"SQUAD POPPING"

by Joanne Welter

I recently attended an all day workshop where we used a group technique to brainstorm ideas on developing Problem Oriented Policing in the Department. As many of you know, training can often be boring, especially, if we have to sit in the same chair for eight hours listening to a lecture. I was pleased to find that I was fully alert and challenged throughout the day. In fact, it was exhausting work and we all felt that our sponsor got her money's worth. What cops will do for a free lunch! This technique ensures active participation by everyone. I was so impressed by the amount of work we accomplished in one day and the number of different ideas generated that I decided to try this concept with my squad.

After watching the development of POP at the Southeastern Division for the last year and a half, I've noticed that some officers have been reluctant to get involved with problem solving. I've talked to some off the officers and have found that their reluctance results from a variety of factors. Some of the officers felt unsure about their ability to apply the process. Others felt that it was a waste of valuable time because it isn't "real police work." Despite the initial hesitance from my squad, I charged ahead and scheduled a meeting. With overtime restraints in mind, I adjusted my officers' hours so that they came to work a ñaif hour early. We continued our meeting through line-up giving us a full hour to develop a plan to use POP as a group, hence the term, as coined by one of my officers, "squad popping."

A week prior to our meeting, I asked each officer to think of a problem location they would be interested in working. At our meeting, I explained my experience with the Group Technique and how I thought it would work using the entire team to solve beat problems. I also told them I was unsure about exactly how it would work and that we could make up the rules or change them as we went along.

The first thing we did was to share our chosen locations where we felt a team problem solving process would work. Officer Steve Dabasinskas said, "I think we should concentrate on areas that we can work and get positive results from within one shift" The officers expressed

their concern about taking on a protect that would be so mind boggling that it would possibly take years or a miracle to resolve.

The officers chose three projects; a narcotic sales and abuse problem at 5947 Linnet sales, trespassing and an uncooperative apartment manager at 328 Milbrae and a high crime rate and fear by riders using the 47th Street trolley station. Two officers volunteered to be "lead officers" for each project After choosing the locations and defining the problems dearly, the officers used the group technique for a complete analysts of each project. The enthusiasm was contagious. Each officer contributed to the analysis and volunteered to get the information or find the answers in a specific area of the analysis.

As an example. Officers Randy Jones and Lee McEuen volunteered to be the lead officers for the 47th Street trolley station- Theirproblemdescriptionstates that the station has been an ideal location for criminal activity. They described the station as being elevated and surrounded by a four foot wall. The passengers or criminal activity cannot be seen from the parking lot or street The stairs leading up to the station %T9 enclosed by a brick wall. Numerous gang fights, stabbings. felony assaults, narcotics and vice crimes have occurred at the station. The officers' analysis included:

- e Thenumberof crime reports to both the city and trolley security,
- e Photographs of the 47th Street trolley station including comparisons of the other stations,
- e interviews of trolley patrons at adjacent stations. What are the riders' fears? Are they aware of any problems?
- e Information from Councilman Pratfs office and support for the effort
- e Who designed the trolley station and why?
- e Is the City liable?
- e is it cost effective to Chang* the design of the wall?

Initially, I found that each officer volunteered to work in an area he felt most comfortable with. Officer L. McEuen is meticulous and likes working with details. He volunteered to do the computer research and contact Crime Analysis. Officer D. Burke volunteered to tackle the City Engineering Department. Officer R. Pfnson volunteered to bring his own video camera to take pictures of the station as seen at night by potential victims. Nancy McPherson

volunteered to use her resources by contacting Councilman Pratfs office. Officers Jones and McEuen solicited the assistance of two other officers in conducting a survey of the riders at the 47th Street trolley station and the two adjacent stations. Dividing the labor gave everyone a vested interest. It also seamed to make the project less overwhelming by having everyone snare the responsibility. *

After completing the analysts on all three projects, we scheduled a second meeting in two weeks to follow up on the results of our analysis and possibly move into a response stage. As a supervisor, this was probably the most difficult stage for me. I wanted to check back with the officers to find out what progress they had made or if they were encountering any obstacles. However, I made a conscious decision to keep my hands off and my mouth shut Officers McEuen and Jones recently presented their project at the last PAAC meeting in front of approximately forty people, including police personnel, community agencies and other City departments. Prior to the meeting, the officers felt as though they were hitting lherfr heads against the brick well they were trying to tear down. They had been advised by the City Engineering Department that the wall .was designed and intentionally built at a retaining wall and that It would cost $100,000 to tear it down four feat and another $100,000 to replace it with railings. Both officers did an outstanding job presenting the problem and its analysis. They were commended by several people attending the meeting. The best part, however, is the ideas that were generated by PAAC members. In addition, two of the people in attendance had important related information about the problem. One, a consultant forth* Public Service and Safety Committee, had just been to a meeting where discussions had been held about a day-care center located at the 47th Street trolley that la being affected by the lack of patrons using the trolley due to the potential for violent crimes. The other information came after the meeting from the Assistant Director of Intergovernmental Relations who had bean on the planning board of the MTDB. She told us of the original design tor the stations wftteh included security cameras, a possible response suggested by my officers. Her interest ltd to a meeting with the General Manager of MTDB and my officers in which station security Issues were ditcutted and then implemented.

This was an exciting part of the process finding out that there was support and concern at administrative levels for ideas generated by beat officers.

It's important to note that traditionally, the problem wouid have appeared to have been resolved much earlier. After a rash of violent crimes, crime analysis indicated that the number of violent crimes *tt* the station had actually gone down. Further analysis revealed two contributing factors. First, that particular trolley station onty has an average of three riders per day; and second, officers were using the "100 block" as an address on crime reports and field interviews instead of listing the actual address which made the statistics inaccurate.

If we are successful in resolving the problem, we will assess *ttm* original project statement and our goal. As PAAC Chairman, Commander Sanders said, "In other words you want to see reduced crime, an increase in the number of riders using the station, a playground full of happy children at the day-care center and a beautiful rainbow overhead?" Well sum. why not?   tv