



Community Policing *Problem Solving*

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Darrel W. Stephens, Chief of Police

WANDERER'S ID PROGRAM

by Officer Jim McNamara

Problem: There is a significant population of frail and elderly persons who reside in our city. Some are mentally or physically impaired and/or suffer from chronic memory loss. The impairment is often to the extent that they are unable to communicate their name, address or other vital information. Numerous cases of lost (wandering) persons such as these are reported missing every year. Additionally, officers often locate or are dispatched to found persons who are memory impaired (145.6 reports each year).

Solution: While working on my POP project, I discovered officers locating memory impaired persons currently have limited options regarding identifying and returning them to their homes. There were no formalized means of tracking and/or identifying such persons. Given the difficulties in identifying memory impaired persons, particularly if a report has not been generated by the caregiver, the officer then often must resort to the Baker Act and transport them to a strange facility. The result is a traumatized elderly person who is confused and frightened, a frustrated officer and mental health receiving personnel who are as frustrated as the police. The result is a less than positive scenario for all involved.

After analysing the problem, I determined the best solution would be the "WANDERER'S IDENTIFICATION PROGRAM" developed by the Alzheimer's Association Chapters in Florida. The program joins forces with local law enforcement and Walgreens to help identify and quickly return wandering persons. The program recognizes that the problem is expected to grow as our population ages. The program provides a special registry for patients suffering from memory disorders that have a tendency to wander.

The use of an I.D. bracelet or necklace that has been engraved with the patient's first name or nickname, a code number, the words "Memory Impaired" and a central telephone number for each county. The bracelet or necklace are provided by Walgreens at no cost to the participating Alzheimer's (memory impaired) families. This information is then registered on computers maintained by the Alzheimer's Association and by a law enforcement agency in the county where the patients reside. The code number enables the officer to identify the patient and promptly return the patient to the responsible caregiver. The information is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week, through the Pinellas County Sheriff's Office, who is designated as the central information storage facility.

* Editor's Note: Jim's proposal to staff was approved and training is scheduled for the near future. •

REPEATED CALLS FOR SERVICE

by Officer Cynthia Laury

Problem: The AAA Housing Authority complex which houses women and their dependent children, generated 150 repeated calls for service. After reading and analyzing each report, I found many components to one problem (unauthorized males) at the complex.

Solution: I decided to meet with the complex owner and manager and find out what their plans were in dealing with violent crimes that occur daily at the complex. The owners said they were unaware of the problems and the manager advised having limited control over the tenants. We discussed lease agreements signed by each tenant. I asked for enforcement of the lease agreements.

I called the HUD Housing Authority and informed them of the situations and asked for emergency inspection of all the apartments suspected of housing unauthorized males. The Senior Housing Inspector set a date and I planned to walk through each apartment with her.

I scheduled a meeting with all the tenants; they were told that unauthorized males cannot occupy their residences under the HUD Housing voucher and lease agreement. I discussed repeated calls for service for violent crime committed against them by unauthorized males. I informed the women that they were responsible for any illegal activity conducted in their apartments. They were told that H.R.S. would be called if any child was left unattended.

Three important steps in addressing my problem solving efforts were:

- **Police Substation** The owner has donated

an apartment at the complex for the Police Officers. The office is equipped with telephones, office equipment and a message counter for tenants to leave messages for the officers. Officers are now visible in the area and feedback from the community has supported the idea.

- **Inspection Day** As a follow-up we had an Inspection Day. On location for the complex inspections were the owner, manager, senior housing inspector and police officers. We encountered the following: unauthorized males answering the doors; males leaving with suitcases and plastic bags; males with outstanding warrants; and males with improper tags or no licenses for their vehicles.

- **Education** The next couple of weeks I worked at educating the women about domestic violence. I passed out domestic violence pamphlets and educated them about CASA and abuse shelters that were available.

As of this date calls for service have decreased due to evictions and removal of unauthorized males. I will be monitoring the situation daily, and police will remain highly visible. •

ELDERLY FEMALE

by Officer John B. Letcher

Problem: Officer Steve Pugh brought to my attention an elderly female living in my Community Policing Area, who was having problems with neighborhood juveniles.

Solution: After Steve made me aware of the situation, I spent some time with Elsa Wobnick who lives at 4611 15th Avenue South. She is an elderly white female who lives alone. She has been having problems with neighborhood juveniles who live in the area. The juveniles throw rocks at her and call her names when she

leaves her residence. Mrs. Wobnick has lived in Florida for approximately 25 years at 4611 15th Avenue South and has seen many changes in the neighborhood, mostly for the worst.

Mrs. Wobnick is 86 years old and has no living relatives. She advised that all of her friends have moved from the neighborhood because of the problems. Mrs. Wobnick advised that she will not move and stated this is her home and will stay there until she dies. Mrs. Wobnick stated that she promised her husband when he died that she would stay in the house and not sell. She advised that her home has too many memories. Mrs. Wobnick started to cry when I advised her that I cared and was here to help her. She advised me that she had not been to the grocery store in several weeks because she was afraid to leave. This disturbed me greatly. I took Mrs. Wobnick to the Publix store at 1700 34th Street North to get her groceries. She was so pleased and grateful that she could not stop thanking me. I helped Mrs. Wobnick shop and we talked.

Mrs. Wobnick is from Germany but speaks pretty good English. It was amazing to me how much of life Mrs. Wobnick has seen in her lifetime. She was so full of interesting stories and very intelligent. I brought Mrs. Wobnick home from Publix and carried her groceries in for her. She was so grateful and happy that she once again began to cry. She gave me a big hug and I left with a wonderful feeling that words cannot express. It was amazing how something so simple and small meant so much to her.

After talking to the parents of the kids in the neighborhood, there has not been any further reports of harassment. I will continue to visit my friend, Mrs. Wobnick, on a regular basis. Neighbors are also beginning to stop over and help out. I am going to look into finding her some assistance from other organizations in the City that can assist her in getting out and going

shopping. You would have to meet Mrs. Wobnick in person to truly appreciate her unique character.

After spending some time in a nursing home, she has now returned to her home on 15th Avenue South.

This is one example of a problem solving effort with a high degree of self-satisfaction. •

DRINKING & DRUGS

by Officer Orlando Perea

Problem: Vacant property and abandoned building which was fast becoming a breeding ground for transient problems and business complaints.

Solution: Due to the recent complaints, I decided to pursue this POP project using our S.A.R.A. phases. ***Scanning Phase** is where I worked to identify the roots of the problem. While scanning the areas, I determined this property to be vacant and unsecured. The property is also overgrown, littered with beer bottles and debris. I also found the building to be littered with drugs and prostitution paraphernalia. **'Analysis Phase** helped me identify the owner's name and address through our Crime Analysis Unit. **'Response Phase** began when I contacted the property owner at their home. I spoke to the owner's wife and advised her of the lot at 2255 2nd Avenue South as being overgrown with punk trees, which gives shade to the transients to hang out during the daylight hours, smoking crack and drinking. I also advised her of the litter and debris scattered on the property and overgrowth, how prostitutes and transients were entering the building and all the debris inside. She was very receptive and cooperative and thought the property was secured because they had paid someone to board up the property. I

advised her to take care of the property as soon as possible and that I would not contact Codes at this time because of her willingness to take care of the problem. * **Assessment Phase** - I did recheck the premises and noted all repairs had been completed and the lot was clear. There was no need for further police involvement. •

ABANDONED BUNGALOWS

by Officer Charles Tatem

Problem: Abandoned bungalows, vagrants and drug paraphernalia.

Solution: This was my first and most successful POP project during the initial inception of Community Policing in St. Petersburg.

The abandoned bungalows at Long's Court South had long been used for illegal drug and prostitution activities. I had discovered these bungalows during my first two weeks in my neighborhood. There were six bungalows in all and they bordered an active church building in the area.

The structures themselves were not fit for human habitation. Floors and roofs of the buildings were rotted and had large holes in them. Structurally the buildings could collapse at any time and there was a fear that someone could be hurt if inside. The grounds around the bungalows were overgrown and the boards were constantly being torn off the buildings, making them a hazard to the public and attracting undesirables to stay the night. Drug paraphernalia and used condoms were found throughout the open buildings. There was evidence of fires having been set in various areas of the buildings and behind them. The buildings were wooden structures and this

posed another problem.

In an attempt to eliminate this problem I contacted my Codes Enforcement Investigator, Tom Gajentan. Gajentan was more than willing to assist and continues to be a driving force in my area. His enthusiasm and follow-ups resulted in the buildings being demolished. This demolition received widespread media coverage by both newspaper and television reporters. Many residents were in attendance, as well as high ranking officials from the city and our department.

The process was long and involved, but with combined efforts from our department and other city agencies we worked as a partnership and achieved our goal of problem solving in my community policing area. •

EDITORIAL NOTES

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