

Problem-Solving Quarterly

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Targeting 911 Abuse at the Neighborhood and Citywide Levels

by Sergeant Charles G. Burnette, St. Petersburg, Fla., Police Department

This problem-oriented policing project resulted from a successful problem-solving initiative that began on a much smaller scale. Having identified a specific bank of telephone booths responsible for an excessive number of repeat calls for service, I determined that most of the calls resulted from abuse of the 911 emergency system. As I continued my analysis, it became evident that this problem was not limited to any area within the city but was, in fact, a problem for every sizable law enforcement agency in the country. Despite the pervasiveness of the problem, practical solutions have not been developed.

This project could not have been started at a more appropriate time. The "tyranny of 911" has recently been the subject of much media attention. The prevalence of 911 abuse detracts greatly from the time available for officers to properly commit to community- and problem-oriented policing strategies, as well as their basic law enforcement responsibilities.

Scanning

Since February 1995, the St. Petersburg Police Department has practiced problem-oriented policing on the patrol level through geographic accountability—assigning supervisors to specific areas rather than shift responsibilities. As a result, the usual squads of officers were reassigned to teams that work together over all shifts, but in the same geographic area to better facilitate problem solving and address community concerns.

Team sergeants often track repeat calls for service to identify problems. Team sergeants review the CAD system monthly for locations that generate five or more calls. In November 1995, I noted that one specific address in my geographic area had been regularly appearing on the repeat calls list.

A cursory examination of those calls revealed that an inordinate number involved either 911 hangups or playing on 911. In the six-month period from April through September 1995, there were 30 calls for service from that location, with 14 calls (46%) identified as either hangups or playing on 911. This prompted a more thorough review of the calls for service, and I reviewed statistics for the location that had been maintained since the inception of our current CAD system. I found that from July 1990 through October 1995, this address was responsible for generating 259 calls for service, with 71 calls (27%) classified as some type of 911 abuse.

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"Stone Soup" Ingredients Add Up to a Safer Neighborhood

by Officer Steve Coleman and Specialist Bruce Hartman, Fresno, Calif., Police Department

El Dorado Park is located in the northeast section of Fresno. It is approximately two square blocks with 3,000 people living in 524 apartments. The area zip code—93710—houses the largest number of children living below the poverty level in California. The neighborhood includes a variety of Asian, Hispanic, African-American and Caucasian cultures. As the northeast section's problem-oriented policing team, we used the problem-solving approach to address the high number of gang, drug, graffiti, trash and substandard housing problems in this diverse neighborhood.

The group working to solve this neighborhood's problems has become known as the Stone Soup Partnership. The name came from a French folk tale about a community coming together. Two soldiers returning from a war traveled through a small village. They knocked on every door asking if anyone could spare some food, but the people were too poor to help. Tired and hungry, the soldiers took a large kettle and sat in the middle

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of the village. They filled it with water and started a fire to heat it. When the people asked what the soldiers were doing, the soldiers put two large stones into the boiling water and explained that they were making stone soup. Intrigued by the idea, everyone in the village wanted to help and contributed a meat or vegetable to the pot. The finished product was a healthy, hearty soup for all to enjoy. This story has a lesson for us today—if everyone would donate a portion of their time and effort, the result would be a healthy, happy community that all could take pride in. Kathy Garabed, the founder of Stone Soup, had these goals in mind for the El Dorado community. All that was needed were the two soldiers to boil the water.

Scanning

In June 1994, the northeast area police commander asked us to research the problems in El Dorado Park. In a one-year period, the neighborhood was responsible for 9 percent (1,241) of the calls for service in the area, and used the largest

amount of resources in the area. The most serious problem was the juvenile gangs that were living in El Dorado Park. Associated problems included drug use, alcohol, gambling, gang intimidation, drive-by shootings, graffiti, auto theft, extortion, burglary and theft. We observed drug dealing from open windows that faced the street. People would drive up and order narcotics as if they were at a fast-food drive-through window. Other problems were blight, trash, debris and illegal dumping in the alleys. It was obvious that there was little for the youths in this neighborhood to do—no parks, playgrounds or positive activities for them to get involved in. The parents and elderly residents felt helpless about the situation. Living conditions were below housing code standards—many apartments had exposed electrical wiring, stopped-up plumbing, inoperative kitchen appliances and pests. The buildings remained in poor condition for extended periods of time due to a lack of concern. The owners and managers felt that the properties were already lost to the neighborhood. Several of the surrounding area businesses and commercial properties lay vacant. Four buildings on El Dorado Park's southern boundary were unsecured, with broken

windows and doors allowing for transient occupancy, drug use and other illegal activities. The buildings were covered with graffiti marking gang territory.

Analysis

When the area commander assigned El Dorado Park to our POP team, the department had serious doubts about the future of the neighborhood, whose problems dated from the mid-1960s. Nicknamed "Sin City," it had a reputation for being a place where college students followed Timothy Leary's advice to "tune in, turn on and drop out." It has remained this way for decades, defying all efforts to foster a wholesome neighborhood environment. The area surrounding El Dorado Park includes Fresno State University to the east, Wesley Methodist Church and an affluent residential community to the north, a middle-income neighborhood and elementary school to the west, and a vacant business complex to the south. The Tiny Rascal Gang (TRG) in El Dorado Park was out of control, and there was little or no support from the community. Money was unavailable for assistance projects and the residents were living at the lowest level of poverty in the state.

Officers Honored with Goldstein Problem-Solving Awards

At the Seventh Annual International Problem-Oriented Policing (POP) Conference in San Diego in November, a number of police officers from the United States and Canada received the Herman Goldstein Excellence in Problem Solving Award for their innovative policing efforts.

Two of the winning projects appear in this issue of *Problem Solving Quarterly*—Sgt. Charles Burnette's efforts to reduce 911 abuse in St. Petersburg, Fla., and Officer Steve Coleman's and Specialist Bruce Hartman's Stone Soup Partnership to improve living conditions in a Fresno, Calif., neighborhood. Additional winning projects will be featured in future issues.

The other team award winners were Officers Harold Bickel and Gregory Dieckmann of Sacramento, Calif., who used proactive enforcement, youth outreach and community partnerships to help reduce crime by 64 percent in the New Helvetia and River Oaks neighborhoods. The other individual award went to Constable Thomas McKay of the Peel, Ontario, Regional Police for his environmental crime prevention project at a high school campus.

Individual honorable mentions were awarded to Constable Dan Carrier of the Peel Regional Police, Officer Dan Mathis of Lauderhill, Fla., and Officer Alan Roegner of Joliet, Ill. Team honorable mentions went to officers from Fresno, Calif./Redondo Beach, Calif., and Wichita, Kan.

Available police resources provided for only reactive, rather than proactive, response. The patrol unit only responded to crimes that had already occurred.

Crimes against persons remained unsolvable because of inadequate witness cooperation or assistance from the public. Gang activities were so flagrant that the TRG took over the parking lot of the neighborhood Methodist church. They would interfere with the children's activities at the church. At one point, staff members went out and confronted the TRG, asking them to leave the property and stop interfering with church operation. The following day, someone had spray-painted graffiti on the church buildings and vandalized the vehicles in the parking lot.

The department gang unit, narcotics enforcement, patrol officers and crime analysis unit all agreed that the area was

Operating on the premise that deliberate misuse of the 911 emergency system could prevent its legitimate use and unnecessarily commit officers to calls, I identified a problem at this location that affected both the guardian and victim portions of the crime triangle. The guardians were the emergency service providers affected by the overworked and abused system, while the victims were citizens affected by the misdirection of services. After consulting with my immediate supervisor, I decided to initiate a POP project to address these concerns.

Analysis

The analysis phase began the week of Oct. 23, 1995. The CAD system did not provide the depth of data anticipated, requiring a hand search of printouts. This review indicated that the problem location was not a residence or business, but a bank of pay telephones installed at a convenience store. This revelation provided some direction for additional analysis and eventual response, in that we would need to address, at the least, the location side of the crime triangle.

I conducted additional statistical analysis on the false 911 calls generated from the phone booths from July 1, 1990 through Oct. 6, 1995, in an attempt to identify factors influencing the problem. Not surprisingly, the most calls were made during daytime hours when pedestrian traffic would be the heaviest. Day-of-week and monthly analyses were also conducted. The results of these analyses are in the tables at right.

These data revealed that a probable factor influencing the problem was the use of the area by school-aged children. In particular, I noted that 9 percent of the calls were generated between 6 and 9 a.m., and that 14 percent were generated between 2 and 3 p.m. These are time periods when students would be in the vicinity awaiting bus transportation. When coupled with the pronounced weekend use and the heavy use in May and June, when school is dismissed for the year, this pro-

vided a direction for further analysis and possible response.

I therefore contacted the Transportation Department of the Pinellas County School Board to obtain a list of schools that used the neighborhood for bus stops. I found this approach quickly thwarted when I learned that more than 20 schools send more than 100 buses through the intersection daily when schools are in session.

I then set aside a day to personally respond to the address for a physical site assessment, which would encompass the location portion of the crime triangle. I also intended to use the visit to meet with convenience store personnel to determine their influence on the problem.

When I arrived at the store, it was instantly clear that environment aggravated the problem and that CPTED standards should be applied. The bank of three phone booths was hidden from the view of vehicular and pedestrian traffic by dense shrubbery on all but one side. The booths were additionally hidden from view of the patrons and employees of the

restaurant directly east of the store by overgrowth at the booth and on an intervening chain link fence. The only open area was directly in front of the booths, which faced the front of a convenience store. A subsequent night visit found the overhead light inoperative, rendering the area completely without artificial illumination. I also discovered that the pay phones were not installed and maintained by the local telephone company, but rather by a private leasing company out of Miami.

I met with the store's on-duty manager, who is the owner's brother, and informed him of the problems with the pay phones. He conceded that he had not paid much attention to them, but pledged cooperation in the future. True to the tenets of CPTED, they had installed the phones at the edge of the property and away from the store to discourage loitering and other criminal behavior. Accordingly, he was not amenable to relocating the phones. This also placed responsibility for the overgrowth in the city's hands, as the phones were situated at the edge of the store's land.

Day of Week Analysis	
Monday	7
Tuesday	6
Wednesday	10
Thursday	7
Friday	9
Saturday	11
Sunday	18
Month of Year Analysis	
January	7
February	4
March	3
April	7
May	18
June	13
July	6
August	5
September	6
October	2
November	4
December	2

Response

I asked Officer Michael Kepto, the community policing officer assigned to the area, to contact the appropriate city maintenance department for trimming of the shrubbery, and the Florida Power Corporation to repair the lighting. Both agencies responded the week of Nov. 20, and there was an immediate pronounced improvement in the site's appearance. Polaroid photographs taken before and after the work documented the change.

Assessment

I monitored the calls for service from the site regularly after the changes were made. As of July 1, 1996, there were no calls attributed to playing on 911, and 911 hangups accounted for only 13 percent of total calls for service. (Please refer to the table below.) To this point, it appears that the problem has been resolved, with the primary factor responsible being the application of CPTED principles to the site. As this project progressed, and I discussed it with fellow officers and supervisors, it became increasingly evident that the problems with the pay phones in my area were not unique. Supervisors in all districts and on all shifts expressed similar concerns, and I began to see the need to reevaluate my approach and perhaps consider a more global analysis and response. The need for this approach was confirmed when I examined citywide statistics for 911 hangups and playing on 911.

Secondary Scanning

I found that, of 141,851 calls for ser-

vice handled by patrol officers in 1995, 7,222 (or nearly 5%) were either 911 hangups or playing on 911. Assuming that a patrol officer responding to a false 911 call spent an average of 10 minutes on his or her investigation, this would reflect an annual salary expense alone of \$20,185. (A computer program later used to assess patrol manpower allocation confirmed that a 10-minute time frame was indeed average when officers investigated false 911 calls.)

Review of false 911 calls for each patrol district demonstrated that the problems were widespread, yet evenly distributed among the districts and over time periods. Statistics delineating calls from residences versus businesses or pay phones were not retrievable from the CAD system, but the practical experience and observations of zone officers and their supervisors confirmed that pay phones at businesses constituted a large percentage of the problem.

Although further detailed analysis did not point as conclusively to the involvement of juveniles as in the initial project, I believed that the application of a dual framework of education and enforcement would nonetheless be appropriate. Educational programs would focus on informing citizens of all ages of the proper use of the 911 system, as well as consequences and penalties for its misuse; targeting the offender portion of the crime triangle; and offering more appropriate alternatives to requesting assistance from emergency service providers.

Enforcement strategies would target locations by proactively regulating phone installations and identifying addresses from which repeated false 911 calls were

generated, and be supported by response policy changes within the police department.

Secondary Analysis

To this point I had been laboring under the assumption that false 911 calls encumber the system and interfere with the processing of or response to "legitimate" emergencies. I decided to challenge this assumption and gain a complete understanding of the operation and regulation of both public pay telephone and 911 emergency telephone systems.

Contact with supervisors from both our agency's and the county's 911 communications centers informed me that equipment and staffing are such that it is rare for all lines to be tied up, except during a natural disaster. In most cases, a 911 call received at the county facility is confirmed and routed to the appropriate agency, by phone and terminal lines, in 45 seconds or less.

Intending to illustrate that there were enough private residence phone lines available for use that the removal of specific problem pay phones would have no effect on phone availability, I contacted the local phone company for statistics. When I learned that these figures were not available, I surveyed a five-block area surrounding the phones at the original target location. I found that there were 26 other public phones in existence, representing five different private leasing companies. In one instance, the same company had installed two phones directly across the street from each other. The findings of this survey were confirmed by several others conducted by community policing officers in surrounding areas. This was the turning point in my analysis, as it became apparent that the sole motivation for the installation of so many phones is not public need, but monetary gain by local businesses. Here I began to consider the possibility of drafting an ordinance to deal with public phones, and began researching public phone regulations.

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Post-Response Calls for Service

Month	Total Calls	911 Hangups
December		0
January		0
February		1 (20%)
March		1 (14%)
April		0
May		1 (25%)
June		2 (22%)

The special agent for our regional phone company's local branch told me that they had little to do with the oversight of privately owned pay telephones. They were concerned with providing an access line and little else, as long as bills were paid and there were no glaring violations. He referred me to the Florida Public Service Commission (FPSC). An FPSC analyst stated that his agency regulated service issues only, such as free 911 access, booth illumination, handicap provisions and posting of repair numbers. A company wishing to install pay telephones in the state must undergo a certification process that, once satisfied, is good for the installation of an unlimited number of instruments statewide. There is a one-time application fee, accompanied by a small annual fee. Companies can lose their certification, mostly for bureaucratic reasons, and currently 97 of the 800 companies operating in Florida are under review.

Representatives of the city's Codes Compliance Division believed that the installation of private pay phones is largely unregulated. A licensed, low-voltage electrical contractor merely needs to obtain a construction permit to install a pay phone, at a cost of \$26 per location and \$1 per line. This process only certifies that a particular construction was able to withstand hurricane-force winds. This process does not apply to pay phones included in original building plans and can be circumvented by application and administrative fines if a phone is installed without an initial permit.

I was also informed by the Florida Department of Revenue that under Florida law, telecommunications cannot be taxed. The instrument is taxed at the point of sale, paid by either the private leasing company or the business having the phone installed. This is an area that needs to be revisited. The revenue realized from private pay phones is immense and is used as a selling point to generate contracts. With about 100,000 pay phones listed in the business section of the local newspaper, the local community does not benefit in

any way from the funds generated.

Neither the FPSC, GTE, the city or the Department of Revenue foresaw any difficulties in the establishment of local, more restrictive policies to regulate the installation and monitoring of pay phones.

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Secondary Response

Over the next several months, I researched other agencies' responses to similar problems. I spent hours at the local college library reading professional publications and periodicals, published requests in professional bulletins and on the Internet for information from agencies currently dealing with similar issues, contacted numerous departments, and made a presentation to the annual conference of the Florida Association of Chiefs of Police. Aside from San Diego's CPTED-oriented nuisance ordinance, which includes pay phone regulation as part of a larger effort to impact problem locations, I found nothing substantive. To compound matters, recent proposals in reaction to media attention to the breakdown of the 911 system in major cities merely involve establishing other emergency or non-emergency numbers.

With respect to the educational aspect of my proposed response, I first consulted our Youth Resources Section to determine what programs were already in place in area schools. I was surprised to find that instruction in the use of 911 was not included in the standard county curriculum. If covered in the classroom, it was only due to the personal preference of an individual instructor. Learning that certification of a lesson plan to be presented by school liaison officers requires only the school board's approval, I began working

on appropriate curricula for each grade level. I am currently working on this with the public education coordinator for Pinellas County's Emergency Communications.

For adult education, I am exploring several avenues, again covering not only misuse of the 911 system, but also the mechanics of using the system properly. A media campaign would be the foremost vehicle to facilitate adult education, utilizing the public access television channels—one of which is almost exclusively used by city government—and billboard advertisements. The St. Petersburg Police Department has already established relationships with area advertising companies to use billboards for public appeals for clues in unsolved homicides. We are also working toward developing circulars that could be distributed with phone bills, in government offices and in community resource centers. These circulars would provide tips, reminders and instructions on 911 use, as well as alternative numbers to call in the likely event that the caller is not facing a police emergency. The latter would necessarily have to accompany revised and expanded inserts in area telephone books and resource guides.

By far the greatest challenge that remains is the construction and ratification of a city ordinance that will embody the greater portion of my enforcement strategy—a permitting process supervised by the police department to impose greater regulations on the installation, operation and maintenance of pay telephones. The ordinance would additionally target, through a fine structure, locations at which playing on 911 continually generates calls for service.

Under the proposed ordinance, an individual or business wishing to install a pay phone, in addition to complying with other city and state regulations, would first petition the police department for permission. The application would be reviewed by the team sergeant who is responsible for the area in which the phone would be installed. The sergeant would assess the need for the phone, based on factors such as the existence of other phones in the vicinity, and the

impact the phone would have once installed. If installation were allowed, the lessor would have to fulfill several responsibilities or risk revocation and removal. These requirements would involve, but not be limited to, maintaining the phones by CPTED standards, providing contact information to the department, and posting signs at the booths notifying users of penalties for misuse of the 911 system. An annual review process, conducted by the team sergeant or community policing officer, would ensure these standards are met. The application and review process would be accompanied by fees that would help defer administrative costs and discourage frivolous installations. Provisions would also be considered to "grandfather" in existing locations and then arrange for site visits to ensure that booths meet the new standards. For locations that continually generate 911 abuse calls, graduated fines would be levied, after notice, to those responsible for those addresses. This has been a successful strategy in similar local ordinances dealing with false alarms and skateboarding.

To gain an understanding of the development and submission processes, I met

with the department's legal advisor and several officers who have drafted other ordinances, and reviewed current ordinances from St. Petersburg and other cities. This helped me understand the need for such mechanics as the inclusion of grievance procedures and definitions to help the ordinance conform to standards and withstand challenge.

Under the proposed ordinance, an individual or business wishing to install a pay phone, in addition to complying with other city and state regulations, would first petition the police department for permission.

Secondary Assessment

Assessment will involve comparison of before-and-after statistics, both citywide and location-specific, after responses are enacted. We expect to see a decrease in

911 abuse accompanied by an increase in calls to other service providers as a result of a successful public education program. We could also track the decrease in the number of fines imposed as a measure of success.

Conclusion

I am currently writing the ordinance proposal, with a city attorney assigned to assist me in reviewing the draft from a legal standpoint. I anticipate meeting with the local representative of the Department of Revenue and Charlie Crist to explore the possibility of amending Florida statutes with respect to telecommunications taxation. I am being aided by the public education coordinator for the Pinellas County 911 system, who is seeking grant funding for this project, as she foresees the expansion of my ideas to the county level. I have also been invited to serve on an upcoming county task force to address recent 911 concerns. This position will be of great help in developing and implementing this project.

Save the date for the
1997 International Problem-
Oriented Policing Conference
Nov. 15-18, 1997
San Diego, California

NOTE: The 1997 POP conference will be held several weeks later in November than it has been held in previous years. Please make sure to pass along this schedule change to any of your colleagues who might want to attend next year's conference.

New from PERF: An Online Resource for Police Problem Solvers

Next time you begin a problem-solving project to address a particular community problem, consider turning to the POPNet for assistance. The POPNet is a new resource from PERF that is meant to facilitate information sharing among police officers conducting problem-solving projects throughout the country.

POPNet is a "library" of successful problem-solving examples. Officers who have completed a POP project can add their project to the library by writing up a description of their problem-solving steps (using the SARA model). That description will then be available online to officers from other departments who may be dealing with a similar problem in their communities. Though departments may participate in the POPNet at no cost, they do need to formally subscribe to obtain a password to access the system.

If your department would like to subscribe, mail your request to PERF, Attention: POPNet.

and concern for their community.

Everyone pitched in to help with alley clean-ups and graffiti paint-outs. Everyone wanted to be part of the "soup" and all the ingredients were already right here in the neighborhood.

The POP team was now a critical part of the monthly Stone Soup Partnership meeting held at Wesley Methodist Church. Kathy Garabed, the group's director, established contacts with members of the surrounding neighborhood churches, the unified school district, businesses and the residential community. Fresno State University provided help through its nursing, criminology, speech, English, health education, athletics and graduate student programs. We all worked together to present the El Dorado Park project to the mayor and city council, in order to request redevelopment funds. Impressed by the community's unity and courage, the city awarded the neighborhood \$170,000 from the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) program. The Fresno Regional Foundation also contributed \$25,000 toward construction of a community park within El Dorado.

Stone Soup has since incorporated as a nonprofit organization, and is negotiating to purchase four vacant office buildings adjacent to El Dorado Park with the CDBG funds. These office buildings total 16,000 square feet, and were targets for graffiti, vandalism and trespassing. The master plan is to relocate a police substation and POP office into one of these buildings. The office space and parking will be provided to the city free of rent. This will allow police to patrol the area continually, safeguarding the neighborhood and property. The remaining three buildings will be leased to the public and private sector to help pay for the overall costs. Fresno State University plans to lease a building for an off-site education and training center. Another building is being evaluated for use as a health clinic provided by a joint venture between the Kaiser Permanente and Blue Cross medical corporations. The philosophy of rebuilding is being achieved as these vacant buildings are revitalized into a working community center.

Evaluation

The El Dorado Park project has been in operation for 24 months. During its first year, calls for service increased with improved participation of the residents, managers and property owners. The project has unified the working relationships among residents, the police POP team, city and county government, Fresno State University, the unified school district, community leaders, neighborhood businesses and property owners.

From July 1993 to July 1994, before the POP project was implemented, there were 1,241 calls for service from this neighborhood. From July 1994 to July 1995, after the project's implementation, there were 1,353 calls for service—a 9 percent increase. While calls for service increased, crime decreased by 26 percent. From July 1995 to July 1996, there were 850 calls for service—a reduction of 391 calls (31.5%) from the project's first year.

An analysis of the full two years of the project showed an overall crime reduction of 53 percent. The area is cleaner, safer and more desirable to live in today than it has been in a decade. The partnership's achievements are numerous, and program funds have come from a variety of sources. In addition to the funding mentioned above, a national grant will fund a fully equipped medical clinic for the El Dorado Park community.

The El Dorado Housing Association's model is being replicated throughout the city, joining residents, owners and government to work together toward a common goal. Peace is being restored as once-violent neighborhoods are now peaceful family communities.

The project's crowning achievement was its receiving the President's Service Award "Points of Light" medal for outstanding achievement. The President presented the award to the Stone Soup Partnership, which was chosen from more than 4,000 eligible nominees.

Problem Solving Quarterly Submission Guidelines

PERF invites submissions of articles describing successful problem-solving projects. Articles should discuss the four phases of the effort:

1. **Scanning:** What was the problem? How and by whom was it identified?
2. **Analysis:** What methods, data and information sources were used to analyze the problem? What did the analysis reveal about the nature and extent of the problem? How was the community involved in analyzing the problem?
3. **Response:** What responses were considered? What responses were implemented, and how were they developed as a result of analysis? What was the goal of the response plan?
Assessment: What were the results? How were results evaluated and for how long? Was the response goal accomplished? Are there any efforts underway to maintain or monitor the long-term results of the project?

Send submissions to

**Problem Solving
Quarterly
1120 Conn. Ave. NW
Suite 930
Washington, DC 20036
(202) 466-7820
Fax: (202) 466-7826**

"Predictability" of Domestic Violence Offers an Opportunity for Successful Problem Solving

by Larry C. Plummer, Mountain View, Calif., Police Department

The crime of domestic violence is different from virtually every other type of crime we investigate. It is, by the nature of its dynamics and parts, "predictable," and therefore preventable.

Unfortunately, in the past we associated cases of domestic violence—especially domestic homicides—with other types of crimes that involved "passion" as a motivating influence or causal factor. In doing so, we dismissed them as being unpredictable and therefore outside the realm of our ability to prevent.

Our problem in Mountain View was that we had been looking at the problem with blinders on. We had missed telltale signs and information that we now understand and use as indicators of predictability and the basis for the development of problem-oriented intervention and prevention strategies.

Clues to Predictability

By examining the perpetrators of our domestic violence cases, their victims, the cyclical patterns of behavior associated with their violent relationships, and even the pattern of our own responses, we found an extraordinary amount of information. Generally, such information is available to us for other crime types only upon the conclusion or near conclusion of our investigations.

The following case illustrates the kind

of information available when one asks who, what, where, when and how questions to analyze the nature of a domestic violence problem and the potential for more effective response.

Who? This case involved an estranged husband, just released from county jail for past violations of a restraining order; his wife; their two children; and the wife's male friend.

Notes: There was a pattern of escalating abuse and violence, and the main participants were known, having been principle parties in all previous cases.

What? This case involved domestic violence—in this instance, a multiple homicide. The husband returned to the home he was forbidden to approach as a condition of a restraining order, intent upon retaining "control" of his wife. She returned with the children and a friend to pick up belongings in anticipation of her husband's release and return. The husband and wife argued, the friend interceded, and the husband killed the friend, wife and then himself, all in front of the two children.

Notes: The crime type was the same as in previous cases involving this family—domestic violence. In this case however, the violence escalated to homicide. The involved parties were the same as in previous cases, with the exception of the innocent friend.

Where? The crime took place at the "family" home, which had been the location for five previous police responses to complaints of domestic violence committed by the husband against the wife.

Notes: Where else? While domestic violence occurs in places other than the home, most crimes do occur behind the closed doors of the home. All previous cases involving this couple occurred at the home.

When? This case occurred several months ago. The "when" is the only component we can't fix with accuracy. However, whether domestic violence involves "simple" violence or homicide,

we know that it is coming or may come at any time. Absent separation and treatment, the cycle of violence continues.

Note: The husband had previously threatened to kill his wife should she ever try to leave him, and all of the previous cases occurred during a specific two-hour period on weekend evenings.

How? In this case, the husband used a handgun.

Notes: In previous cases the husband had struck his wife with his fists, but one case involved his brandishing a handgun and he had previously threatened to shoot and kill her.

Inadequate Past Responses to the Problem

In the past, our responses to disturbance calls that did not involve actual domestic violence but that might be indicative of a domestic violence problem were rarely, if ever, captured on a "real" police report. As such, they could not be recovered for consideration as part of our domestic crime statistics and were never given a second look.

Minor domestic violence cases were often underinvestigated and underreported. In most cases, the substance of our responses and actions was captured on short form reports that sometimes lacked thorough information. Appropriate enforcement (arrest) and follow-up actions were not routine or consistent.

More serious domestic violence cases were usually appropriately investigated and documented, but our ability to support the victim ended with an arrest and/or provision of standard victim information and assistance cards. In general, our response to domestic violence probably mirrored that of many police agencies across the country. It followed the following pattern:

We began by responding to minor "disturbance only" calls that could have been

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Domestic continued from page 9

recognized as activity associated with the cycle of domestic abuse. These were usually documented in ways that did not allow us to track or recover the data.

We would later respond to additional incidents at the same address. The incidents involved abuse or violence between the same two people, and the circumstances fit a predictable pattern. A female victim was abused or assaulted more seriously than she had been before, was now more cooperative with and trusting of police, and was more interested in her abuser's arrest and prosecution. The male suspect was calmer than the victim, denying his involvement, blaming the victim, or perhaps not at home when the police arrived. The children were once again witnesses to or victims of abuse (and perpetual scarring). We made a report, perhaps arrested the suspect and infrequently followed up on the investigation. We provided victim support information, but did not have any other means of supporting the victim or doing anything more to intervene.

Finally, in all too many cases, we responded one final time. This time, however, the case involved homicide and we took it very, very seriously. We arrested the suspect and did the most thorough form of investigation and reporting we knew how to do. The result, however, was merely one more arrest and closure, which did absolutely nothing for the victim or the domestic violence problem in general. And, as in all previous responses we were, by virtue of our limited perspective and response, much too late.

Community Policing: A Change of Perspective

A little over one year ago, Chief Michael Maehler committed our organization to institutionalizing and operationalizing the philosophy of community-oriented policing. Our new focus on "Policing with Partners" to solve problems that afflict our community led us almost immediately to reassess the way we viewed the problem of domestic vio-

lence and our response to the problem.

Our efforts were guided by the new-found perspective that we had to 1) be more proactive in addressing the problem, 2) approach it with a keen understanding of the issues involved, 3) seek long-term solutions, and 4) be able to bring more resources to bear on the problem than we currently had at our disposal. We realized that success—reducing the incidence of domestic violence—would require the support and involvement of community partners.

The keys to our progress were our true belief that the problem's predictability provided opportunities for intervention, and our partnership with the Support Network for Battered Women (Network). The Network offered the support resource required to make eventual intervention strategies a reality.

Addressing Domestic Violence Using the SARA Model

Scanning. The problem of domestic violence must be as old as humankind itself, and affects every jurisdiction in the world. We had lived with our problem for years, but despite rising media attention and public concern, our perspective remained quite traditional, this marked only by the changing of our protocol on the subject in 1993.

However, several things occurred in 1995 that led us to examine the problem from a fresh perspective and to change our methods. They were 1) our notice of a pattern of multiple, repeat police responses to several homes where domestic violence recurred; 2) our notice that responses to actual domestic violence at these locations had been preceded by one or more responses to "disturbances" (noise, arguments, yelling, bothering, abuse not amounting to a crime, etc.) that should have been indications to us that there existed a potential for future domestic violence; 3) our chief's commitment to community-oriented policing; 4) city involvement in a countywide conference on domestic violence, the outgrowth of

which was the establishment of a city task force on domestic violence; 5) the fielding of several complaints about our poor response to domestic violence calls; and 6) the start of our relationship with the Network, our primary local support agency for battered women.

Our relationship with the Network did more than anything else to give us a new-found awareness and sensitivity, which led us to determine that our problem with domestic violence was masked and growing, that real intervention and reductions in the crime were possible, and that the problem deserved much more attention than we had previously given to it.

Analysis. Investigative staff members responsible for addressing "persons" crimes noticed the problem with our response, as well as opportunities presented by our new relationship with the Network. They were responsible for forging a formal relationship with the Network and developing problem-solving strategies.

Their study of our statistics showed that while documentation of actual domestic violence cases had remained quite static over a period of time (35 cases per month), "disturbance" incidents that we might logically examine and connect to domestic relationships seemed to be escalating and were substantial in number. Investigators estimated their frequency at roughly twice that of actual domestic violence reports.

Interviews with our own officers supported their sense that the weight and importance of domestic violence-related disturbance calls was indeed substantial. Officers identified problem locations denoted by incidences of repeat responses and expressed their frustration at not having the time or resources to offer victims more than enforcement or referral information as a "solution."

Research conducted into what other agencies and individuals were doing and saying about the problem provided investigators with valuable insights, alternative response methods, and potential for real intervention and abatement. They focused

specifically, and with gratitude, on work conducted by the San Diego Police Department and Ann O'Dell, who had years before effectively addressed the predictability of domestic violence-related homicides.

Meetings with the Network were held to share information and obtain their feedback about the problem and our response methods. We learned through these meetings that victims and support agencies were unhappy with our response.

Victims saw the police as more of an impediment and threat than a source for support and resolution. Furthermore, they found it hard to accept police officers as both report takers/enforcers and support providers.

The Network also pointed to problems with the way we made reports on crimes of domestic violence and asked that we do a better and more consistent job in this arena. Finally, and most important, they expressed a strong desire to partner with us in developing problem-solving strategies designed to reduce the incidence of domestic violence.

Our analysis included consideration of the above-mentioned clues to predictability and the resulting belief that we could effectively predict future problems with domestic violence and then provide intervention services designed to prevent the likelihood of the actual occurrence.

Investigators thought we could do so by accurately documenting cases of domestic "disturbances," which we knew were sound predictors of a domestic violence problem. This could be followed by intervening with potential victims identified in those reports as well as reports of domestic violence, then offering them support services appropriate to their circumstances.

To proceed from this analysis, we knew that we had to change response and reporting methods, and also acquire additional personnel resources for adequate intervention and follow-up services.

Response. Investigators met with a

variety of department personnel, members of the city task force and Network members to develop and choose a response plan. Listed below are our goal and associated objectives. The objectives were constructed to incorporate the whole department in our response plan.

Goal: Reduce the incidence of domestic violence by providing intervention services to those documented as being victims of domestic violence and those predicted to be at risk of becoming domestic violence victims.

Objective 1: Enhance our reporting of domestic violence cases and create case documentation on other cases that could help predict the future incidence of domestic violence. We hoped to have members produce more complete, thorough and effective police investigations and to document as fully as we could the considerable number of disturbance cases occurring that might be predictors of domestic problems and future domestic violence incidents.

A range of alternatives were considered, including adding report forms, eliminating reporting forms and formats, increasing report review and changing data recovery mechanisms. We ultimately decided on the following actions. 1) Adopt a new domestic violence protocol endorsed by the county chiefs of police. The protocol required more complete reporting, more severe and consistent enforcement, and the provision of better "up front" and follow-up support to victims. 2) Create a new report classification of "Domestic Disturbance" and require hard-copy documentation of such cases. Doing so would capture those disturbance cases that might be predictors of a domestic problem and future violence. 3) Require review of disturbance cases by persons-crimes investigators. 4) Make statistics on the new disturbance category part of our monthly crime statistic reports.

Objective 2: Provide meaningful intervention services to victims of domestic violence or domestic disturbances as a follow-up to the original police responses and investigations. We hoped that doing so could effectively support victims to

take actions to resolve their problems and reduce the likelihood of future violence.

The provision of intervention services required the dedication of personnel resources we didn't have at our disposal. We considered and rejected a plan to deliver such services through persons-crimes investigators—they were already taxed too heavily and felt that the provision of such services by people other than sworn officers would be better received. We also considered and rejected the use of nonsworn or volunteer members—budget, staffing and supervisory span of control were issues. True to our philosophy to "Police with Partners," we ultimately decided to create and implement a Victim Assistance Program (VAP) that would be staffed within the Persons Crimes Unit by volunteers from the Network. VAP volunteers would receive copies of each domestic violence and disturbance case report made, review the cases, contact victims, offer victim-support services, provide investigators with feedback from victims and on police reports/actions, and, as appropriate, serve as a liaison between investigators and victims regarding further investigations.

New protocols to implement new reporting requirements and the VAP program were issued following delivery of training in June 1996.

Assessment. As we all know, the problem of domestic violence will take years to abate. In our case, the success of this first response plan will take several years to measure. We will by then have amended the plan, perhaps once or twice, in response to analysis of its effects, shortcomings and successes, as well as changes in the problem itself.

However, we have already had some successes based on our stated goal and objectives. Notable successes are as follows:

- The quality and effect of our investigations are much improved. This assessment is based on feedback from both internal and external

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review of case work.

- Feedback from the Network, victims, citizens and our officers indicate that officers are showing more concern for victims of domestic violence and the problem itself.
- We are documenting an average of 66 domestic disturbance cases each month. These cases would previously have been buried, unnoticed, or reflected only in statistics on the general category of "Disturbance Other" cases.
- The department and the Network are together issuing more emergency protective restraining orders and restraining orders than in the past.

We have contacted and offered services to an average of 50 victims of domestic violence or domestic disturbances each month through the VAP. While we average 97 cases of violence or disturbance each month and had set an objective of contacting a greater average number of victims (75+%), we have found this to be

unattainable given the 20 hour per week volunteer allocation from the Network.

Analysis of this shortcoming prompted the department to partner with the Network in submitting a grant request to the COPS Office for funding that would allow the Network to provide the department with a full-time, paid VAP employee for one year.

Comparison of the four-month period prior to the start of the plan with the four-month period following showed 1) a decrease in the incidence of actual domestic violence cases by two per month, but 2) an increase in arrests for domestic violence of almost 43 percent (21 vs. 30).

Conclusion

We have been quite satisfied with the results of our response plan to date. Resistance we expected from line personnel on reporting changes and from persons-crimes investigators who might have perceived the VAP as an intrusion have never materialized. Rather, all members have been impressed by and appreciative of the support provided by the VAP. Furthermore, our general ethic and response to the problem of domestic violence and its victims has been elevated by the influence of the VAP and our partnership with the Network. We look forward to the program and our response evolving in the future.

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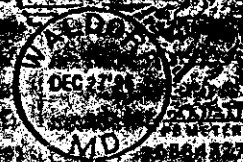
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Problem Solving Quarterly
 1120 Connecticut Ave. NW
 Suite 930
 Washington, DC 20036



RANA SAMPSON
 4817 CANTERBURY DRIVE
 SAN DIEGO CA 92116