Sgt. The Street Narcotics Sergeant and most of the personnel involved in the project have Community Based Policing training. The officers did have incentives in this project. Overtime was granted when working weekly drug project. Federal Grant monies were used for drug interdiction at the location.

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**Graph:**

Table 1: Narcotic Drug Law Violation Calls In Area: Reduction and Average Calls Per Month Before and After Project:

|                         |                       |                        |
|-------------------------|-----------------------|------------------------|
| Narcotic Drug Law Calls | 01/01/2000-12/06/2002 | 304 (14 Per Month Avg) |
| Narcotic Drug Law Calls | 12/07/2002-03/01/2003 | 23 ( 7 Per Month Avg)  |