

40 MANCHESTER ROAD, BLACKPOOL SUMMARY

SCANNING.

40 Manchester Road, Blackpool, had been subjected to twenty-seven attacks of damage dating between August 1998 through to December 1999, when an offender was caught and successfully prosecuted at court. The premises are privately owned by Mr Leslie Corcoran, a 70 yr old, who is deaf and lives alone. He is described by his neighbours as a quiet man who never causes any problems. Mr Corcoran has no previous convictions nor do any members of his family.

During the sixteen months that I investigated the damage occurring at the property it was attacked in numerous ways: -

- A line and obscene words were spray painted along the gable end of the house using aerosol paint.
- Marbles were catapulted through the front bay window, front and rear bedroom windows.
- Front door lock glued up.
- Oil/creosote/paint thrown all over the gable end and over windows.

ANALYSIS

- Criminals travelling to the area via a network of alleyways.
- The property being attacked from all angles.
- Numerous reactive and proactive Policing plans in relation to the address.
- No specific crime pattern.
- Family's dissatisfaction with the Police and our apparent inability to identify an offender.
- No obvious reason why the address *was* being targeted.

RESPONSE

- A letter was sent to all residents of Manchester Road to keep them informed of the problem to make them feel involved. Also to ask for any ideas they may have as to the offender and any possible reason why the damage was occurring.
- + High visibility patrolling of the area.
- + Both plain clothes and uniformed static and mobile observations on the property.

Partnerships were formed with the following:-

- Probation Service.
- Community Services.
- Victim Support.
- B&Q.

The above agencies supplied personnel and equipment to re-paint the gable end on two separate occasions.

- Age Concern supplied and fitted a P.I.R light.
- The Evening Gazette wrote an article on Mr Corcorans plight.
- Blackpool Borough Council eventually improved the street lighting.
- Technical Services fitted surveillance camera's.
- Blackpool Police painted the gable end on one occasion.
- A Neighbourhood Watch was formed.

ASSESS1NIENT.

- + Links forged with the community and outside agencies.
- The address being repaired to *make it more* presentable to the public but more importantly to help Mr Corcoran who continued to live in the premises throughout.
- The eventual detection of an offender who was successfully prosecuted at court.
- The elimination of the problem enabling Mr Corcoran to carry on with his life carefree.

MANCHESTER ROAD INITIATIVE

SCANNING

This initiative was based simply on one house in Manchester Road, Blackpool, which between the months of August 1998 and December 1999, was subjected to twenty seven attacks of criminal damage. This eventually stopped when an offender was caught and successfully prosecuted at court. The owner of the premises is a 70 year old deaf gentleman who has lived alone at the address for nineteen years.

The address itself is situated part way between Newton Drive and Granville Road. It is an end terraced and has a network of alleyways running to its rear, side and front. (see map).

The damage originally started in August 1998 when a line was spray painted along the gable end of the house. Obscene words were also written. The householder then began to have marbles catapulted through his front double glazed window. This type of damage was so regular that the householder was unable to have his windows replaced because of the expense and the fact that a short time later they were again damaged.

We were notified as a result of a concerned neighbour stopping me in the street and explaining the situation. By this time the damage had been occurring for two months and the householder was due to have his window replaced for a second time.

The problem was prioritised due to the suffering caused to a resident of the community and the resulting detrimental effect this could have on the community as a whole. The main objective in targeting this problem was to eliminate the offender and end the damage caused, thereby improving the householder's quality of life. Ultimately, eliminating the problem would enhance community confidence and public satisfaction.

ANALYSIS

On first speaking to the householder he was adamant that it would be, children causing the damage on their way to school however he was unable to give any reasoning for this impression. The next day a colleague and myself watched the house from the alleyway opposite in the hope of catching the suspected young culprit and hiping the problem in the bud, however at 7.30am on the second day of our observations we noticed that the window had already been broken before our arrival. It was then realised that the problem could be occurring at anytime during the hours of darkness, this being between 8pm and lam.

Having sat down with the householder in his own home I discussed with him his lifestyle, habits and social life. We talked about life in the street and any arguements he may have had to cause somebody to hold a grudge against him. The householder was very difficult to talk to and was not forthcoming with any concrete reasons why this could be happening.

I believed that by identifying the reasoning behind the damage it would be just a matter of time before I could achieve my aim in ar'esting the offender. So I wrote a letter which I then hand delivered to every address on Manchester Road. This informed the occupants of the damage and asked for their assistance with any information as to the offender, or a reason for the damage. I also enclosed a Crimestoppers card.

I also generally stopped and chatted to the residents about the problem. I felt that by making the public feel involved they would want to offer their help and that if any information was being withheld the local residents would draw it to my attention. However the letter generated no

response at all and the residents felt that the householder was a decent man who was always pleasant to talk to and with whom they had no complaints.

RESPONSE

On discussing the problem with supervision it was decided by them that as the Community Officer for the area it should be a priority for me to continue to analyse and to try and make a successful arrest. I decided that to adopt a POPS approach to deal with the matter. The more traditional approach of having a Police Officer watching the house was not in the initial stages appropriate, due to the lack of any crime pattern and the fact that this would make it manpower intensive and costly.

I then requested that the Central Wards POPS vehicle be tasked with visiting the address each evening. This vehicle was usually double crewed each evening between 4pm and midnight. Its main purpose was to patrol around "Hot Spots". Manchester Road seemed an ideal area for it to patrol. By using this vehicle I hoped to arrest an offender or to deter them from the area with our high visibility patrolling.

However it soon became apparent that the damage was still occurring even though the POPS car was patrolling the area each evening. Using this information I was able to gather that the damage was being committed during the very early hours of the morning and as the nights were getting darker this could be between midnight when the car finished patrolling and dawn. Following one attack against the property I was handed videotape from a neighbour who had set up his camera to look out over the alleyway opposite. This showed a very blurred dark figure walking out of the alley at 3.55am and walking towards the premises in Manchester Road, and then out of sight. It did not show the male commit any damage but helped us by revealing that the criminals were using the alleyways.

This network of alleyways gave perfect routes to and from the premises. They were poorly lit and gave access to the property from all angles. This meant that having used these to reach the premises, the offenders could then cause damage and disappear back into the alley having only been in view for a few seconds.

I then decided that perhaps we would need some technical support and so having gained authority for a surveillance camera I asked the T.S.O to visit the address and advise me on the suitability of a camera. Throughout this time the POPS car, high visibility patrols and myself continued to patrol the area. The T.S.O reported back that due to the poor street lighting and location of the premises a surveillance camera would be of no use.

The householder and his family were by now becoming more and more anxious regarding the damage. This had by now changed from windows being smashed to paint, oil and creosote being thrown over the walls. The crime pattern was still irregular and so I decided to try two action plans. Firstly I felt that the householder would benefit from having his house repaired. The paint and marbles had caused considerable damage and the house had become an eye sore. I believed that this in itself must have been affecting the householders well being. I contacted the Probation Service who agreed to supply Community Service workers to re-paint the sidewall. I also formed partnerships with Victim Support and B&Q who supplied the equipment and the Evening Gazette who did an article to publicise the damage.

My second action plan was that having had the property repaired, myself and several other officers including the Special Constabulary would conduct observations on the address whilst on nights. Whilst I was away on leave this action plan was cancelled due to officer commitments and inevitably the address was damaged the very night that I had planned our observations.

A little perturbed by this I then again sat down and re-assessed my response to the problem. As supervision stated that it was too costly to have officers watching the address for hours on end and it is also not the most popular of jobs, I once again looked at my previous idea of a surveillance camera.

I decided to approach Blackpool, Borough council in an attempt to form a partnership with them. Initially I spoke to them with regard to them supplying a dummy CCTV camera which I wanted fitting to the house. They immediately turned this down as being inefficient and too costly. I was then told about the Millennium Fund, which the Council had to help elderly people living in poor quality areas of the town. On asking them for some money to buy P.I.R. lights for the address I was told that Manchester Road did not fall within this fund and that they were not prepared to change their guidelines. Therefore no money was made available to me. My third and final try with the Council was with the Highways Department who I asked to brighten the lights situated outside the attacked premises to allow us to use surveillance cameras. The Council informed me that "Street lamps are for lighting roads not houses". Due to the Council being unable to assist me in the way I had hoped I was led to re-assess my plans and involve other major stakeholders.

Following one call to Age Concern I was provided with not only a P.I.R. light but also an electrician who very kindly fitted the light to the house free of charge. I then once again re-contacted the T.S.U. and met one of their officers at the address. After explaining the situation fully he finally agreed to fit a camera but only if the lighting in the street lamps was brighter. Together with the help of this officer I finally managed to get the Council to agree a level of brightness which they were happy for the streetlights to be changed to. At last it was agreed that a camera could be used and whilst waiting for this to be set up a colleague and myself observed the premises for two nights over a weekend period.

On leaving our observation point at 5.45am on the Sunday I had my first real break through. Walking towards the attacked premises were two very well known local criminals. David (Dougie) McDonough and David Newton. These males spotted us but fortunately we were in plain clothes. They then walked into the network of alleyways, which run to the rear of the premises. After a short time two loud bangs were heard as if brick were hitting wood. When they re-appeared we identified ourselves and searched them both, although nothing was found.

We then returned to inspect the premises and could find no visible damage. When I returned the following evening the householder reported that his property had already been damaged by pink paint whilst he had been out during the evening and that it was discovered when he returned home at 10pm. When I spoke to him he also happened to mention that on waking that morning he had found two bricks in his rear garden just underneath his boarded up window. This I believe accounted for the noise I had heard whilst McDonough and Newton were in the alley.

A search warrant was then obtained for the addresses of both males and when support unit officers searched McDonoughs' flat numerous paint tins were found along with a catapult. Paint splattered clothing was also found hanging in a wardrobe. Both males were arrested and both denied ever causing damage at the address. McDonough stated that all property recovered belonged to another male whom had been staying with him. He refused to name this male stating he did not want him harassed by us.

Paint samples sent to the forensic Science Service came back as a strong possibility of being those used on the attacked premises. After discussing the case with C.I.D., supervision and the C.P.S. it was decided that I simply did not have enough evidence to charge these males. So after being on part IV bail for four months they were both eventually released no charge.

However during the four months that the males had been on part IV bail, damage at the address had become very infrequent apart from one attack in February and one in March. I quietly hoped that the damage had finished and that I had been correct in my suspicions about the males.

In June 1999 my hopes were once again dashed when the damage began again very sporadically. I arranged a meeting between myself, the householder and his family, my supervision and the local councillor at the attacked premises. We all sat down and discussed what further action the Police could take and what we had already done. The family had complained about our apparent lack of action on numerous occasions and following this meeting they could see that we had in fact done every thing that they were asking of us. I was also able to put over to them the difficulties that we were having due to the lack of any crime pattern.

High visibility patrols continued in the area. However by September the offenders appeared to be making a more concerted effort with their attacks against the premises. Once more the Community Services team re-painted the wall of the house and myself and other members of my team were tasked with sitting inside the attacked premises between 3am and 7am. One officer had a view out of the front of the house whilst another viewed the rear. Two other officers were stationary nearby in case assistance was required.

At the same time another surveillance camera was placed in a house nearby. However when a video from this was viewed in the hope of identifying an offender, it became apparent that it was poorly situated. The reason for this being that we could not determine the direction from which the offenders would attack the premises. The only way that I thought this would be possible was to have gates at each end of the alleyway. Unfortunately this idea would not be possible due to fire regulation.

By this time I was receiving considerable support from colleagues and supervision. It was by now November 1999 and after sitting, down with supervision it was decided that this problem could not be solved by just the efforts of one officer. So each team on Central Wards was tasked with providing an officer to conduct static observations each evening between 3am and 7am from an alleyway opposite the premises.

The earlier surveillance camera was, now moved and attached to a drainpipe at the side of the attacked premises. I wrote an action plan, which briefly explained the situation to all team supervisors, although they were already aware of the situation. All officers were asked to stop and check any person seen hanging around the attacked premises.

The intention that I had in September 1998 had by now completely changed. This problem had become very personal to myself and I was beginning to feel that all my efforts in trying to catch an offender and introduce more resources were constantly failing. I felt that when asking for help I was constantly facing closed doors, a scenario which no doubt is faced by officers on a daily basis throughout all forces. So for the householder, his family and myself an end to the damage was an ultimate goal with the arrest of an offender being a bonus.

On 2nd December 1999, all my aims plus the bonus were realised. Whilst an officer was conducting static observations a male, Terence Slater approached the house and threw paint over the sidewall. He was detained by the officer and during interview denied this offence and a further offence, which we were able to identify him from video footage.

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ASSESSMENT

The offender was charged with both offences of damage and a further charge of harassment. When he appeared at Court his solicitor stated that he was part of a much larger "ring" and had been told to cause the damage. Slater apparently feared for his life, should he inform us who the ringleader was, and had no idea why the damage was being caused.

It has still not been ascertained why these premises or this householder should have been victimised in such a way. Slater is an associate of McDonough and they have connections in drugs.

The premises had been subject to twenty seven separate attacks of damage between august 1998 and December 1999. Since Slaters arrest the premises have been free of damage.

It is clear that responding with a POP approach may have made outside agencies and the public feel more involved, but did not eliminate the problem. In line with the problem solving approach once the offender was eliminated, the damage ceased. Attempts to alter aspects of the location did not in this instance solve the problem completely. Painting the premises and making it brighter with P.I.R lights may have temporarily eased the householders worries, but due to the nature of contributory factors, i.e. lack of crime pattern, network of alleyways and poor visibility, the tactic which worked most effectively was nightly observations.

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This was a problem that required 'constant analysis and assessment due to its nature. I believed that it was my responsibility as the householder's Community Officer, to tackle this problem and would not have achieved my objectives without the help of partners and colleagues. The partners involved contributed to rectify damage done and alleviate the stress that this continual damage must have caused the 'recipient. Support from colleagues in conducting nightly observations, ultimately achieved success.

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