

Problem Solving Quarterly

A NEWSLETTER OF THE POLICE EXECUTIVE RESEARCH FORUM
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Problem Solving in Practice #1

Posted: Keep Out

By Nancy McPherson

Description of Problem

In San Diego, a complaint was received by the Mayor's Citizens Assistance Office concerning a block of old row houses on "J" Street in the Logan Heights area. The citizen alleged that several houses had already been posted with red condemnation signs but were still being occupied and acted as magnets for illegal activity. Officer Terrence Degelder, a six-year veteran of the San Diego Police Department and a patrol of-

face in Logan Heights, was assigned the task of responding to this complaint.

On Degelder's first visit to the property, he found that nine wooden buildings intended for use as houses or apartments had front yards strewn with trash, garbage, and refuse. Degelder entered two of the buildings and noted evidence that the buildings were occupied by a large group of transients. He also noted evidence of drug activity such as discarded balloons, burnt bottle caps, and what appeared to be drug residue.

Degelder interviewed several individuals on the premises and discovered that the owner was a Mr. S. who was collecting rent from several of the tenants. A records check on Mr. S. revealed that he had a felony record which included convictions for burglary, forgery, and assault.

Several days later, Degelder

visited the city building inspector's office and discovered that nine months earlier the city had declared the buildings at the Logan Heights location uninhabitable due to deterioration. Not satisfied with promises that the building inspectors would "look into the situation," Degelder contacted Joseph Schilling, the deputy city attorney in charge of code enforcement. Schilling advised Degelder that if he could obtain a current building inspection, court action could be initiated against Mr. S.

Degelder proceeded to contact Mr. J. Warkentin, a city building inspector, and asked him to visit the premises that day. While Warkentin conducted the building inspection, Degelder spoke with several residents, including Mr. S. When asked if he was collecting rent from the residents, Mr. S. denied this, explaining that he supplied residents with

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receipts so they could obtain welfare funds.

Meanwhile, Warkentin completed his inspection which revealed major fire, health and safety, and municipal code violations in all nine dwellings. When Degelder returned to Schilling's office with this information, Schilling immediately initiated the required documents to file a civil complaint against the owner in Superior Court.

With encouragement from his supervisors, during the next several weeks Degelder continued to gather evidence in support of the city's complaint. He initiated a records check of the premises and discovered that an unusually large number of drug-related arrests had taken place at that location. He also discovered that the premises had been the site of several raids by the Border Patrol, who had apprehended literally hundreds of illegal aliens. Degelder spoke with several individuals living in one of the dwellings who admitted

that they were illegal aliens, overlooked in earlier Border Patrol raids. As a result of his investigation, Degelder became convinced that the premises were being utilized as drug "shooting galleries" and illegal alien hiding spots.

Response

Two months after the citizen complaint was received, the city filed a civil complaint in which the court was asked to:

- order Mr. S. to repair and maintain the property in accordance with applicable codes and ordinances;
- declare the property a public nuisance; and,
- issue a temporary restraining order which would effect the removal of all inhabitants and cause the property to be fenced-in until the required repairs were completed.

Several weeks later at the next hearing of the case, the court continued the restraining order to ensure that the premises remained boarded and fenced until the repairs were finished. The day after the court entered the preliminary injunction, Degelder arrested Mr. S. for possession of heroin. Mr. S. was subsequently convicted and sentenced to 16 months in prison.

Degelder continues to monitor the "J" Street property and is still optimistic that his efforts will result in the removal of this blight. The city attorney has filed documents requesting that the court condemn the property so that the buildings can be razed. This request is still pending.

Nancy McPherson is the Forum's field technical assistance coordinator for the Problem-Oriented Approach to Drug Enforcement project in San Diego.

Helpful Hints

EXPANDING PROBLEM SOLVING

"The first line supervisor has to encourage the officer, as well as keep him motivated. The supervisor has to be involved with the problem —willing to work hand-in-hand with

that officer, sometimes serving as a buffer between the officer and mid-manager."

Sgt. Susie Mowry
Newport News Police Department
(804) 247-8637

"Keep precinct shifts aware of all current projects going on and, in particular, allow each shift to be briefed on that shift's projects, the methods being used to solve the

problem, and the outcome."

Officer Mark Watkins
Baltimore Co. Police Department
(301) 494-2370

"Give clear instructions, regulate the paperwork, and make available an accurate and up-to-date list of resources."

Officer Carol Maguire
Baltimore Co. Police Department
(301) 494-2370

Briarfield Revisited

By John Eck

The first problem-solving effort in Newport News, and one of the most ambitious, attempted to address the high burglary rate in the New Briarfield apartments.

At first, the apartment complex appeared to be experiencing a straightforward problem of breaking-and-enterings, typical in a poor neighborhood. Upon closer inspection, it became clear that problem was actually much more complex, stemming from a host of squalid living conditions. The Newport News Police Department eventually concluded that the problem could be alleviated by relocating the residents in better housing.

The details of this effort are described in **Problem-Solving**, but the report does not detail the outcome. At the time the report was written, burglaries had decreased substantially, but there had been no resolution of what would happen to the complex.

Some problems take longer to solve than others.

The police department had been able to mobilize the residents, other city agencies, the city manager, and ultimately

the city council and mayor to **negotiate** with the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) to buy the property and move the residents to better housing. The city was also considering replacing the existing structures with a new school, businesses, and new apartments. When we wrote the report, HUD had not yet reached an agreement with the city.

Now, almost three and a half years since this problem was taken on, it may be resolved. A foot patrol officer still covers New Briarfield and neighboring apartment complexes, but out of the 457 units, only 40 are currently occupied. But an agreement between HUD and the city of Newport News has been worked out.

Newport News Agrees to Buy Apartments

The February 24 edition of the local news-paper, the **The Daily Press**, states:

"The city has reached a tentative agreement to buy and demolish the dilapidated New Briarfield Apartments complex and replace it with a middle school, housing and commercial development.

"The 'in principle' agreement, announced at Tuesday's City Council meeting, ends more than two years of negotiations between the city and the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development...

"Mayor Jessie M. Rattley said the \$1.2 million deal 'is the same offer the city made over a year ago.' "

Some problems take longer to solve than others.

Police Efforts Go Unrecognized

Interestingly, for some time now, news accounts have not mentioned the police department's role in this effort. Some people in the police department have even forgotten that it was their initial effort that got the ball rolling. Other officers, however, feel that they are not getting enough credit. **Before the department decided to address the problems in New Briarfield, no one else had made an effort. But once the police department personnel documented the problem, brought various city agencies together, and worked with the residents, those other than the police began to lead the effort—and get the credit.**

"There is no limit to what you can accomplish if you do not worry about who will get the credit."

A lieutenant in Newport News has this message on his desk, "There is no limit to what you can accomplish if you do not worry about who will get the credit." New Briarfield is a good example of this.

John Eck is the Forum's associate director of research.

Problem Solving in Practice #2

Cuyler: A Joint Effort

By Tia Clark

Description of Problem

Cuyler, a predominantly poor black neighborhood in Savannah, GA, has been infested with criminal activity and "nuisance problems" due to an increase in drug trafficking in the area. Both the Savannah Police Department and concerned citizens believe that reducing the drug trafficking in the area will alleviate the other problems.

Prior to April 1988, the Savannah police were using traditional police practices such as undercover operations and increased patrols as a means of controlling the drug activity. These practices proved unsuccessful. In April 1988, Captain Dan Reynolds of the Savannah Police Department suggested that problem-oriented policing strategies be applied to the drug-related problems in Cuyler. Reynolds' proposal was accepted and the Chief pledged his full support to the effort.

Once the problem was analyzed, it became clear that non-police problems such as substandard housing, housing code violations, abandoned vehicles, and lack of recreational facilities were contribut-

ing to the drug activity. The police department, Neighborhood Services and the Cuyler Community Association then joined forces to further pinpoint the problem and develop a strategy for improving the quality of life in Cuyler.

Response

The police department, with the assistance of the Metro Drug Squad, utilized every resource of its operations to confront the community's drug problem. The Crime Prevention Unit, in conjunction with Neighborhood Services, was assigned the responsibility of organizing neighborhood block cleanups and encouraging citizens to report suspicious activity.

The Tactical Reaction and Prevention (TRAP) unit and beat officers were informed of the drug problem in Cuyler and encouraged to talk with Cuyler residents about the effectiveness of the police response.

...it became clear that non-police problems were contributing to the drug activity.

Police and Neighborhood Services then began investigating the non-police problems. These two organizations were able to identify several specific areas in need of improvement: removal of abandoned vehicles, removal or renovation of vacant buildings, renovation

of substandard houses, cleaning of vacant lots and collecting of refuse. TRAP and Neighborhood Services met with the residents of Cuyler to discuss the findings of their investigation and their plan of action.

...landlords have since cleaned their vacant lots...

Neighborhood Services followed through on these investigations by conducting neighborhood cleanups, enforcing housing code violations and requesting that landlords improve conditions in substandard housing.

Results

Some landlords have since boarded up their vacant property and cleaned their vacant lots in an effort to improve the visual appearance of Cuyler. Even though the primary concern of the community is drug activity, the residents and police believe that the community must be physically improved before it can be rid of drugs. Efforts are continuing to further minimize drug activity in the area.

For more information, contact Captain Dan Reynolds, of the Savannah Police Department, at (912) 233-9321.

Tia Clark is a Forum summer intern from Hampton University in Hampton, VA.

Update: Drug Problem Solving Project

A two-year **Problem-Oriented Approach to Drug Enforcement** project funded by the **Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA)**, has targeted drug problems in five U.S. cities: Atlanta, Tulsa, Tampa, Philadelphia, and San Diego. The project sites are developing drug problem inventories, in which they describe the variety and nature of the drug problem in their targeted areas. These inventories will be used by street patrol officers and supervisors as guides to help analyze and resolve the problems. Another important aspect of the project is the compiling of innovative and effective policing methods of drug enforcement.

Field Staff Hired

Field technical assistance coordinators for each of the participating project sites have been hired by the Forum. The coordinators, who were each hired locally, are responsible for the administration of the project at their departments. They will help department members design and implement a problem-oriented approach to drug enforcement, foster intra-departmental communications and provide tech-

nical assistance to department members on drug problem solving efforts. For further information about individual project sites, please contact these staff members at the following locations:

Sandra Huguley

Atlanta Dept. Of Public Safety
Bureau of Police Services/SIS
175 Decatur Street, SE
Atlanta, GA30335
(404) **658-6632**

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Philadelphia, PA 19145
(215) **467-3982**

Nancy McPherson

San Diego Police Dept.
1401 **Broadway**
San Diego, CA 92101
(619) 531-2223

Training On Problem Oriented Policing

Training on problem-oriented policing has been conducted for officers at each of the sites. About 150 officers, from the rank of patrol officer to captain, have participated in the one-day training sessions provided at each of the sites by the Forum. Prior to these sessions, officers read several case studies of problems. These case

examples were discussed in groups during the training sessions, using the problem solving process as the analytical framework.

Management Conference

The first problem-oriented approach to drug enforcement management conference was held in Philadelphia from April 19-21. It provided an excellent opportunity for interaction between various project site participants. Highlights of the conference included a report from each site about its target area, a presentation by **Herman Goldstein**, and a discussion of analytical techniques. A second conference is scheduled for October 26-28 in San Diego. The primary focus of the conference will be the drug problem inventory. Each department will report on data sources used, problems identified, and information collected about their particular targeted drug problem area.

For more information, contact the Forum at (202) 466-7820.

For Your Reading Pleasure

The Newport News Police Dept, has published its annual report on problem-oriented policing. To obtain a copy, please contact Edriene Johnson, Police Planning Coordinator, 224 26th. Street, Newport News, VA 23607; (804) 247-8404.

Officer's Efforts Don't Go Unrewarded

East Side Group Honors Initiator of Unusual Crime Watch Effort

By Sean T. Kelly

St. Paul, MN— Officer Robert Weston's day isn't often filled with dramatic arrest, high-speed chases or other forms of confrontation with lawbreakers.

More likely, he's dropping in on apartment complexes on St. Paul's East Side, asking about unusual activity that might indicate an impending burglary or a possible drug deal.

The apartment managers and residents readily provide him such information, if they haven't already called the East Side Team Police office. It's all part of their neighborhood crime watch effort.

Weston, a 16-year veteran of the St. Paul Police Department, suggested this novel use of the crime watch approach because he observed problems that stemmed from dealers moving from place to place in the neighborhood.

He forged links with the apartment managers so trust was built up and information readily shared. The East Side Resident Managers Association, the organization that grew

out of his instigation, recognized him with a special award last week.

Weston, who has a gift for putting people at ease and a willingness to make an extra effort, said adapting the crime watch approach to apartments was a new wrinkle called for by an unusual situation.

...adapting the crime watch approach to apartments was a new wrinkle called for by an unusual situation.

"Normally, you think of a neighborhood crime watch in an area with many single dwellings, but we've been able to establish watch programs in several of the apartment complexes here," Watson said.

The effort, which appears to have made a significant difference, came as a reaction to what was happening in the area, he said.

Three years ago, openly blatant drug activities were being conducted in the Maryland Avenue and Hazelwood Street area near the Roosevelt Homes, the East Side's largest public housing complex.

"There were gangs involved, openly wearing their insignia. Graffiti was written on the walls of some businesses. There was a lot of street activity with drug dealings and it was spilling over into the apartment complexes,"

Weston said.

"We patrolled heavily but there wasn't a lot we could do by ourselves. I got to talking with the apartment managers and the public housing people about working together on the problem."

Twenty people turned out for the first meeting, he said. "We began cleaning up the street gang graffiti and got one businessman to clean up alongside his building," he said. "The city came and removed trash from one lot that had become a dumping ground. It got communication going."

The apartment managers, who historically regarded one another as competitors, formed a league called the East Side Resident Managers Association and still meet once a month with the police invited, he said.

Some of the apartments organized neighborhood crime watch programs with remarkable results, he said. "We found that as soon as those watch signs went up, there was a dramatic drop in our call load," he said. "The drug traffickers were not so blatant about it after that."

Information from the resident managers pointed to one possible drug dealer, and a search warrant for his apartment was obtained and executed, Weston said. "That led to an arrest and a guilty plea, and that message spread like wildfire," Weston said.

In one three-month period of 1987, burglaries in the area were down 50 percent compared with the same quarter in 1986, he said.

"It's been an amazing change for the better," said Connie Oppelt, resident manager for the Phalen Park Estates apartments at 1265 Hazelwood St. "There used to be many more break-ins and you couldn't walk down Hazelwood without someone propositioning you or trying to sell drugs to you."

The complex has enrolled 44 people in its crime watch program, or more than one-third of its 113 units, she said. One nearby homeowner also has joined and the signs are conspicuously displayed, she said.

"If we see cars with suspicious people, we get a description," Oppelt said. "We watch out for the kids who live here, Officer Weston talks to the people and reaches the people. The cops from all the different shifts are visible."

Donna Rose, assistant manager for the Roosevelt Homes, said she joined the resident managers groups not just to be cooperative but to gain results for her own residents. "We are concerned about the safety of the residents in our 314 units and we also want to be good neighbors," she said.

As with other public housing projects in St. Paul, many of the residents are Southeast Asians who have distrusted authorities. "With the help of interpreters, we are making some progress on that," she said.

There is even some interest in forming neighborhood crime watches in parts of the Roosevelt campus, she said. This is left to the wishes of resi-

dents in each area of the complex, she said.

Lucy Hampshire, assistant manager for Phalen Terrace Apartments, 1331 E. Maryland Ave., said a meeting has been scheduled for March 26 to test the interest in forming a crime watch organization for that complex.

"We'll see how many want to become involved," she said. "Officer Weston is well-known in our complex because he drops in so often and we always get a good police response when we need it," she said.

Capt. Don Trooien, commander for the East Side Team Police, said Weston's efforts have made a difference. "He had an idea that people were moving from apartment to apartment and that sharing information would help cull out the bad apples," he said.

Weston, 41, still performed his regular duties but used his day shift effectively to make contacts with the apartment managers, Trooien said. "We tried to find some time for him but mostly he squeezed in this extra effort," Trooien said.

The results show the wisdom of this preventative approach, according to Trooien. "Things have cooled down around there and the people really appreciate it," he said.

The award they gave him last week proves that.

(Reprinted with permission from the **Pioneer Press/Dispatch**, March 13, 1988.)

Submissions

Has your agency tried a new and innovative approach to solving a drug problem? If so, please send Diane Hill a brief description of your example of problem-solving efforts, along with the name and phone number of a contact person who can answer questions about your approach. Send submissions to: Police Executive Research Forum, 2300 M Street, N.W., Suite 910, Washington, DC 20037, or call (202) 466-7820.

Problem-Oriented Approach to Drug Enforcement

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You Want To Know

Q. How can police managers show officers that they support problem-solving efforts?

A. "Create an environment where officers have the freedom to experiment with different techniques of problem solving; develop a relationship of trust and understanding; and, give up some of

the absolute control police managers cling to so desperately in order to preserve their authority."

Lt. Frank Palombo
Clearwater Police Department
(813) 462-6370

A. "Develop a comprehensive training program outlining problem-oriented policing; implement policies which encourage and formalize use of problem-oriented policing within the department; and, provide rewards and recognition to those officers who demonstrate competence in

problem solving."

Capt. Dan Reynolds
Savannah Police Department
(912) 233-9321

A. "Make sure that time is set aside to allow officers to work on identified problems. Managers should also relate to the public, police administrators, and patrol officers the importance of problem solving."

Stt. Guy Gable
Baltimore Co. Police Department
(301) 494-2370.

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