

**1998 Herman Goldstein
Award for Excellence
in
Problem-Oriented Policing**

—Abstract—

The city of Reno in the State of Nevada is blessed with the natural beauty of its surrounding mountains and a clear running river of mountain fresh water named the Truckee River. This river, running approximately 23 miles through the middle of the city as well as the entire width of the county, has historically attracted individuals and families who camp along its banks. This fact has in turn, increased the problems faced by the community at large in the Reno/Sparks/County area. Problems ranging from health and safety issues to actual crimes committed by these individuals have impacted the tax-paying citizens of Washoe County. Averaging upwards of 2,000 Calls For Service per year along the river corridor, it became obvious that a concerted, effective and direct solution must be implemented to correct and handle this problem.

For many decades, the Truckee River has attracted individuals who would rather camp along its banks than obtain housing and/or beneficial services. We found many of the individuals in need of some type of social service, ranging from mental health assistance to job search opportunities. More than anything else, there was community outcry to help these people and in turn, return the river corridor to a safe, enjoyable area of the city/county. In the past, we found law enforcement response to be directed toward simply arresting these individuals and placing them into an already overcrowded

criminal justice system. This accompanied by a sporadic, disjointed local social service response resulted in little to no positive effect on the overall problem.

As stated, we realized that prior responses to this issue were ineffective therefore, we determined that a massive, community based response was needed to provide a long-term solution. Our goal was to eliminate individuals who violate the law and/or camp along the Truckee River corridor by dismantling make-shift shelters and camps while directing individuals to specific assistance programs. We would further, implement a system whereby the corridor is checked on a continuous basis to prevent this problem from re-occurring in the future.

Our combined efforts ultimately resulted in the removal of over 400 cubic yards of trash/garbage and the contacting of a number of individuals who were subsequently offered assistance. Further, we have continued to control this problem and in turn, reached our goal.

**1998 Herman Goldstein
Award for Excellence
in
Problem-Oriented Policing**

—Description—

Scanning:

Over the past number of decades, complaints from Washoe County residents, along with Reno and Sparks citizens, concerning a variety of issues such as people living along the Truckee River have increased significantly. These complaints, averaging over 2,000 per year, pointed out the existence of increasing amounts of garbage, make-shift shacks and shanties and, human excrement along and in the river. As each winter approached, more complaints arose regarding the building of campfires and the concern for the distinct possibilities of brush fires and injuries associated with open flame heating methods. As time went on, the number of individuals living full-time along the riverbank reached the point where it had become a significant public health hazard and general safety risk to all involved. Not only were the people who chose to live along the river corridor at risk but, because of the river providing water for all those living in and below the immediate area (the Truckee Meadows), a large amount of the population were also negatively effected.

The above stated problem was known to exist for many years by various entities. Law enforcement officials were acutely aware of the issue due to the fact of consistently coming into contact with the individuals who chose to violate the existing laws regarding camping/living along the river corridor.

Crimes ranging from Simple Trespass to Murder occurred throughout the length of the Truckee River. Citizens and their families were extremely reluctant to fish, picnic and enjoy a walk along the river for fear of becoming a victim. Local politicians and media joined in the call for something to be done to deal with the matter more effectively than it had been dealt with in the past.

Being aware of the above stated situation, the Washoe County Sheriffs Office Patrol Division chose to employ the Problem Oriented Policing(POP) concept in an effort to positively effect and hopefully finally solve this problem. A variety of other problems/issues/concerns were reviewed for possible POP involvement however, this project more than any other, was determined to effect a wider range of citizens, covering a multitude of different areas. From major criminal activity to huge community health risks, this problem contained potential for drastic ramifications if not dealt with in an effective, long term and continuing manner.

Analysis:

The Sheriffs Office began to analyze this problem by reviewing the frequency and number of Calls For Service(CFS) generated along the river corridor. We found that local law enforcement agencies were responding to over 2,000 CFS per year along this area. Further, we determined that the calls ranged from minor misdemeanors to major felonies, up to and including homicides. Additionally, through interacting with citizen groups, ie. Citizen Advisory Boards(CAB), we were constantly being advised of their concern regarding the general conditions of the river corridor. In short, our community at large felt unable to safely enjoy the river due to garbage, human waste and, assorted criminal activities. Local politicians and media cried out for something to be done.

The Truckee River corridor problems have been around for decades. The City of Reno and surrounding areas are known for their transient population, drawing many individuals nationwide to its lure of easy money and lucrative job market. This in turn, causes a variety of problems which unfortunately include individuals choosing to live along the river. Years had passed with disjointed efforts to address this issue but, because of lack of total community buy-in and an aggressive, proactive stance, all previous efforts have failed to produce the ideal solution. We found ourselves handling small, separate issues and events instead of the major cause and reasons for the problems. More and more citizens became victims of these "river people", who preyed on them as well as each other. Law enforcement handled each crime, victim, suspect situation in a manner that we were accustomed to, solving most of the crimes in the conventional methods. This in turn, added to the local jail population and greatly effected the criminal justice system by increasing the number of court cases being handled on a daily basis.

We found individuals living along the river due to lack of money, mental illness and/or a plain desire to be "left alone". Social Service solutions and opportunities were not being offered and/or accepted by those in need. Ultimately, the extent of the problem surprised all of us. We discovered upwards of 29 campsites, in addition to massive amounts of hazardous solid and liquid waste. We found individuals in need of services ranging from food to mental health assistance. We found that there was a need for additional Social Service/Mental Health/Emergency Housing availability within the combined areas of Reno/Sparks/Washoe County. All of this was discovered during a series of "surveys" which were made along the entire length of the river (23 miles). In effect, we as a community were missing the basic needs and concerns which may have resulted in helping find a

solution to this massive problem. We knew for example, what drew these types of individuals to our area however, we were unable to make inroads into resolving the associated problems caused by them.

In an attempt to gather as much information as possible, the Sheriff's Office invited input from all. We involved local media in the form of radio interviews, television spots and newspaper interviews in an attempt to inform the community of our perspective and in turn, generate open discussion. We met with Community Advisory Boards, mental health experts and providers, business owners, health officials, Veteran Affairs officials, emergency housing officials, etc. in our quest to gather as much input as possible. We even obtained aerial photos of the entire river corridor from the local wing of the Nevada Air National Guard to assist us in determining the extent of the problem we were facing. In short, we presented the problem to the community and by working with our citizens, we formulated a response which we all believed would solve the situation.

Response:

When confronted with all of the data which we had accumulated during the Analysis stage, we reviewed the feasibility of a number of alternative responses. We realized that "business as usual" would not work. Many years of doing it "the same way" just did not produce desired results and would not be acceptable. We discussed implementing portions of resources which were available to us without committing entire entities/agencies, in an attempt to keep the overall financial impact down. We also viewed limited responses to only certain portions of the river corridor as being an alternative plan. Ultimately, we determined that our response must be all encompassing in nature,

that is we must involve every unit/agency/entity in our response and said response must cover the entire length of the river corridor. To do anything less would be futile.

In developing our plan, we established a **Goal** which stated that this project was, "To eliminate individuals who violate the law and/or camp along the Truckee River corridor by dismantling make-shift shelters and camps while, directing individuals to specific assistance programs. Additionally, to as best as possible, clean the river corridor by disposing of trash, garbage and debris, to include but, not limited to : liquid waste, solid waste and any other contaminated and/or infested material which could cause a health hazard to the community and citizens of Washoe County. Further, to implement a system whereby the corridor is checked on a weekly basis to prevent this problem from re-occurring in the future". We set the following Objectives: 1)The project will involve numerous agencies/entities to assist in implementation. These will include but, not be limited to Washoe County Sheriffs Office, Reno Police Department, Sparks Police Department, Reno/Sparks/Washoe County Parks, Citizen's Academy, private property owners, Union Pacific Railroad, Health Department, Sanitation Department, Community Liaison Officers, Homeless Evaluation Liaison Program Officers, Jail Inmate Work Crew Leaders, Public Information Officers and, numerous social service organization representatives, 2) An initial survey of the river corridor to identify, document and remove individuals who are violating existing health and safety laws, along with a general clean-up of the area, 3) An issuance of a Written Warning to those individuals who are found to be in violation of a County Code/State Statute/State Law and an offer to assist that individual by directing him/her to the proper agency/entity, 4) After the area is cleared/cleaned, proper signage will be erected to officially post the corridor as a "No Camping" zone, 5) Appointment of specific Deputies/Officers

who will be assigned to check specific sections of the corridor on a weekly basis for future violators, 6) Deployment of "Strike Teams" to clear/clean areas found to be a problem after the initial implementation of the plan of action and, 7) A monthly report generated reviewing the status of the river corridor, specifying any action taken to maintain its cleared/cleaned condition.

By utilizing the Analysis portion of our model, we created a Plan of Action that took into account various considerations which were deemed to be highly critical. First and foremost, we assured that our proposed actions fell within State and Federal law parameters. We realized that many, if not all of the individuals which we may come in contact with along the river would fall into the category of "homeless". This in turn, peaked the concern of the American Civil Liberties Union(ACLU) who immediately upon hearing of this POP project, contacted us and voiced their disapproval of our plan. Their concern centered around the issue of "targeting" a particular group, ie. the "homeless", for any type of directed action. After weeks of explaining our intent, the ACLU softened their stand. When the Action Plan was finally implemented, we invited ACLU representatives to be present to observe all of our actions. As a result, no complaints and/or concerns were voiced by them.

As was stated previously, there was a community-wide outcry to take some action regarding the problem along the river corridor. Citizens were acutely aware of the health hazards posed by individuals polluting the river, not to mention the criminal activities perpetrated by these same individuals. In the public's mind, the Truckee River corridor had become an eyesore and had in effect, negatively impacted the tourist trade. Visitors elected not to frequent certain areas thus, causing financial repercussions. These issues led to the full backing of our plan of action by the

community at large.

Even with the input, assistance and backing of our community, we still had to review our response plan with regards to the practicality, potential effectiveness and ultimate cost of the project. We knew that an action such as the one that we proposed had never been attempted before in this area, nor had anything similar ever occurred relative to the river corridor problem. In effect, we were breaking fresh ground. By going over the Analysis portion of the model, we determined that our proposed response actually had a high probability of total success. For the first time in decades, we gathered massive support, unity and determination to solve this problem now and for years to come. We projected the cost factor to be within acceptable limits, especially based upon the perceived outcome. We accumulated numerous voluntary donations in the areas of equipment, manpower and, support services thus, substantially lowering the overall cost of the project.

All of this finally led us to realistically evaluate the practicality of our plan. At first, we had some concerns regarding the enormity of the project and whether we would be able to coordinate all of the numerous factors involved in the plan. With this in mind, we instituted the Incident Command System, coordinating all of our efforts with community volunteers, various government/social service/business entities and, local media. We determined that our response in the form of the Action Plan, was indeed workable.

By reverting back to the Analysis portion of our model, we formulated specific actions which dealt with each factor involved in the problem. We were acutely aware that most of the individuals living

along the river corridor could be classified as "homeless" therefore, we immediately contacted the various local emergency housing providers and requested their assistance. This in turn, led us to make contact with other service organizations, ie. mental health providers, in the assumption that some of the individuals may be in need of their services. Further, we also contacted the Veterans Administration and requested their involvement due to the fact that some of the individuals along the river were veterans in need of assistance. Lastly, as a result of numerous "surveys" along the river prior to our Response portion, we found a number of individuals who were in need of transportation to other locals, both in and out of the State of Nevada. In other words, they were actually stranded here due to a variety of reasons and if means were made possible, they would prefer to return to wherever they came from. With this in mind, we enlisted the aid of the Homeless Evaluation Liaison Officers to assist in coordinating transportation needs. We found that the Analysis portion afforded a great deal of useful information for us to utilize in formulating our Response, in that it actually pointed us in specific directions that proved to be essential in attaining our goal.

We began to plan for this project approximately two(2) months prior to our implementation dates which were January 31 and February 1, 1998. A three(3) phase Action Plan was devised, consisting of:

Phase 1:

- * Form a Command Unit to organize, formulate and implement the Action Plan,
- * Initiate the Incident Command System,
- * Section-off the Truckee River Corridor into manageable areas of responsibility,
- * Determine what specific action will be taken when confronted with the problem,

- * Assign supervisory staff to oversee the action in each section of the river,
- * Coordinate all multi-agency response in order to facilitate the Plan and,
- * Continue to obtain information regarding the general condition of each section.

Phase 2:

- * Brief all supervisory staff assigned to each section of the river corridor,
- * Establish a Command Post and Staging Areas for deployment of personnel and equipment,
- * Generate both written and photographic documentation of the project,
- * Coordinate/facilitate any individual referred to assisting agencies/entities,
- * Facilitate the Booking Process of any individual arrested during the project,
- * Assist any Public Information Officer in his/her duties,
- * Post involved areas with proper signage regarding any future violations of the law along the river corridor and,
- * Establish specific dates of implementation of the Action Plan.

Phase 3:

- * Debrief all involved entities,
- * Generate a final report regarding the project,
- * Establish a follow-up system to monitor the status of the river corridor,
- * Establish "strike teams" to handle any follow-up activities which may be necessary in the future and,
- * Generate monthly reports on the status of the river corridor and any further action deemed necessary.

Once the Action Plan was developed, we began to mobilize various resources to help us in this endeavor. As stated previously, numerous social service organizations, citizens groups, businesses and community volunteers were on-board from the initial stages. To these we added our Contractor's Auxiliary, individuals from the Sheriffs Work Alternative Program and, inmate work crews. In all, we mobilized over 33 different entities/agencies in accomplishing our task, expending a grand total of 1,661.25 man-hours, of which approximately 473 hours were directly attributed to Sheriffs Office personnel.

Due to the massive amount of community/agency involvement, we found that the biggest difficulty we faced had to do with the coordination effort needed to accomplish our project. Numerous meetings and conferences were necessary to confirm that the SARA model was indeed being followed. We found it necessary to cover the same issues time and time again, just to make sure that individuals were aware of every concept of the program. Because of the high visibility of this project, we needed to correct any and all misunderstandings prior to the beginning of the Response stage. This proved to be a constant issue, due to the large amount of volunteers involved and the ever present ACLU representatives. The one area we had no difficulty in was our contact with the specific individuals living along the river corridor. They seemed to accept our position and offers for assistance without conflict or complaint.

Assessment:

The results of this POP project were staggering. From January 1998 to the end of April 1998, we cleared over 400 cubic yards of garbage/trash/human waste from the Truckee River corridor. We

contacted 10 individuals who were offered assistance and cleared over 30 campsites. Due to our actions, we were able to reach needy individuals who for one reason or another, have never been reached before. We actually found that the majority of individuals who lived along the river left the area totally or chose to accept one of the social services prior to the initial implementation of our plan. The community at large invested time and money in the social service/mental health area in order to provide adequate levels of service to the effected individuals. We provided a means for local citizens to advise us of future problems along the river by telephoning a "River Hot-Line", which had been set-up at the Sheriffs Office.

We knew from the beginning of this POP project that the measure of success must not only encompass what was stated above but, must also be far reaching into the future. In other words, the result of what was accomplished must be measurable from week to week, month to month, year to year. With this in mind, we adopted a plan to have assigned Sheriffs Deputies, Reno/Sparks Police Officers and Washoe County Park Officers continue to check the river corridor for individuals who may be violating the law, ie. depositing trash, building campsites, etc. By utilizing this method, we were able to gather specific information regarding our success during the past four months and therefore, anticipate using the same method in the future. Additionally, the local newspaper (Reno Gazette-Journal) has instituted a program of their own entitled "Champions of the River", which has been patterned after our POP project. In short, they are organizing a community based effort to "adopt" portions of the river and in turn, keep it clean and clear of individuals who may be violating the law. We have added our support to their project.

Relative to the Goal that we had set for this POP project, not only did we meet it but, we are continuing to move forward and with the total backing and support of the community at large, we will continue to meet it. It has been determined that our Calls for Service along the river corridor have dropped considerably, as has the amount of garbage/trash observed throughout the 23 mile stretch of river. We have encountered fewer and fewer campsites and individuals living along the corridor thus, indicating that our continued efforts are working. Additionally, to date we have received no telephone calls on the "River Hot Line" advising us of individuals violating the law along the river. In short, all input indicates that we have indeed implemented a successful POP project through the use of the SARA problem-solving model.

One major concern which we had prior to and during the Response stage of the project regarded the thought of us simply moving the problem to other areas of the cities/county. We discussed the possibility of the individuals leaving the river corridor only to relocate themselves in alleys, doorways and abandoned vehicles throughout the immediate area. With that in mind, local law enforcement officers paid particular attention to just such a possibility. Happily, we found that this scenario did not occur, at least to any greater extent than prior to the project.

In hindsight, although our Response stage of this project was highly successful, we could have performed better logistically. By this I mean that we could have obtained better information regarding the actual extent of the solid and liquid pollution which we confronted along the river. Upon the arrival of the Health Department representatives, we were advised of the large amount of potentially toxic material that was found and in turn, had to be handled by our personnel. At the final

portion of our Analysis stage, we had to readdress this issue and somewhat modify our Response stage to assure safety factors were taken into account. Ultimately, we could have implemented better methods of handling this type of material.

Agency and Officer Information:

This POP project incorporated the majority of personnel within the Sheriffs Office, mostly from the Patrol Division and the Detention Bureau. Well over 100 staff members contributed over 1,200 total hours to reach the goal that had been established. A small percentage of these individuals were versed in the concept of Problem Oriented Policing through classroom instruction and/or reviewing books on the subject. These individuals formed the nucleus of the project. There in fact, existed a total buy-in from the top administrators down through the line staff. In actuality, our Sheriff Richard Kirkland, was the driving force behind this entire project and continued not only to support it but, encourage others to do the same.

Our personnel accepted and initiated this project with no additional incentive other than to better their community. We all felt that the problems along the Truckee River effected us all and as citizens, we had an intrinsic ownership of these problems. We drew upon the SARA model and incorporated as many resources as possible. Most of these were donated by local citizens and business owners, such as heavy equipment companies and operators. Other donations came in the form of money directed toward the project. Nevada Bell donated \$10,000, which offset expenditures for paper products, Thermos purchases, etc. Refuse fees were waived for the massive amounts of garbage/trash which was collected during the project. Our agency did incur the cost of personnel salaries however, this

was far outweighed by the ultimate result of the project.

When all was said and done, the Truckee River POP Project was not only successful but, it proved that Problem Oriented Policing is extremely effective and indeed, the wave of future law enforcement.

Project Contact Person:

Eric R. Raddi, Lieutenant

Washoe County Sheriffs Office

911 Parr Blvd.

Reno, Nv. 89512

702-328-3355 / Fax 702-328-3389