

**HERMAN GOLDSTEIN EXCELLENCE IN
PROBLEM-SOLVING**

**BALTIMORE COUNTY (MD) POLICE DEPARTMENT
TEAM HONORABLE MENTION
1993**

Police Executive Research Forum

WESTMOUNT PROJECT

BALTIMORE COUNTY MARYLAND

This Project Report is submitted in consideration for the Police Executive Research Forum's 1st Annual Problem Solving Award. Any inquiries should be directed to Captain Adam Starr or Corporal Paul Franzoni, of the Baltimore County Police Department - (410) 887-1575.

WESTMOUNT PROJECT

1. *What was the problem?*

The Westmount Apartment Complex is located in an urbanized section of Western Baltimore County. The complex consists of 244 units which are occupied by a predominantly lower income and transient populous. There are many children, and single parent households are abundant. Over the last few years, the frequency of violent crime in the general area has increased. In 1992, a Homicide and another unrelated shooting in the complex drew specific attention to the Westmount area.

An initial assessment revealed that drugs could be part of the root causes of Westmount's deteriorating community status.

The project team also discovered that a percentage of the children in the community were only minimally supervised. This factor, coupled with the examples of violence and drug use, promoted delinquency.

2. *For Who Was This A Problem?*

THE POLICE:

As with virtually all Police Departments, manpower resources are at a premium. Police Departments can no longer afford to merely react to situations once they occur. Traditional saturation or special enforcement campaigns are impossible, and those measures did not yield long-term results.

THE COMMUNITY:

The community was afraid. When the officers conducted surveys, we learned that most of the people condemned drug use, and had no remorse for anyone who may have been injured in a drug transaction. The citizens were specifically concerned about the safety of their children.

3. *Who Was Affected and How?*

- A. **Westmount Residents** - *The people who lived in Westmount were directly affected by the violent acts and delinquent behavior.*
- B. **Westmount Management** - *Management wanted to make Westmount a model community. Crime, unruly juveniles and a general sense of vulnerability detracted from the Complex's marketability.*
- C. **The Criminal Justice System** - *Not only the Police Department, but all facets of the Criminal Justice System were impacted by the crime that occurred in Westmount.*
- D. **Neighboring Communities** - *The crime and delinquency in the Westmount Complex reflected poorly on other Apartment Communities in the area. Additionally, neighborhood businesses did not benefit from the poor publicity or questionable clientele that Westmount had been attracting.*

4. *How Did the Department Handle These Problems in the Past?*

Traditionally, problem locations were handled reactively. Post cars would respond to calls when summonsed and made arrests for on-sight offenses. Specialized Units would occasionally work the area covertly, but there was no long-term commitment. Minimal attention was given to crime prevention.

5. *What information Was Collected About the Problem?*

A. *148 Community Surveys were conducted by district officers assigned to the project team. Demographics, as well as citizen's perspectives of crime were collected.*

B. *Project team members met with the Rental Manager.*

C. *Crime statistics and calls for service were reviewed.*

6. *Were There Any Difficulties Encountered in Gathering information?*

There was some hesitancy on the part of citizens to answer questions asked by the police officers. Only 2 citizens refused to answer questions at all.

There was some apprehension on the part of the officers about approaching residents. Specifically, there was concern that our good faith efforts could be rejected or that we would actually be in danger when approaching closed doors. For these reasons, the initial surveys were conducted with 2 or 3 officers working in various parts of the complex. However, follow-up surveys were done individually. Officer apprehension dissolved as the project progressed.

Management was very willing to work with the Police Department.

7. *What Were The Goals of This Project? What Strategies were Employed? What Were the Results?*

GOAL #/•-

Reduce the serious incidents at the Westmount Apartments.

METHODS:

- o *High visibility.*
- o *Walking in the complex.*
- o *Meeting for reports, etc.*
- o *Increased enforcement of traffic and criminal laws.*
- o *Increased car stops.*
- o *Pay phones from Essex Road, south, on both sides of Liberty Road were changed to now allow in-coming calls.*
- o ***Increase Liaison with management.***
 - o *Use of drug addendum in lease.*
 - o *Discussed screening methods such as criminal background checks with management.*
 - o *Encouraged management to evict problem tenants.*
 - o *Open communication with management concerning tenants possibly involved in the drug trade.*

RESULTS:

- o *Calls for service and incidents were maintained at a lower level during the period of the open project, than the same period a year prior. The project began August, 1992.*
- o *August, 1991 -February, 1992 - 67 incident reports*
- o *August, 1992 - February, 1993 - 49 incident reports*
 - ***incidents were reduced by 18 reports (or down 26.9%)***
- o *August, 1991 - February, 1992 - 251 Calls for Service*

- o *August, 1992 - February, 1993 - 180 Calls for Service*

Q *Calls for service were reduced by 71 calls (or down 28.3%)*

GOAL #2:

Organize the community to prevent the re-occurrence of these incidents and to create a better quality of life.

METHODS:

- o *The swimming pool at the rear of the complex was filled with debris and water, and the fence was not intact. The County Health Department was called by the C.O.P.E. officer to have the repairs made when management failed to act in a timely manner.*
- o *The County Building Inspectors were called to evaluate the complex in terms of the Liability Code. The complex passed all requirements.*
- o *On 08/12/92, Officer Gideon and Lt. Rogers brought a group of 15 children from Westmount Apartments to Precinct 3. Activities included:*
 - o *Tour of the station.*
 - o *Video cartoons of drug awareness.*
 - o *Demonstration of K-9 and A viation.*

- o On 10/04/92, a meeting was held for the community to discuss problems and the department presented the findings of the initial survey. A result of the meeting was:
 - o A Halloween event for the children was planned. The parents set up tables in the parking area so that the children did not have to go to each apartment on every floor. Management and tenants supplied candy.
 - o Organizing the community by forming a tenants group was planned.
- o C. O.P. E. officers evaluated the property in terms of lighting and crime prevention. The complex was found to be lit adequately.
- o Abandoned autos were reported and stickers placed on them. The management followed up on towing the autos.
- o Management hired a new security guard who is more aggressive than the previous one. The new security guard was also licensed as a special police officer through the Maryland State Police and has arrest powers for the apartment complex grounds.
- o A second survey was conducted during the month of January, 1993. The results of the survey indicated that the residents have a high turnover rate, as only 42% of those surveyed this second time were surveyed in the initial inquiry.

- o *Out of 171 occupied apartments (72.5% occupancy rate), 50 persons were surveyed for a 29.24 % survey rate. The survey instrument revealed:*
 - o *52% said that things were better at the complex.*
 - o *80% have not had to call the police in the past eight months.*
 - o *70% said they saw the police more often in the complex.*
 - o *74% of the residents rated police service as a 4 or 5 on a scale of 1-5 (5 being best). This rating is 14% higher than the initial rating.*
 - o *7 people said the neighborhood was quieter.*

RESULTS:

Based on the second survey and discussions with tenants and management, the quality of life in the Westmount Apartments has improved during the course of the project. As of this writing no formal tenants group has been formed, however, increased communication between tenants and the management has improved.

8. *What Agencies Assisted the Police Department.*
 - o *C&P Telephone Company*
 - o *Department of Community Development*
 - o *Baltimore County Department of Recreation and Parks*
 - o *St. Luke's Epworth United Methodist Church*

9. *What Recommendations Would You Make to Other Police Agencies Interested in Addressing Similar Problems?*

1) *If possible, keep Problem Solving non-specialized.*

Although it may be necessary to create a specialized unit initially, it is imperative that fine officers see the project as their own, and not the responsibility of a specialized unit. Although this project was initiated by a small specialized unit within the precinct, the project team involved line officers. Shortly after the project begun, the "COPS" squad was disbanded.

2) *Decentralize the decision making process . . . but get every level of supervision involved.*

Officers will be more committed if they have some say in developing the goals or at least how the goals are pursued.

However, the 1st line supervisor must take an intimate interest in assuming that day-to-day activities are completed.

Similarly, top management must a/so be involved, not necessarily as a Commander, but as a facilitator and cheerleader.

3) *Keep others informed.*

Everyone in the precinct must be kept abreast of progress and setbacks.

Using a project bulletin or chalkboard is helpful. A logbook assists in keeping good records.

4) *Document everything.*

There are reasons why we should.

1) *to create a functional working record;*

2) *to create an example for training and reference;*

3) *to account for time, and justify the need for keeping or increasing resources;*

4) *to share information with others.*

5) *Be realistic - measure success in inches.*

Many problem areas suffer from a number of significant social and economical problems. It is not realistic to assume that problem solving refers to an absolute abolition of a set of negative circumstances. It is important that officers appreciate seeing small accomplishments such as an increase in the public's perception of the Department, or a 5% decrease in crime.

6) *Survey citizens.*

There are 3 reasons to survey communities:

1) *to gather information;*

2) *to provide a basis for a before and after comparison;*

3) *to provide a structural opportunity for the police and the public to interact. Surveys are a great ice breaker.*

7) *Have fun.*

Problem Solving provides officers with a unique opportunity to use talents and develop interests outside of law enforcement activities.

Some officers enjoy working with children. Others will develop interests in tenant-landlord laws. Use this as an opportunity to enhance your officer's job satisfaction. Keep your goals flexible to allow personal growth and interest.

