

# Chapter 8

Tackling Crime and Other Public-Safety Problems

Case Studies In Problem Solving

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Cruising



## Cruising

### Cruising in Santa Ana, Calif.

For about 25 years, Santa Ana, Calif., motorists have seen cruisers take to the streets Sunday nights. By 1994, people were cruising on Friday and Saturday nights, as well, and the typical cruising-related problems of disorder, noise and traffic gridlock were compounded by car jackings, felony assaults, hit-and-run accidents, and homicides. Citizen complaints and calls for service continued to rise, along with the corresponding costs of police service.

Santa Ana police estimated that 1,000 cruisers hit the city streets on winter nights, and many more on summer nights. (Using a "mark and recapture" technique common to ecologists estimating animal populations, Cpl. J.L. Armstrong estimated that over 22,000 vehicles were involved in cruising in Southern California.) A mile stretch of South Bristol Street had become the latest popular cruise. Cruisers told police that Santa Ana's cruise was the biggest in a five-county region, and that police presence actually made them feel safer. Gang members were joining the cruise, contributing to the associated crime. Area residents and merchants told police they were intimidated by the activity. The traffic trapped residents in their neighborhoods, and merchants were losing legitimate customers. Emergency medical services had to be rerouted because the traffic blocked access to a hospital emergency room.

According to Lt. Mike Foote, the cruising phenomenon, particularly among Southern California's large Hispanic youth population, has roots in rural Mexican social customs. In many Mexican towns, large groups of young people gather in public squares and move in organized fashion to promote intermingling of the sexes. This pattern of movement mirrors cruisers' driving patterns. From this observation, it became clear to Foote that the objective of a problem-solving initiative should be to interrupt the social motivation to cruise by changing the patterns of movement.

Before developing a new response, Foote took stock of the police response to the problem over the previous six years. He concluded that a lack of police intervention left the situation in chaos. Small-scale, directed patrol efforts had no impact. Multi-agency enforcement initiatives were but a temporary distraction to the cruisers. Completely closing the streets only diverted the cruisers to other major thoroughfares, and diverting the cruisers to side streets fostered gang conflict and compounded problems in residential neighborhoods. Diverting the cruisers onto nearby freeways was ineffective. Traffic-control points proved only a minor inconvenience to cruisers. A full-time cruising-enforcement detail alleviated violence, but only while deployed. Nothing seemed to effectively reduce or eliminate the problem. Because so many cruisers traveled around the regional circuit, the probability of police intervention for each cruiser was too low to have much deterrent effect.



Foote realized the department's previous responses to the problem, especially the big enforcement operations, were part of the problem. The police had become part of the "floor show" that made cruising more attractive. They provided an element of danger to the activity, without serious risk of harm, which appealed to young adults. Cruisers maintained a sense of anonymity that fostered irresponsible and reckless conduct.

With this knowledge and understanding, Foote and his colleagues developed an ambitious strategy intended to achieve 16 specific objectives. They were aiming for nothing less than full abatement of the problem. They consulted legal counsel at critical points in the planning. The goal of the first phase of the plan was to personally identify and discourage all cruisers. To do so, the police devised a traffic-control scheme more elaborate than previous ones. They used their legal authority to stop all traffic, identify drivers and provide information on cruising violations. Control-point officers were discouraged from taking formal enforcement actions that would unnecessarily impede traffic flow. It proved impractical to enforce the cruising ordinances, and the police later recommended revisions to them.

Police entered driver and vehicle information in a computer database at the traffic-control points. They sent follow-up letters to registered vehicle owners to reinforce their warnings and to ensure that parents were informed of young drivers' activities. They also erected warning signs along the roadway. The signs were deliberately vague, yet legally sufficient to discourage cruising without educating cruisers about loopholes in the laws. On the operation's first night, police stopped 70 percent of the cruising vehicles at checkpoints. They stopped 83 percent of the cruising vehicles over the next two nights. The number of returning cruisers had so diminished by the fourth night that the police suspended the checkpoints in favor of traffic stops and consensual encounters.

Cruiser traffic steadily decreased, while other traffic returned to the area. Average speeds along South Bristol Street climbed back up to normal levels. Within three months, cruising was under control, requiring only minimal police action. By the program's completion, the police had issued over 2,000 personal warnings and sent over 1,700 follow-up letters. The warning-and-education campaign turned out to be at least as effective as formal enforcement, and considerably more efficient. Ninety percent of cruisers warned on the first night did not return. In the year before the initiative, police handled 990 cruising-related calls for service (60% of the total calls-for-service workload), and 153 related crimes. During the two months of the anti-cruising initiative, there were only 28 cruising-related calls (13% of the total workload), and three related crimes. There have been no cruising-related calls in the past two years, and no homicides related to cruising. (In 1995, the city recorded 79 homicides. By mid-year 1997, the city had recorded only seven. Foote believes the cruising initiative and a disorderly party initiative to reduce gang violence are partly responsible for this dramatic decline.)

By 1997, the police felt sufficiently confident that the problem had been solved, and they took down the traffic-control chains and posts. Business in the former cruising

area is "booming," and businesses are no longer closing or relocating, as before. Since the project's completion in 1995, the cruisers have not returned to Santa Ana. The word is out throughout the cruising community that Santa Ana is no longer the place to go.\*

*Editors' note: This initiative is notable for its careful and comprehensive analysis, strategic and tactical planning, dramatic impact, and excellent documentation. By approaching the problem from a sociological perspective rather than a more narrow law enforcement perspective, the police could see their way to a new and effective solution to the problem. Interestingly, in response to the Boise, Idaho, Police Department's 1988 national survey on cruising problems, Santa Ana described only a moderate problem with cruisers parking on private property. In the 1995 initiative, the problem was determined to be more serious in 1988 than originally described. Apparently, officials did not recognize the full scope of the problem until it was more carefully scrutinized.*

## Cruising in Boise, Idaho

In July 1988, the Boise, Idaho, Police Department's planning unit began systematically analyzing the problem of cruising. Although cruising had been a Boise pastime dating back to the 1940s, by the late 1980s, the related problems of harassment, litter, public disorder, traffic congestion, underage drinking, and vandalism had become intolerable to the downtown business community.

The main feature of the planning unit's study was a nationwide mail survey of 435 police departments to learn how they addressed similar problems. The survey netted a remarkable 52 percent return rate. The Boise staff found that departments used such tactics as enforcement of trespassing, curfew and loitering laws; massive extra patrol; street barricading; and special anti-cruising ordinances that regulated the frequency with which a vehicle could be in an area in a specified time. A few cities tried the "If you can't beat them, join them" approach by sanctioning cruising in designated areas least likely to create spillover problems. Most cities that acknowledged a cruising problem dedicated additional police officers to control it.

The department planners simultaneously conducted field surveys of people involved in cruising. Not surprisingly, the cruisers tended to see cruising as a means of socializing, showing off their driving ability, and comparing cars. They enjoyed the relatively unsupervised atmosphere. From their point of view, the scarcity of public restrooms and trash receptacles was the main cause of the disorder and litter. Somewhat surprisingly, many teenage cruisers said their parents endorsed the activity, in part due to police presence. Police officials doubted that this was true generally.

By the fall of 1988, the mayor had appointed a task force to explore the problem and recommend responses. The task force members included businesspeople, cruisers, police, and probation officials. The task force examined the problem from multiple perspectives, before settling on eight major recommendations:

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\*Sources: Draft internal report and internal memoranda, Santa Ana Police Department, 1995; personal communication with Lts. Mike Foote and Bill Tegeler.

1. Open and staff a storefront police station in the cruise area.
2. Review existing noise ordinances and purchase decibel meters to allow for police enforcement.
3. Reestablish community-service sentencing for those convicted of cruising-related offenses.
4. Develop a juvenile citation to allow for quicker processing of young offenders.
5. Increase street lighting and lighting in a downtown park designated as a focal point for cruising.
6. Create alternative social events such as car shows or street dances.
7. Appoint a standing advisory committee to aid in implementing these strategies.
8. Sanction cruising in an area less disruptive to downtown businesses, and provide sufficient amenities to support cruising.

All but the last two recommendations were implemented to one degree or another. The final recommendation met with resistance from business owners who were adamant that cruising be stopped, as well as from cruisers who rejected the notion of government sanction. The storefront police station was opened and staffed. A consultant was hired to study the noise problem and the adequacy of the noise ordinances, and funds were earmarked for noise meters, pending the outcome of the study. A community-service sentencing program was developed under which offenders would do work to improve the downtown area. A private firm was contracted to supervise the program, with part of the expense paid for by the downtown business group. The juvenile citation was developed and implemented. Street lighting was improved, although lighting in the downtown park was not. Alternative youth activities were organized. Although these response strategies did not put a complete end to cruising-related problems, police department officials credited the process with developing a better and more comprehensive approach to the problem.\*

*Editors' note: The distinguishing features of this problem-solving initiative are the comprehensive survey of other communities' responses to cruising-related problems, and the inclusiveness of the task force's membership.*

### Additional Editors' Comments on Cruising

Cruising is a national pastime for some American teenagers. Some communities experience cruising-related problems, while others do not. It seems that some communities are more suited for cruising, with large teenage populations; long, wide avenues; and boulevards dotted with fast-food restaurants, diners and a wealth of unused parking lots that teenagers can take over on Friday and Saturday nights. In some communities, the effects of cruising have reached epidemic proportions, halting cross-traffic, littering main streets, and costing police departments thousands of dollars each weekend in extra personnel. As a result, some police agencies are searching for new solutions to the problem, resisting simply assigning additional patrols. The efforts in this section illustrate this new approach.

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\*Sources: "Downtown 'Cruising' in Major U.S. Cities, and One City's Response to the Problem," by James Carvino and Lt. R. Mike Worley, Boise Police Department, 1990; "'Cruising' in Major U.S. Cities, and One City's Response," by R. Mike Worley, Law and Order, September 1990; notes from Worley's presentation on cruising at First National Problem-Oriented Policing Conference, San Diego, November 1990.

During the research, the editors found several other projects of note. Portland, Ore., police used citizen patrols and street closures to control cruising. Santa Clara, Calif., police initially used traffic diverters, limitations on street parking, and ordinances restricting alcohol in closed parking lots, having some effect against their 20-year cruising problem. In addition, they used a computer program that tracked whether a vehicle passed by an established checkpoint more than once, allowing them to apply the city's anti-cruising ordinance.







# Chapter 9

Tackling Crime and Other Public-Safety Problems

Case Studies In Problem Solving

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College-Related Crime



## College-Related Crime

### A College-Related Crime in La Crosse, Wis.

During the mid-1980s, the village of Coon Valley, Wis., hosted an annual canoe race down a Mississippi River tributary. The spring event attracted students from area colleges and from around the country. Following the canoe races, crowds of between 4,000 and 8,000 people gathered in the downtown area of nearby La Crosse. La Crosse has approximately 51,000 full-time residents, and another 15,000 college students.

By 1989, the crowds had become unruly, confronting authorities. Firefighters turned their hoses on the crowd to clear the streets that year. The next year was worse, as some crowd members broke concrete garbage containers and threw chunks of the concrete at police officers. Some people vandalized police cars, and four officers were injured. Again, firefighters used their hoses to disperse the crowd. During 1991's gathering, a police officer was hit with a thrown garbage can, and a squad car was overturned and set on fire. After the bars closed one night, police arrested 183 people and used tear gas to break up a hostile crowd.

In 1992, the police prepared for the crowd by suiting up in riot gear. They also requested the assistance of the state patrol and officers from neighboring communities. Again, they used tear gas, and they made about 150 arrests. By this time, the annual canoe race and ensuing disorder had attracted national media attention, and relations between the police and the local colleges had become strained.

In 1993, the La Crosse Police Department established a problem-solving team that focused its attention on the annual civil disorder. They began their work by convening several meetings with college administrators, and holding a public forum at the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse before the general student body. They invited members of the Tavern League and student government to sit on the panel in this forum.

The team then interviewed a wide range of people affected by the disorder, including businesspeople and individuals arrested during past years' events. The problem-solving team surveyed the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse student population. They also reviewed news articles written about past years' events, and police reports filed during the events. They interviewed officers who had worked the events. It took the team several months to complete this research.

From their problem analysis, the team learned that although most people in the crowd were of college age, many were not college students. The worst of the disorder started at tavern closing time, when patrons joined others already mingling on the sidewalks. The size of the crowd forced people into the street, which, in turn, caused traffic problems. Cars parked curbside were frequently damaged, and people were



injured darting from between those cars into the street. These conditions inevitably compelled the police to intervene. Officers tried to keep the crowd out of the street, and took into custody those who failed to obey their directives.

The size of the crowd contributed to a sense of anonymity among its members, which, in turn, fostered irresponsible behavior. The problem-solving team also concluded that the presence of news cameras in recent years had only inspired disorderly conduct in some people. Some tavern operators even showed footage of past years' disorder to their patrons just before closing time. Most taverns served alcohol in either glass or aluminum containers. With these factors in mind, the team set about developing a new response to the problem. It set a goal to guide the response: to reduce confrontation and improve the community's perception of how authorities handled the crowds.

This, then, is how the La Crosse police handled the 1993 and 1994 events. As the event drew near, the problem-solving team wrote letters to all area newspapers and radio and television stations, soliciting their help in presenting a positive image of the event that played down confrontation with authorities. Team officers appeared on talk shows and gave interviews toward this end. They appealed to the students' interest in maintaining a positive reputation for their school.

The team brokered an arrangement by which the Tavern League paid for free bus transportation to and from the downtown area. Presumably, this would help reduce the number of parked vehicles in the downtown area and the incidence of drunken driving. The team helped arrange a campus dance at which no alcohol was served. The dance was well attended and reduced the number of people under the age of 21 on downtown streets. The university also sponsored a volleyball tournament as an alternate attraction.

Both plainclothes and uniformed officers videotaped the crowd, having first publicly promoted this tactic to ensure students' safety. Unlike television cameras, the conspicuous police cameras tended to inhibit, rather than inspire, disorderly conduct. They also provided evidence of criminal conduct.

The team asked for and received support from the local Heileman Brewing Co. to promote a theme they called "Fun at the Creek — Safe on the Street." With students' participation, Heileman produced a brochure on this theme that was handed out at the canoe race. The brochure offered safety tips, encouraged residents to be responsible for their out-of-town guests' behavior, advertised the police cameras, and listed the penalties for the most common charges against people arrested in past years. Additionally, patrolling police officers handed out lapel pins emblazoned with the theme. This helped them establish rapport with the crowd.

The team arranged to have the city's public-works crews conduct a special cleanup of the street both before and after the event. Before the event, the crews removed bottles and other debris that might injure or be used as weapons. Team officers personally encouraged each tavern operator to serve alcohol only in plastic cups.

The team also convinced the city council to prohibit parking downtown between 9 p.m. and 6 a.m. for a few nights following the canoe race. This eliminated vehicle-damage reports, which freed officers to attend more directly to the crowd. The council also authorized the police to temporarily close certain streets to traffic, thereby creating more space for the pedestrians.

In 1993, police made only 27 arrests; in 1994, they made only 14 (compared with 183 in 1991, and 150 in 1992). According to then-Sgt. Dan Marcou, a member of the problem-solving team, "There was a 100 percent reduction in confrontation, which was our goal." News articles about the events had turned positive, as had the many letters to the newspaper editor and the police chief. The La Crosse police assigned a liaison officer to work in the university's student union. The police department assigned far fewer police officers to the event in subsequent years, and neither police nor firefighters had to use force to disperse the crowds. Coon Valley police also made fewer arrests in 1993, dropping from about 90 in past years to only 10.

Perhaps unfortunately, the Coon Valley canoe race was canceled in 1995, and it has not been held since. The crowds no longer come to La Crosse in the spring, but the city has several other events that draw similarly large crowds. The police department has adapted the tactics developed through this problem-solving initiative to all its crowd-control responses.\*

*Editors' note: This project is notable for the police's fundamental shift from a confrontational to a nonconfrontational approach to the problem. They recognized the value in soliciting the support and participation of all groups affected by the problem. They combined tactics that addressed the physical opportunities for problems to occur (e.g., removing vehicles from the streets and eliminating glass bottles) with tactics that addressed the motivation for problems (e.g., marketing safety, videotaping the crowd, and providing alternate activities). While the improved response may have come too late to save the annual canoe race, it eliminated the civil disorder and led to more systematic improvements in police operations and police-university relations. This project received Honorable Mention for the 1994 Herman Goldstein Award for Excellence in Problem-Oriented Policing.*

## A College-Related Crime in San Diego, Calif.

San Diego State University is one of California's largest educational institutions, with upwards of 25,000 students. It has its own sworn public-safety agency, but as an urban campus, it also relies heavily on the municipal police. Just *how* heavily was never assessed until a review was undertaken by San Diego Police Department Sgt. Caplan; Officers Napier, Didelot and Smith; Retired Senior Volunteer Patrol member Alter; and crime analyst Wartell.

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\*Sources: Project report submitted in support of nomination for 1994 Herman Goldstein Award for Excellence in Problem-Oriented Policing; news articles from the La Crosse Tribune and the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse periodicals, The Racquet and The Campus Connection; "Civil Disturbance Is Put to Rest," by Chief Edward Kondracki, in Community Policing Strategies, published by the Community Policing Consortium; personal communication with Lt. Dan Marcou, Sept. 18, 1997.

Located in one of the city's busiest divisions, the university generated a disproportionately high number of police calls. Municipal police responded to more than 140 calls in 10 months for fights, illegal parking, large parties, littering, loud music, public urination and defecation, rapes, robberies, and traffic congestion. Call-load analysis captured only a portion of the services the municipal police provided to the university. For instance, campus events such as concerts and athletic competitions often required significant municipal police resources; one event required the deployment of 35 officers, adding up to more than 100 police hours. The city police's computer-aided dispatch (CAD) system did not reveal this deployment. Often, university events requiring municipal police services were listed in the CAD system without a geographic designation. For instance, because university concerts were listed with a non-geographic designation, these events were essentially unattributable to the university. Thus, municipal police provided the university with several hundred hours a year of untracked services, in addition to the tracked response to calls for service.

The university's public safety department was also quite busy. Fraternities alone generated more than 50 substantiated problem calls in the 1994-to-1995 school year. This does not include calls to fraternities that, while requiring initial police response, do not require additional police follow-up (e.g., a neighbor complains of noise from a fraternity party, public safety personnel respond, and, by the time they arrive, the fraternity has already turned the music down).

The San Diego police team analyzing the problem realized that the university made money from many of the events for which it enlisted municipal police services. The university hosted a fair number of for-profit events on campus, including concerts and athletic competitions drawing "crowds in the thousands," according to Sgt. Caplan. The team also learned that relations between their department and the campus public safety department were strained. "Much of [it] was caused by confusion over jurisdiction and responsibilities," Caplan said, adding that each department felt problems were "dumped from one agency to the other." The team located a mutual-aid agreement the chiefs of each agency had signed years before. By the terms of the agreement, the university had clear jurisdiction for call response, investigation and patrol for all university property, both on and off campus, including all fraternities and sororities. In total, more than 40 buildings fell under the public safety department's jurisdiction. Having collected basic information about the problem, the police team decided to focus on solutions that were within their jurisdiction to implement. They also forwarded suggestions to the campus public safety department for their review, giving them the "flexibility [to devise] solutions within their own jurisdiction," according to Caplan.

The community had previously formed the College Area Community Council (CACC) to meet with university officials about problems the college and its students generated. The team consulted the CACC and felt that the best approach would be one that "empowered the CACC to devise solutions and obtain cooperation from the university," Caplan said. The CACC preferred that the campus public safety department handle police response to university-generated problems, as municipal police took much

longer to respond to calls about noise and out-of-control parties. In addition, the CACC knew that the public safety department could file administrative disciplinary sanctions against students. Such sanctions often have more sway than criminal violations of noise ordinances, for instance, which fail in the competition for court time due to homicides, drive-by shootings and the like.

The police team looked at dispatch policies again and found that the communications division routinely dispatched city officers to university locations, sometimes "as a courtesy," according to Caplan, and sometimes due to the mistaken belief that civil liability would attach if city police did not respond. The team also found that the city contributed to the college-area noise problems by routinely granting variances for fraternity events, without a substantial review. They also found that some university events commanded audiences of 10,000. The university's public safety department staffed adequately for the impact on campus. However, municipal police were required, without reimbursement, to control traffic around the university; for some events, traffic was congested as far as three miles from campus.

The police team adopted and implemented several responses to these problems. They trained supervisors and officers in the jurisdictional response boundaries, so that it was clear which department would respond. They also notified the communications division, listing specific addresses within the university's jurisdiction. They put a marker in the CAD system identifying all university addresses, prompting dispatchers to tell callers that the campus public safety department is the appropriate responding agency. Municipal police still respond to high-priority emergency calls, but the public safety department is responsible for all reporting and investigating. Retired Senior Volunteer Patrol officers distributed a letter to college-area residents (including fraternity and sorority members), notifying them that the public safety department has jurisdiction over university property. University addresses were listed, and campus phone numbers were provided for follow-up.

As for the noise problems, the police team asked the city's noise abatement unit to provide greater input on college-area noise variance permits, to which they agreed. The team scheduled meetings with the Inter-Fraternity Council (IFC) and the CACC to negotiate standards for noise permits that would lessen the impact on the surrounding community. As a result, the IFC agreed to a limit on the number of people who can attend IFC parties (there were also occupancy issues involving fire and building codes). The university agreed to sponsor more events on campus, rather than "in the outlying IFC houses," Caplan said. The university also agreed that additional security personnel would staff IFC events, to curb the need for municipal police response. The team recommended that its own police administration bill the university for event-related services, and that the police special events unit help the university plan upcoming events, at least those big enough to impact both university and city jurisdictions.

As a result, by April 1995, in the two months following full implementation of the responses, the San Diego Police Department handled only three university-related



calls. Noise and party calls dropped dramatically, and the CACC is pleased with its new agreements with the fraternities. The special events unit now provides the university with event-management expertise. Finally, relations between the campus public safety department and the municipal police have improved, because jurisdictional disputes have been resolved.\*

*Editors' note: This effort is significant on several fronts. Many cities with college campuses have agreements with local police defining jurisdictional arrangements between different public-safety authorities. This effort takes a fresh look at the problem, from a patrol perspective. In addition, in this case, city police listened to and represented the surrounding community's interests, and they mediated reasonable solutions with university affiliates, such as the IFC, regarding noise problems. Lastly, this effort evidences a thoroughness that is the hallmark of higher-quality problem-solving projects: the police team reviewed CAD data and, if there were gaps in the data, searched for additional information about the problem; they consulted the surrounding community and the campus public safety department; they involved those prompting the calls for service (fraternities and sororities) in devising solutions; and they used creative approaches (e.g., training, CAD-system markers and mediation).*

### **Additional Editors' Comments on College-Related Crime**

College campuses may be hot spots for crime for a variety of reasons, including the high number of young people attending or visiting who are of crime-prone years. The most reported campus crime is theft, but off-campus parties, sexual assaults, underage drinking, etc., also generate concern for campuses and their surrounding communities. The efforts in this section represent two types of problems colleges experience: civil unrest stemming from an event that has gotten out of control, and noise and traffic resulting from an event.

The editors uncovered several other notable approaches aimed at tackling campus public-safety problems. To deal with student party houses in residential neighborhoods surrounding the local university, Evanston, Ill., police worked with the city council to strengthen the noise ordinance. The University of Wisconsin-Madison police examined problems at football games. At each game, they made 70 to 100 arrests for drunken conduct, sexual assaults of cheerleaders, and assaults with flying objects. Analysis showed that most of the problems occurred in the student section. In response, the police started a peer education process, discontinued sales of plastic cups (which were filled with ice and flung by some students to the sections below), and increased the speaker volume to keep students more engaged in the game (students were creating their own entertainment because they could not hear the announcer). The police also challenged Greek organizations to develop alternatives to alcohol tailgates. The state legislature passed laws restricting body-passing. Staff from the dean of students' office, as well as student observers, started sitting in the student section. In addition, some general-admission seats were changed to reserved seats.

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\*Sources: San Diego Police Department write-up submitted to Rana Sampson as part of NIJ- sponsored problem-solving project; personal and written communication with Sgt. Caplan.





# Chapter 10

Tackling Crime and Other Public-Safety Problems

Case Studies In Problem Solving

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Group Homes



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## Group Homes

### A Group Home Problem in Fresno, Calif.

California has the highest per-capita incarceration rate in the United States, and as juvenile crime increased in the early 1990s, alternative detention facilities for the young were in demand. One alternative – community-based juvenile group homes – sprang up around the state, and large cities like Fresno found an increasing number of them spread throughout their neighborhoods. Fresno patrol officers often complained that group homes accounted for a disproportionate number of calls for service. Officers felt they were repeatedly returning to group homes to deal with public-safety issues. Officers Don Gross and Eric Eide decided to take a deeper look at the problem, in hopes of reducing calls at these locations.

Gross and Eide found that by 1994, Fresno had 40 juvenile group homes. The probation department and other court divisions, such as family court, would place young people in local group homes, for a variety of reasons. Some of these young people were convicted of crimes, while others were removed from severely dysfunctional households for a prescribed period of sheltering and recovery.

In 1994, the 40 group homes generated more than 1,000 calls for service about problems ranging from assaults to runaways. Officers complained that they were becoming "supplemental staff" to the group homes; whenever group-home staff encountered a difficult problem, they asked the police to step in. Sometimes they called the police simply to scare difficult juveniles into compliance. City council members were aware of the problem, and proposed a change in the municipal code that would allow the police to charge group homes for repetitive calls.

Gross and Eide found that some group homes never came to police attention. However, others frequently used police services. Five of the 40 group homes accounted for 50 percent of the group-home calls to police, and eight accounted for 75 percent of the calls. Further analysis showed that four group homes accounted for slightly more than 50 percent of all group-home runaways; four homes accounted for 77 percent of all group-home mental illness-related calls; four homes accounted for slightly more than 50 percent of all group-home assaults; and four homes accounted for nearly 60 percent of all group-home disturbances. Gross and Eide believed these homes accounted for the poor reputation such homes had among police and other community members, fostering the general impression that group-home residents were out of control, and that management could not control them.

Gross and Eide contacted city and state agencies involved with group homes to learn more about their interaction with and authority over the homes. They found that although a number of agencies had contact, none was exercising guardianship. For instance, the social services department's group licensing agency relied on group-home self-reporting of crime problems and police calls in granting license renewals. Some group homes were underreporting calls for police service by as much as 50



percent. Other agencies (e.g., probation and mental health) played a distinct role, but they rarely communicated with each other about problems they had with group homes.

The officers looked at past attempts to tackle group-home problems, and found they had failed for several reasons. Regulating a group home's location did not work; over 95 percent of the homes housed six or fewer clients, so federal law exempted them from many local and state regulations. The officers also looked at why repeated police response was not remedying problems at the homes. They found that, "by responding repeatedly to a group home, law enforcement actually becomes a supplemental form of staff to the problem home . . . [allowing] the home to put off dealing with specific internal issues." They also found that regulatory enforcement over the homes was too fragmented for regulatory sanctions to work. The problem, they reasoned, demanded a more comprehensive response because more than one problem home was involved.

Gross and Eide looked at the problem from an economic point of view. Group-home providers were paid for running a home, and the police and probation departments (those providing the clients) were necessary consumers. The officers decided to look for the most cost-effective way to turn group homes around, since they provided a needed community service. They came up with the following plan:

1. Bring together all those engaged in regulating group homes (i.e., the community-care licensing, county mental health, probation, and social services departments), so that they are made aware of the problems experienced by the homes and can uniformly respond. (These agencies agreed to provide "agency-specific assistance" to those homes having problems, and to apply uniform sanctions if problems persisted.)
2. Arrange regular meetings of all group-home providers so that those who run homes without problems (the vast majority) can guide and assist those who run homes with problems (the few).
3. Provide education and training to the group-home industry so that the young clients are better served.

The forum of group homes and regulators, put together by Gross and Eide, "made the group-home industry aware that there would be uniform accountability," and created more effective guardianship over the homes' management practices by making the problem operators "accountable to the forum, not just the police."

Since the officers implemented this initiative, "the distribution of calls for service [has flattened] out . . . no longer do only five homes [account for] 50 percent of calls for service." Calls in the first year after the project dropped by 300 from the year before. In addition, in the first six months, the forum was so successful in mentoring the problem homes that regulatory agencies did not have to resort to disciplinary sanctions to gain compliance. Gross and Eide estimate that, over the course of this one-year effort, they spent only 40 hours studying the problem, implementing the initiative, and assessing the impact.\*

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\*Sources: "Group Home Problem-Oriented Policing Project," write-up prepared by Officers Don Gross and Eric Eide; conversations with Gross and Eide; pie chart prepared by Gross and Eide; information gained from panel presentation by Gross and Eide at 1996 Problem-Oriented Policing Conference.

*Editors' note: Two officers were able to start solving Fresno's group-home problem. Their effort is interesting in several respects. Finding that most group homes are well run and therefore go unnoticed in the community, the officers used that knowledge rather than regulatory sanctions as the lever for change among the few problem homes. The pattern analysis the officers did provided the underlying basis for this approach, because it showed that there were fewer problem group homes than patrol officers first suspected. The officers tailored a response that made the problem operators "accountable to the forum, not just the police." They estimated that they spent 40 police hours on this project. This would appear to be time well spent, since they saved the Fresno police from responding to 300 calls for service in the year immediately following the project. With an average of 30 minutes per call for the most typical group-home calls (regarding assaults, disturbances, mental illness, and runaways), those 300 calls would have required 150 hours of police response.*

## **A Group Home Problem in Tulsa, Okla.**

Murdock Villa is a Tulsa, Okla., high-rise public-housing complex with 144 units. The woman who donated the property to the government specified that it house only physically and mentally handicapped residents. As of 1986, she continued to pay for some of the property upkeep, while the Tulsa Housing Authority administered the property and hired a resident manager. At the time, about half the residents hired home-health-care providers approved for subsidy payments by the state human services department.

In the spring of 1986, Tulsa police officer Kay Orndorff noted the high number of calls for service to Murdock Villa. Most of the calls were rather vague reports of burglary, drug dealing and theft, although rapes were occasionally reported. She also noted that the property was in poor condition — roach-infested and foul-smelling. Many residents appeared unkempt. Outside doors were often propped open with chairs, and there was no visible security at the complex. Nonresidents often wandered the hallways, and residents often fought. In short, the complex seemed in total disarray.

One evening, Orndorff and another officer investigated a report of stolen prescription medication from one of the Murdock Villa apartments. The resident's home-health-care provider was there when the officers arrived, and he seemed disoriented and under the influence of a substance. He told the officers there was no problem, but they noticed the resident, a 45-year-old quadriplegic woman, trying to signal them silently. When they questioned the resident alone, she began to cry and begged them for help. She told them the provider was stealing her medication. The officers confronted the provider with the allegation, and ultimately ordered him to leave. The next day, Orndorff advised the human services department of the situation, and arranged for the resident to select a new provider.

Two months later, Orndorff was assigned to a newly created position in the police department, community outreach coordinator. She was given latitude to work on



problems in new and creative ways. Soon after beginning this assignment, Orndorff received a call from the same Murdock Villa resident, who reported that her new home-health-care provider was stealing her jewelry. She said many other residents were being similarly victimized, but their providers threatened to abandon them if they reported the thefts. When Orndorff tried to interview other victims, she found most hesitant to talk.

Orndorff helped the woman fire the second provider, and then advised the human services department of the situation. With her department's approval, Orndorff stayed with the woman for a week, to stabilize her situation and look deeper into the complex's problems. Orndorff spoke with the woman's physician, who described his patient as highly lucid and intelligent. She found the woman's human services case-worker rather uncooperative; he refused to believe the theft allegations. He revealed that the human services department did not screen home-health-care providers; it merely gave residents their names.

Orndorff next spoke with a staff member of a nearby group home, the Independent Living Center. He told her that he, too, had heard complaints about the victimization of Murdock Villa residents. He said he had forwarded these complaints to the Tulsa Housing Authority, but he had not revealed the alleged victims' names. The victims were afraid they would be evicted if they filed complaints.

While living with the invalid woman, Orndorff was able to build some trust and rapport with other residents, sufficient for them to tell her that two human services workers were also stealing medication from residents. With some difficulty, Orndorff located the complex's resident manager; she found him to be unkempt and unconcerned about the residents' problems. The tenant association was largely ineffective in asserting tenants' rights, serving more as a social club.

To free her time to investigate the problem, Orndorff arranged for local church volunteers to spend time with the residents. She contacted the invalid woman's family in Georgia and reported her concerns. Unfortunately, the family could not afford to go to Tulsa, and the home-health-care providers had so depleted the woman's funds that she could not afford to travel, either. After some searching, Orndorff secured a donation from a local police civic organization to pay for the woman's relocation to Georgia.

Having solved one resident's problem, Orndorff looked to address the underlying problems affecting all residents. She researched calls for service over the past two years, finding some 230 of them to Murdock Villa. Joined by her commander, then-Maj. Drew Diamond, Orndorff met with the housing authority staff. Armed with the calls-for-service and crime reports, they challenged the staff to address the problems. The staff expressed surprise, claiming they had received no complaints about Murdock Villa. They did pledge to investigate the matter, however.

The police requested inspections of the complex by the fire marshal and health inspector; several violations were noted. Alerted to the complex's crime problems, the local news media publicized them. The woman who donated the building learned of

the problems through media reports. She promptly contacted Orndorff and pledged her support by vowing to close the complex if the housing authority and human services department failed to rectify the problems.

Two other Tulsa police officers, Debbie Daniels and Nancy Reed (formerly Blades), working in a new program to promote community involvement and crime prevention, joined Orndorff in her efforts to improve conditions at Murdock Villa. Specifically, they set a goal of reducing the intimidation of residents. Their intermediate objective was to *increase* by 20 percent the number of complaints filed with the police about problems at the complex. Officers Daniels and Reed worked through the tenant association to strengthen its ability to safeguard its members.

Orndorff visited Murdock Villa every other day for three weeks, both in uniform and in plain clothes. She sought out capable residents and designated them as floor monitors. The floor monitors attended tenant association meetings, identified ongoing problems, and helped find solutions to those problems. The tenant association began meeting regularly and became much more effective. The housing authority developed a better security system for the complex that regulated nonresidents' access to the building. It also corrected the fire-code violations and improved the pest control.

The mayor appointed an ad hoc committee to improve conditions at Murdock Villa. Through this effort, several private citizens raised \$15,000 to hire a tenant services coordinator. The coordinator worked independently of the housing authority. She developed an orientation program for new tenants, and helped keep the tenant association strong and active. With continued help from Orndorff, the coordinator recruited the local library, religious organizations and Meals on Wheels program to offer their services at the complex. These services helped reduce many residents' isolation and loneliness.

The intermediate objective to increase residents' willingness to report problems was met. Calls for service from Murdock Villa increased 28 percent, and reported crimes increased 51 percent, from the year prior to the intervention. During the same period, calls for service had increased only 3 percent citywide, and 7 percent in other neighborhoods the police had targeted for community outreach. The officers involved believed this partially confirmed the success of their efforts at Murdock Villa.

According to Deputy Chief Charlie Jackson, reflecting on conditions some 10 years later, the Murdock Villa experience was a catalyst for more widespread improvements in the housing authority's operations, and in its relations with the Tulsa police. Maj. Diamond, who went on to become the Tulsa police chief, recalls that after he and the officers intervened at Murdock Villa, the complex became a "nonproblem."

Officer Reed said the key to their success was getting the tenants to know and trust the police. She believed many tenants either were too afraid to call the police or did not believe it would do any good. She said, "We empowered the tenants to take control of their own problems, and to know who to contact to help solve them." She noted that conditions at Murdock Villa remained much improved for at least two years following their efforts. When she retired from beat officer, from 1995 to 1996, she said



the police were no longer getting a lot of calls for service to Murdock Villa, even though few of the original tenants and managers were still there.\*

*Editors' note: This project is noteworthy for the officer's unconventional way of analyzing the problem – moving into the problem complex. The officer uncovered a serious crime problem that the police and Tulsa Housing Authority had previously underestimated. The officer motivated other individuals and organizations to work toward a long-term solution to the problem. The officer's initial focus on one victim was subsequently expanded to other victims, and ultimately, to the conditions and management practices that allowed crimes to occur. The responding officers also received considerable support and help from their commanding officer, who used his influence to get other agencies involved in solving the problem.*

### **Additional Editors' Comments on Group Home Problems**

Increasingly, group homes dot the nation's communities. The need for additional correctional space spurs some of the increase. However, many group homes house young people who are victims, not necessarily offenders. Many communities have group homes for the mentally impaired, and social service and mental health agencies often provide the residents with assistance. Some group homes are called "assisted-living facilities" because they received help from public and/or private agencies. At some facilities, funding or regulatory agency representatives provide full-time, live-in assistance and monitoring; at others, representatives simply visit periodically. Some group homes come to a community's attention due to crime, while others never do.

The variety of living facilities, the variety of people housed in them (offenders, victims, mentally ill, elderly, etc.), and the range of those people's needs make it difficult to generalize about solutions to problems. Certainly, capable guardianship, such as monitoring and adequate supervision, is key, although how much is required will vary with the setting and the problems encountered. One issue underlying the efforts in this section is "Who should bear the costs of capable guardianship: the facilities or the police?" The two approaches documented here reflect attempts to equitably resolve this issue.

The editors found two other approaches worth noting. Two St. Petersburg, Fla., police officers working on group homes with repeat calls for service became certified assisted-living-facility administrators. Doing so helped them understand and resolve chronic problems at these facilities. Also in St. Petersburg, officers noted that several assisted-living facilities were generating a disproportionate number of calls for service. The officers analyzed the types of calls and tracked those who made them (e.g., residents or staff). In one case, a high number of unnecessary residents' calls prompted police to ask the management to move the phones to a staff-monitored area. Other types of calls and disturbances at these facilities required different tailored responses.

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\*Sources: "Murdock Villa – Tulsa Case Study," by Karen Allen, field technical assistance coordinator for the Problem-Oriented Approach to Drug Enforcement project administered by the Police Executive Research Forum, and funded by the Bureau of Justice Assistance, undated; personal communication with Deputy Chief Charles Jackson, Oct. 23 1997; personal communication with Drew Diamond, Oct. 30, 1997; personal communication with Detective Nancy Reed, Nov. 10, 1997.



# Chapter 11

Tackling Crime and Other Public-Safety Problems

Case Studies In Problem Solving

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Homeless-Related Crime



## Homeless-Related Crime

### A Homeless-Related Crime Problem in Fort Pierce, Fla.

In the fall of 1990, Fort Pierce, Fla., police officer Eugene Sereg, assigned to the city's downtown area and beaches, began receiving complaints from citizens, fishermen, merchants, and tourists about panhandling, petty thefts, and garbage and disorderly people in a riverfront park. To assess the problem, Sereg patrolled the area more closely and interviewed frequent park users and park maintenance workers. He also systematically interviewed the people suspected of creating the nuisance. In addition to identifying them, he asked them why they chose to hang out in the park. Many told him the police did not bother them there, and it was close to a grocery store that sold cheap beer and wine, even to intoxicated people. The park and the surrounding downtown area also provided a steady stream of income through panhandling. Sereg's survey of the area revealed that many transients were sleeping under the South Beach Bridge. He also noticed that the height and spacing of the bushes in the park gave the transients concealment and shade.

Suspecting the problems might not be limited to the downtown area, Sereg asked other patrol officers to notify him of similar problems elsewhere in the city. He confirmed problems in at least five other parks, but each park's problems were different. Older alcoholics favored some parks. Drug addicts of various age frequented one park.

One park, known as the Savannahs, is a naturally wild habitat. Most of the transients living there were not alcoholics. They stole from nearby businesses and retreated to the woods. Although they preferred to commit crimes of opportunity, if confronted, they could be very intimidating to merchants. Most thefts occurred in shops and parking lots along nearby U.S. Highway 1. In addition, the transients often failed to pay for meals.

Using the sheriff's department's helicopter, Sereg and a cameraman conducted aerial reconnaissance of the park, as it is big and difficult to penetrate on foot. The photographs confirmed the presence of fairly elaborate campsites. The campsites were near a set of railroad tracks on which 22 trains per day traveled between Florida and points north. While working on a different problem involving noise complaints at the railroad switching yard, Sereg noticed that the transients regularly used the trains for transportation. There were hopping-off points along the tracks elsewhere in the city; bridge overpasses were the most popular.

Realizing that he was dealing with a bigger, more complex problem than he first imagined, Sereg knew he would have to address it one step at a time. He began by recontacting the downtown merchants to let them know he was aware of the problem and would need their cooperation to solve it. He assured them he would increase his visibility in the area, but in exchange, he needed them to contact him on his pager whenever they had a problem with the transients.



Sereg also recommended that the merchants stop giving money and food to the transients, and that they discourage their customers from doing so. Although the merchants felt they were helping to solve a social problem, in reality, they were doing little to solve the larger problems of hunger and poverty. Rather, they were encouraging behavior that was harming both the transients and community commerce. For about three weeks, Sereg stood on the streets daily to discourage people from giving money to the transients. This tactic was very tiring and unpleasant, but necessary to break some long-entrenched practices.

The next step was to contact organizations and agencies that provided services to transient and indigent people; Sereg educated himself about the services each organization provided. There were four agencies he could count on. The Salvation Army provided subsistence-level food and clothing, and made referrals for medical care. A ministry provided emergency food, shelter and clothing for homeless families, and made referrals to state public-assistance agencies. A church provided medical referrals and short-term shelter for alcoholics. The state human rehabilitative services department provided rehabilitation services for alcoholics and drug addicts who volunteered to participate. A few other churches and businesses agreed to notify Sereg if they could feed transients on holidays. Working with a local migrant-workers advocate, Sereg also made referrals for Spanish-speaking transients.

Sereg recontacted the transients and, depending on their individual needs, referred them to the appropriate organizations. Unfortunately, local hospitals seemed less willing to help with more serious medical problems.

To motivate some transients to seek help, Sereg set about making it uncomfortable for them to live in park bushes and under bridges. He arranged for the railroad company to spray a pesticide that was nontoxic to humans in places where transients' living habits attracted rodents. He had the parks department trim park bushes and install new sprinkler heads near the more popular sleeping spots. He had gates installed across the stairwells of some businesses and government buildings to prevent transients from sleeping there.

Sereg arranged for the sanitation department to make more frequent dumpster pickups and to have damaged dumpsters repaired. He compelled some store owners to clear away obstructions to the dumpsters. He told restaurant owners to put food waste at the bottoms of dumpsters, where it would be less visible. He had fast-food restaurant managers put locks on their dumpsters. He knew the transients were at risk for disease from eating contaminated food. He encouraged merchants to limit the number and type of alley garbage containers. City code-enforcement inspectors reminded a few uncooperative merchants, and at least one government agency, of their legal obligations, and fined them for failure to comply. Sereg testified at several hearings.

Sereg advised transients of the city ordinance prohibiting picking through garbage containers. He showed photographs revealing the sanitation problem to interested city officials, to inform them of the scope of the problem and of the police response to it.

Sereg briefed other patrol officers about the problem and the agencies available for referral. He encouraged them to refer difficult transients to him.

The problem in the Savannahs park proved to be more difficult. Sereg tried to get the state fire marshal to survey the area and do a controlled burn. Environmental concerns made this approach impractical. Code-enforcement inspectors advised an absentee property owner to clear out the underbrush and garbage. When he refused, the city cleared out the brush and fined him \$1,300. Unfortunately, this hurt the owner-police relationship and slowed the cleanup.

Sereg and the train engineers worked out a train whistle code to notify officers if transients were riding on a train. A few transients were removed from the trains as a result of this warning system.

The problems were not eliminated, but there were some indicators of progress. Sereg identified approximately 35 people causing problems when he first began the project. One year later, he estimated there were about six problem transients living in the city year-round, and another six who were seasonal. Sereg rarely encountered a transient whose name and background he did not know. This improved his and other officers' ability to refer transients to appropriate agencies. The transients also came to know Sereg; some occasionally called the police station to check on his schedule.

Visually, the downtown area's streets and alleyways improved. Casual interviews with fishermen, merchants, office workers, and park maintenance workers indicated lowered levels of concern and increased use of the parks. Dispatch records did not separately code complaints about transients and panhandlers, and officers wrote few reports on such calls. However, Sereg received fewer direct and dispatched complaints about transients.\*

*Editors' note: This project is noteworthy for the officer's persistence and systematic progress over more than a year. He developed a wide range of carefully tailored responses to address the problem's many discrete aspects. His goal was not merely to stop the problems the transients created; he also wanted to help them. His strategy reflected both concerns.*

## **A Homeless-Related Crime Problem in San Diego, Calif.**

California's Otay River Valley is a massive tract of undeveloped land, covering 8,000 acres. It is bordered by the cities of San Diego, Chula Vista and Imperial Beach. Thick underbrush covered much of the land, making passage by foot difficult. The businesses surrounding the river valley suffered from burglary, panhandling, theft, and vandalism. People often illegally dumped trash and debris in the valley. Transients, perhaps as many as 300, lived at campsites in the valley. Huts of bamboo, metal, plywood, and tarpaulin were furnished with tattered and filthy chairs, couches and mattresses. Some transients had propane barbecue grills and refrigerators powered by generators or car batteries. They used shopping carts to transport stolen property, or

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\*Sources: Script for videotape narrative chronicling the project, written by Officer Eugene Sereg and Michael Scott, and produced by the Fort Pierce Police Department, 1991; "Sign of the Times," Police Magazine, Vol. 16, No. 3, March 1992.

cut them into grills for cooking. Many of these items were either scavenged or stolen. Some campsites were booby-trapped to ward off intruders. Others had gardens and recreational equipment. Many of the transients suffered from infectious diseases like AIDS, sexual and skin diseases, and mental illness. Owing to the heavy drug use, especially of methamphetamine, some people came to refer to the valley as "Club Meth."

Before late 1991, most of the police response was reactive. Officers would file crime reports, but few crimes were solved, as the connection between the crimes and the transients was not firmly established. Officers Mark Haas and Joseph Snarponis first noticed an increase in crime at a shopping plaza located at the edge of the valley. They located a group of transients in the valley who they believed were at least partly responsible for the crime. They took note of valley conditions and contacted the property manager of the H.G. Fenton-Western Salt Co., which owned some of the land. With the property manager's cooperation, they cleared out some of the transients' campsites, but they were stymied in their efforts to clear out the underbrush and debris due to state environmental regulations.

In early 1993, police discovered several new campsites while investigating a sexual assault that allegedly occurred in the valley's western region. The victim told officers that other assaults in the valley were going unreported, and that some of the transients were getting more aggressive. Complaints from the shopping plaza escalated, and the fire department put out a number of fires in the valley. The surrounding communities' fear peaked when two young boys were found murdered in the valley. Police efforts to address the crime-related transient problems had to be put on hold for fear of compromising the murder investigation. (The police had not solved the murders as of late 1997.)

As political pressure mounted to remove the transients, Officers Bobby Wight and Sylvia Vella were assigned to take on the valley as a problem-oriented policing project. The officers contacted the property manager and enlisted his cooperation in posting no-trespassing signs at various campsites. The property manager contracted with a company to clean up the properties. By the end of November 1993, all the campsites were cleared out. The police enforced the trespassing warnings. Only one person refused to leave, and that person was taken into protective custody due to mental illness.

In May 1994, the problems resurfaced. Property managers now complained to a city council member that crimes were again occurring at nearby businesses. In June, a meeting was convened to which representatives from all agencies and businesses affected by the Otay River Valley were invited. The problem clearly called for a more comprehensive solution. Given the large scope of the project, a police sergeant and two lieutenants (one each from San Diego and Chula Vista) assumed supervisory responsibility. Officers Wight and Bryon Barmer presented the problem at the police department's monthly Problem Analysis Advisory Committee meeting, and their strategy began to take shape. They envisioned a three-phase effort involving enforcement of trespassing laws, cleanup of the property, and restoration of the land to a use that

would discourage illegal camping. Various government agencies from the cities of San Diego and Chula Vista, San Diego County and the state of California, as well as the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and Army Corps of Engineers, joined with private-property owners on this massive project.

The police officers began analyzing the problem by conducting aerial reconnaissance of the valley, mapping out the campsites and the ingress and egress points. Police crime analysts compiled statistics on crimes and calls for service related to the valley, to verify the problem and establish baseline data from which progress could later be measured. Officer Wight met with the city's property department to discern who owned the valley's various parcels of land. He learned that the city of San Diego had bought some of the land, and intended to buy an additional 6,000 acres. Wight held several community meetings to keep business owners, property owners and elected officials apprised of developments and to form consensus on project goals.

The officers leading the project were thoroughly prepared to present their strategy to their divisional command and project steering committee. They had color maps of the valley, statistical crime maps, photo presentations, videotapes of air surveillance, a nine-page orientation paper, and a three-phase operational plan. Once the project was approved, the officers informed prosecutors about it so that they would not trivialize any resulting charges. A prosecutor was assigned as legal counsel for the project. The private-property owners gave the police written authority to enforce trespassing laws. Project officers gave the steering committee a tour of the valley, during which they found several more campsites not visible from the air.

The first step in responding to the problem was to enforce trespassing warnings. Once again, the police issued warnings to transients and ordered them to leave the property. At the same time, they provided the transients with information about area homeless shelters and other services they might need. The police photographed and identified the transients they warned in case it became necessary to arrest them. They made three separate sweeps through the valley to ensure that all trespassers had been warned. This time, they made nearly 100 arrests — many on outstanding warrants, some for trespassing. In late September, after the official notifications were completed, all campsites were torn down. Police found an assortment of knives, a sawed-off rifle and ingredients for pipe bombs among the abandoned debris.

The second step was to clean up the valley. With the police providing security, approximately 200 volunteers collected 38 tons of trash and cleared out the campsites. Many of the volunteers came from the California Conservation Corps, the federal Urban Youth Corps, and the National Civilian Community Corps (part of AmeriCorps). A second cleanup was conducted in June 1995, with added assistance from state prison inmates. A private landfill agreed to waive \$1,500 in dumping fees. A private waste-hauling company donated the use of large trash containers. Thirty tons of trash were removed.



According to data the crime analysis unit analyzed, burglaries and related crimes dropped 80 percent after the evictions and cleanups. This decline has held steady through 1997. Before the project, San Diego police were spending about 3,000 hours per year on valley-related calls. Since the project was completed, the annual figure has dropped to between 500 and 800 hours. San Diego and Chula Vista officers walk through the valley twice each month to ensure that the transients do not return. Police estimate there are now only about 50 transients who still occasionally sleep in the valley; however, these transients have not established elaborate campsites.

The city of San Diego's long-term plan for the Otay River Valley is to develop it as a regional park, with hiking trails and a wildlife refuge.\*

*Editors' note: This project is notable for the magnitude of the problem and the amount of work and coordination required to implement the responses. San Diego police jokingly refer to this effort as "the mother of all POP projects." Coordinating the commitments and activities of dozens of agencies and businesses and hundreds of volunteer and paid workers was remarkable in itself. Many large problem-solving initiatives fail more because of coordination and commitment failures than because of poor strategy.*

### **A Homeless-Related Crime Problem in Santa Ana, Calif.**

Harbor Plaza is a large commercial complex at the corner of two main thoroughfares in Santa Ana, Calif. The complex has about 30 businesses, including a large supermarket and a drug store. In 1993, property managers and merchants complained to the Santa Ana police that increasing crime at the plaza was seriously hurting their business. The supermarket was the plaza's anchor store, and its managers were considering closing and relocating. The managers and merchants said aggressive drug dealing, panhandling and theft from vehicles were the most common problems. Police officers in the Westend district decided to address the problem.

They started by refining their understanding of the problem. They looked at crime and calls-for-service data and conducted a written survey of the plaza's merchants. The data showed that most of the crimes and calls occurred during one patrol shift. The survey also showed that panhandling was the merchants' predominant concern. During surveillance, the officers watched panhandlers aggressively accost shoppers, begging for money. Some panhandlers pretended to be military veterans. Many of the targeted customers were Hispanic and Asian women. Some panhandlers also offered to wash windshields for money, giving them the opportunity to look in vehicles for valuables to steal. The officers identified and contacted 15 panhandlers and learned that all were addicts who used the money mainly to buy drugs. Many had come to Santa Ana due to the weather and the city's reputation for cheap drugs and tolerance of transients.

Partly due to police efforts to curb homeless-related problems downtown and the closure of a nearby park, the number of homeless in the Westend district had increased.

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\*Sources: Otay River Valley POP Project report, San Diego Police Department, July 1995, submitted in support of nomination for 1995 Herman Goldstein Award for Excellence in Problem-Oriented Policing; "SDPD and CVPD Combine Efforts for 'the Mother of All POP Projects,'" by Patti Clayton and Roxana Kennedy, Law Enforcement Quarterly, August-October 1995; personal communication with Officer Patti Clayton, July 11, 1997.



Five blocks away from Harbor Plaza was the Santa Ana riverbed, in the Orange County Sheriff's Office's jurisdiction. It had become a favorite campsite for many transients because the bridge overpasses offered shelter. The officers suspected that the Harbor Plaza problems were connected to the riverbed, which they confirmed by videotaping activity there. The same people causing problems at the plaza were living at the riverbed. The videotapes also recorded criminal activity at the riverbed, including drug dealing and prostitution.

Westend police officials knew they had to address this problem carefully. The city had incurred substantial legal liability in the past by addressing transient problems through strict law enforcement. Moreover, the city's ordinance prohibiting public camping was still under an injunction, pending a legal appeal. Accordingly, the police department's legal advisor briefed all personnel working on the project, before they took any action. Project officers established their goals: to reduce the number of crimes in the area, reduce the incidence of drug dealing and use, and eliminate aggressive panhandling. They developed a five-phase response plan.

In the first phase, the officers coordinated with the Orange County Sheriff's Office and Environmental Management Agency to remove all people illegally camping in the riverbed, and to clear out the campsites. The police sought and received support for this operation from two elected officials, a city council member and a county supervisor. The response team posted warning notices at illegal campsites and handed out flyers to transients advising them that camping was illegal, and that police were going to enforce the law. On the date scheduled for enforcement and cleanup, all transients left the riverbed without resistance. Cleanup crews found stolen property, used drug paraphernalia and window-washing equipment. The cleanup operation was videotaped.

In the next phase, the officers sought to reduce the number of people committing crimes and panhandling in the plaza. They intensively patrolled the plaza and made field contacts with nearly 100 people suspected of various offenses. They made only 10 arrests. Many people left the plaza and did not return. Only about a dozen people persistently returned to cause problems. To put pressure on the remaining hard-core offenders, the officers conspicuously followed them, warned them and interrupted their illicit activities. Eventually, all the panhandlers left the plaza. The officers also uncovered and disrupted a fraud scheme in which people sold stolen calling-card numbers to public-pay-phone users.

Once they had removed the transients from the riverbed and plaza, the officers turned their attention to promoting environmental changes in the plaza that would deter future problems. They convinced merchants to lock trash dumpsters to prevent scavenging. An alley drug users and prostitutes often used was gated. Sections of the parking lot frequented by prostitutes and drug dealers were chained off at night. Businesses with public restrooms were convinced to control access by using keys or tokens. A water fountain window-washers used to fill their buckets was moved away from the parking lot. A fast-food restaurant changed its beverage service to reduce



thefts. Several public pay phones used for drug dealing and prostitution were removed; the remainder allowed only outgoing calls and were disconnected late at night. Poor outdoor lighting was improved. A newly hired private security company began impounding vehicles parked without authorization, to remove potential theft targets and hiding places for other unlawful activities. The police trained security officers.

In the final phase, officers designed a flyer to educate shoppers about the problem of panhandling. The flyer discouraged indiscriminate contributions to panhandlers, and promoted contributions to legitimate charities that serve the needy. The flyers were posted in store windows and distributed to customers.

Once the plan had been carried out, the officers conducted a follow-up written survey of the merchants. All merchants noted decreased panhandling, fewer disturbances and fewer transients. Some said their business had noticeably increased and customers had commented favorably on the improvements. A fast-food restaurant manager reported a 50 percent increase in sales, and the supermarket managers said their sales had increased to the point where they had postponed plans to relocate. The merchants formed a business association and agreed to meet with the police regularly to address issues of mutual concern.

Arrest statistics showed that proactive arrests for municipal-code violations and for vice and narcotics offenses increased during the project period, while offenses such as theft from vehicles and vandalism decreased. The police department did not receive a single citizen complaint about the officers' actions, although they believe homeless advocates were monitoring them. According to Westend district commander Lt. William Tegeler, conditions at the plaza have remained improved four years later. The plaza is fully occupied, although the anchor supermarket moved for reasons unrelated to the transients. A new grocery store that better caters to the largely Hispanic clientele moved into the vacated space, and is thriving. The police department receives only occasional complaints regarding plaza panhandling.

The riverbed has remained clear of transient campsites. County engineers reconstructed the areas under the highway overpasses, using a rock-and-cement combination that makes the ground unsuitable for camping.\*

*Editors' note: This project used a carefully tailored combination of tactics to address its goals. The responding officers studied the offenders' behavior and the environment before taking any action. They appropriately consulted with legal advisors, knowing there were issues of constitutionally protected activity. The police used warnings and education more than actual enforcement, thereby maximizing voluntary compliance, both from offenders and from merchants and shoppers. The many changes made to the environmental conditions of the plaza and the riverbed seemed quite productive. This project received a 1993 Herman Goldstein Award for Excellence in Problem-Oriented Policing.*

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\*Sources: Project report submitted in support of nomination for 1993 Herman Goldstein Award for Excellence in Problem-Oriented Policing, Santa Ana Police Department; personal communication with Lt. William Tegeler, May 30, 1997.



## Additional Editors' Comments on Homeless-Related Crime Problems

The number of homeless skyrocketed in many cities in the 1980s. For some transients, the economy was the catalyst; for others, it was drug and alcohol abuse or discharge from mental health institutions. The police in these cities were put in the unenviable position of addressing homeless-related problems. Even when the homeless broke no laws, many citizens felt that street-living and panhandling degraded the community's image, and they looked to the police for solutions. The police also walked a fine line trying to discern what was constitutionally protected. The efforts in this section document officers taking a careful look at different homeless-related problems, including aggressive panhandling, burglary, public urination and defecation, theft, and trespassing. In the San Diego and Fort Pierce projects, officers tried to link the homeless with appropriate social-service providers who could more adequately address their needs. In all three projects, officers made physical changes to areas to make them less attractive for aggressive panhandling, burglary, foraging, sleeping, stealing, and urinating.

The editors found several other strategies worth mentioning. In 1990, in Savannah, Ga., community sentiment against the homeless was running high, with many suspecting that the homeless accounted for a high proportion of crime in the downtown historic area. Savannah police studied the problem and found the opposite: Less than 1 percent of all calls for service and Part I crimes was attributable to the homeless. Many of the people police interviewed who appeared homeless actually had a place to stay. A fair number were heavy drinkers, had manual-labor skills and were unemployed.

In Evanston, Ill., as part of a study of aggressive panhandling, police found there were 36 panhandlers in the downtown area, 81 percent of whom had criminal records. Many used panhandling money for drugs and alcohol. The most generous donors were local college students. As a result, the city used several strategies. It hired part-time workers, called "intervenors," to help panhandlers find alternatives to aggressive panhandling, and to provide givers with information on ways to help panhandlers through charitable donations. The city strategically placed cash-donation boxes in the downtown area so donors had an immediate way to help people in need, through charitable organizations. The city placed posters in the downtown area discouraging panhandling and emphasizing the research results. The posters dissuaded direct giving to panhandlers, stating, "Most panhandlers in Evanston are struggling with substance abuse and are not homeless."



