

Seattle Police Department

Norman H. Stamper, Chief of Police
Norman B. Rice, Mayor

96-55

August 14, 1996

Police Executive Research Forum
Attn: Herman Goldstein Award
1120 Connecticut Ave NW, Suite 930
Washington, D.C. 20036

Dear PERF members:

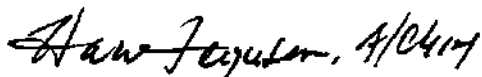
It is with pride that I write today to nominate the Options, Choices, Consequences (OCC) program for the 1996 Herman Goldstein Excellence in Problem Solving Award. OCC has been an early public success in our transition to community-oriented policing in Seattle. Because it began early in the process, OCC has served as a beacon for further projects involving community collaboration.

As you will see from the application, the SARA model served us well in identifying the precise elements of the youth handgun problem and developing and implementing a potential solution. The scope of our problem-solving orientation has grown tremendously since the inception of OCC. We are now midway through our year spent training every member of the Department in the SARA model, and are continually refining and broadening our understanding and use of problem-solving methods.

We expect to have many more strong examples of SARA applications in the years to come, and are proud of this early collaborative success. OCC has played a pivotal role in community awareness of the work of the Seattle Police Department, being the subject of numerous media citations, and serving as a visible program for our Mayor and City Council to support.

Thank you for your consideration. We look forward to your response.

Sincerely,



Norm
Norm Stamper
Chief of Police
Seattle Police Department

enc.

SCANNING:

The Options, Choices, and Consequences program addresses youth gun violence, the state of which, in the United States, is all too familiar to most of us. Gunshot trauma is the third leading cause of death for teens of all socio-economic and ethnic groups. Each day in the United States, 15 children age 19 and under are killed with guns in America. Every six hours a youth, age 10-19, commits suicide with a firearm. Since 1990, 3 of 5 juvenile murder offenders have used guns to perpetrate their crimes. These statistics merely hint at the depth of the gun problem in our country.

The scope of the problem in Seattle is similar: A disproportionate number of the gunshot victims treated at Harborview Medical Center (Seattle's primary trauma treatment center) in 1994 were 25 or under (approximately 130 people); the cost of treating gunshot victims at Harborview alone was over \$4 million each year for the past three years. Statistics from the King County Medical Examiner's Office reveal that, of the 698 unnatural deaths of young people age 21 and under since 1990, 38% were the result of homicide or suicide—a quarter of these were the result of gunshot trauma. Furthermore, youth ages 14-17 are the fastest growing group of gun violence victims.

Identification of the problem sprang from a number of different sources, the first of which was the growing number of youth victims of gun violence. Additionally, the Seattle Police Department noted that youth were increasingly the perpetrators as well as the victims of gun violence. A tremendous community outcry arose over these incidents, particularly several tragic deaths, resulting in a call to action. The collaboration of the Seattle Police Department, the King County Prosecutor's Office, and the Seattle School District was the catalyst for the combined focus on education and enforcement. Realizing that the area of youth violence was too big to constitute a "problem," the purview was narrowed to youth gun violence and then to the prevention (secondary) aspect of that problem.

The widely-held public perception was that only "gang" or "at-risk" kids carried guns, that it was the problem of poor urban single parent families (the assumption that these were all African American youth was not often articulated but always implied). The perception also existed that the guns used by these youth were purchased from predatory adults.

Another critical issue was the implementation of new legislation which increased penalties for youth convicted of crimes involving a handgun.

ANALYSIS:

The analysis itself began with a look at the statistics from law enforcement and public health professionals. We learned that while violent crime was on the decline nationally, violent crime among youth was rising dramatically. The use of handguns in the commission of a crime among youth was escalating as well. This added a lethality component that had not been present before. Seattle and King County statistics mirrored the national trends. Focus groups were used to gather information from youth.

We pulled together a community-based coalition that included representatives from the Police Department, City Council, Seattle Neighborhood Group (comprised of community members; Group Health Hospital, the Washington State Medical Association, the County Prosecutor's office, Seattle Public School District, Mothers Against Violence in America (MAVIA), Washington State Commission on African American Affairs, Washington Ceasefire, Seattle Violence Prevention Project, the Crisis Clinic, Harborview Injury Prevention and Research Center, Physicians for Social Responsibility, and the University of Washington School of Public Health. With a coalition of this size and diversity we were able to gather a large amount of information about the problem from a variety of perspectives.

The problem of youth handgun violence had many harms associated with it. Certainly the medical implications of a gunshot wound are much more serious and long lasting than other types of injuries. The cost of treating gunshot wounds, both in the emergency room and in rehabilitation, is staggering. In 1990 the cost of firearm injuries in the United States was an estimated \$20.4 billion. This includes \$1.4 billion for direct expenditures for health care and related services, \$1.6 billion in lost productivity resulting from gun injury related illness and disability, and \$17.4 billion in lost productivity from premature death. In 1994, \$3.97 million were spent treating gunshot victims at Harborview Medical Center alone. These costs exclude deaths in the emergency room (15), victims treated and released, long-term care and surgeon's fees. The other harm - much harder to measure - is the long term harm that being in constant fear imposes on a child. A youth's ability to focus and concentrate at school when preoccupied with the possibility of the person sitting next to him or her having a gun is greatly impacted. The long term cost of this issue is still unknown.

Prior to the Options, Choices, and Consequences Program there was no standard curriculum educating youth about the prevention of handgun violence. The existing prevention work was at best a tertiary effort, occurring only after an incident. Nor were there public education efforts toward adults and storage of handguns in homes.

The analysis revealed that our initial perception about who was carrying guns and where they got them was clearly not the whole picture. Facts showed that young people from all socioeconomic classes had access to and were carrying guns. The belief that this was a problem of poor, African American males did not stand up to the analysis. A focus group highlighted the easy access to handguns. One 7th grader told us that given \$20 and 48 hours a handgun could be purchased. Harborview Medical Center reported the same fact, and offered records indicating that 47% of male high school seniors reported easy access to handguns. We learned that a large number of young people were carrying guns because they were afraid, not for criminal purposes. Youth both gang-involved and not were carrying guns. They felt the need to have a gun because "everyone else is carrying guns". The risk of accidental shootings increases dramatically with each youth carrying a gun, we know that accidental shootings contribute to the problem as much as do intentional ones. Adding to the problem was the likelihood of a successful suicide with the presence of a handgun in the home. One startling fact was that most young people were getting the guns from their homes or the homes of their friends, not from a predatory adult lurking in the shadows. If there was a gun in the house, the youth knew exactly where it was and how to get it.

We learned that very few people secured their handguns in lock boxes and/or with trigger locks. Guns were stored in closets, night stands, kitchen drawers and cars. When there was a gun in the house and there was a burglary, the gun was usually located and stolen.

The analysis also highlighted how widespread this problem was. The impact of the media and video games on the perception of the dangers (or lack thereof) of guns cannot be understated. Many young people had no concept that gunshot injuries were actually painful. Their experience was based on movies such as "Terminator," and "Die Hard." Youth did not have realistic information about the impact of a bullet wound on the human body. They believed that when shot, one either dies or dodges the bullet. The reality of surviving with long-term medical and legal consequences was out of youths' frames of reference.

Based on the critical analysis of the task force one of the underlying conditions identified was the lack of knowledge (legal and medical) young people had about the consequences of possessing a handgun.

The community was an integral partner in the analysis portion of this problem solving effort, giving us an incredible amount of information and a perspective that we could not have had otherwise. The community has also been an active partner in the response phase.

RESPONSE:

Our long term goal continued to be the reduction of youth violence associated with handguns while our short term goal was the education of young people on issues surrounding handguns. Consequently, the department continues to identify underlying conditions which are then addressed by a comprehensive strategy that includes education.

We decided that one of our responses would be to develop a youth handgun violence prevention curriculum focusing on 7th and 8th grade students. This decision led us to look at other curriculum that existed, which did not provide the startling, provocative method by which to get and keep 12-13 year-olds' attention. The exception was an extensive program in Portland, Oregon shown to be very successful with at-risk youth. Our analysis also told us that focusing solely on at-risk youth would not impact the problem significantly, and so we chose to do a school-based curriculum. Our hope was to get the information to all middle school-aged students in the City of Seattle. An added benefit was that such a program could be conducted with the help of volunteers for a relatively low cost. It did not rely heavily on FTEs for sustainment.

Options, Choices, and Consequences is an interactive curriculum in which police officers, medical doctors, and prosecutors present information to middle-school youth on youth gun violence. Affectionately called "Cops, Docs, and Prosecutors" by the schools, the goal of OCC is to remind youth of their personal responsibility for their decisions about guns, and to encourage them to make decisions based on accurate information. OCC includes a strong volunteer component. Over 140 officers, doctors, and prosecutors have been trained to provide the program, with the doctors and prosecutors donating their time. OCC also has a community speakers' bureau which addresses local business and social organizations to provide information of the facts of youth handgun violence, and the importance of storing handguns safely in homes. OCC has been strongly supported by the King County Prosecutor, the Washington State Medical Association, Superintendent of Seattle Public Schools, and the City of Seattle, including, most prominently, its police department.

There were three objectives identified for the problem solving effort. They were: (1) to develop a curriculum for youth and their parents about consequences of youth possession of guns (arrest, prosecution and victimization); (2) develop an awareness campaign which would appeal to youth, educate the general public about the legalities of youth gun possession, and identify youth gun victimization issues; and (3) identify resources available to assist youth and parents in the reduction of youth gun possession. Essentially, we wanted youth to understand the reality of handguns, and have the ability to weigh consequences and make decisions about handgun possession.

Seattle was fortunate to have received a Comprehensive Communities Program Grant, which allowed for a small sum of money for the initial start-up cost. We also had a strong commitment from both the Washington State Medical Association and the King County Prosecutor's Office. This commitment provides two-thirds of the staffing for the actual presentation. The City's commitment from the was also a great resource, contributing generously to the problem solving effort.

After analysis and the decision to develop a middle school curriculum, we went to work to create a curriculum that was provocative and graphic. Once the curriculum was developed, we tested it in summer school classes, and used the feedback to make adjustments to the curriculum. We then hosted a comprehensive training for police officers, doctors, and prosecutors. We secured slides, medical paraphernalia, legal scenarios and other training materials. We continue to solicit feedback from audiences through surveys, questionnaires, and evaluations in an effort to continuously refine the program.

We encountered a few difficulties in responding to this problem. One was that some of the schools were not interested in having the curriculum presented at their schools. We also had a few teachers who left the room during the presentation, making it difficult for them to deal with any consequent issues. Further, there were some logistical problems with equipment failure and scheduling.

EVALUATION:

The homicide rate in Seattle has dropped dramatically in the past year (in 1994 there were 69 homicides, 1995 saw 47, and midway through 1996 there have been 20 homicides). While it is unclear how much of this change is directly attributable to this curriculum, it is indisputable that the whole campaign and the community policing orientation of the Department has impacted this heartening decline. Options, Choices, and Consequences is a part of a large-scale, holistic approach to the issue of violence in Seattle. More difficult to quantify, but equally important, are the benefits created by officer interaction with youth and other community members.

Also important are the improvements in youth understanding produced by OCC. Student feedback makes clear that the goal of providing information in order that youth can make informed choices was met. For example, before OCC, many children did not understand that gunshot wounds actually hurt. They seemed to think you either die or get right back up. Due to the glamorization in popular culture of gun-related violence, there is significant misconception about what happens to a "regular" person when shot. Two responses convey this lack of understanding. "A bullet wound can do a lot more than it show (sic) on television and can do a lot more internal damage than you think," and "I learned that in real life, not in movies, the bullet will go in with a relatively small hole but will come out leaving a hole the size of a football". We see similar results with the legal component. "I didn't know you could get arrested even if you didn't kill someone." Also, "I never knew that if you have a gun and you didn't intentionally want to shoot someone and you did and they die, then you could be charged with manslaughter." This heightened understanding of the impact of youth gun violence is an immeasurable benefit.

The number of handguns seized in schools has steadily decreased during the past three years, and the perception that schools are unsafe has been addressed through OCC. There are very few violent incidents occurring on the property of schools in the City of Seattle. Since one of the youth concerns discovered during scanning was the perception that their schools were unsafe, it has been important to provide accurate information, helping to dispel myths and create a more trusting educational environment.

OCC has broken down barriers between youth and police, creating an atmosphere of enhanced trust in an area typically fraught with mutual suspicion. One officer remarked that prior to the training, she was met with suspicion upon entering a school. She now receives more general acceptance and acknowledgment. Through OCC, youth and police have interacted in such positive ways as picnics, where they have played softball and basketball

together. Students regularly remark that their perceptions of officers have changed as a result of OCC.

On a macro level, a community which experiences reduced incidents of gun violence is one for which the quality of life has greatly improved. The reduction of fear of violence is also significant, as is increased trust toward the police. Specifically, the enhanced trust between youth and police creates greater potential for positive long-term relationships and a reduction in future offenses. One girl explained, "I think that I could gain more respect for officers if they came and talked to us like this."

We have also contracted with the University of Washington's School of Public Health and Community Medicine to do a complete program evaluation. This will measure both youth and parent perceptions about gun violence before and after the training. It will track this over a three-, six-, and nine-month period to see if those changes in beliefs are sustained. Initial results are very positive. Final evaluation findings are pending.

PHILOSOPHY AND ORGANIZATION:

The major problem solving effort combined a number of employees at different levels of authority within the organization. Additionally, as highlighted earlier, many community stakeholders were involved. The employees who were supervisors and managers had received a four-day training that included a full eight hours of training on the problem solving model. The movement from an incident-driven department to a problem-oriented one was underway during the development of the OCC program.

Both Herman Goldstein's book "Problem Oriented Policing" and the department's problem solving curriculum were used as guidance as the coalition worked through the problem solving process. The biggest obstacle to the process was to keep the group from jumping into the response prior to a thorough analysis. Revisiting the model and the importance of the analysis portion was helpful in keeping the group on track.

As mentioned above, we were able to work under the Comprehensive Communities Grant. This provided us with the financial assistance necessary to pull together materials to support the curriculum. The department's commitment of staffing and leadership came from civilian and sworn supervisors who provided the support and encouragement to employees developing the curriculum, training potential presenters and finally taking the curriculum into the schools and community centers. The success of the program indicates that for employees to do systematic problem solving there needs to be consistent support throughout the department and in Seattle this support clearly exists.

OPTIONS, CHOICES, AND CONSEQUENCES

Program Summary

Options, Choices, and Consequences (OCC) is an interactive presentation that addresses youth gun violence. An interactive presentation, OCC appeals to a broad group of youth and community members. Through the use of visual aids, narrative presentations, and group activities, participants are confronted with the ramifications of gun violence. Teams of volunteer law enforcement professionals, prosecutors and physicians present the program to middle school students, their families, individual school faculty, school administrators and other members of the community.

For the '95-'96 school year - its first year of operation — Options, Choices, and Consequences has been presented in over 180 classrooms and other venues. A conservative estimate of the number of students and adults reached is over 6,000.

Premised on a basic respect for the intelligence of each student, the goal of Options, Choices, Consequences is to provide students more information about handgun violence and its effects, explain that each person has a choice to make about whether to be around guns, and allow students to decide their positions on guns. OCC does not preach or judge. Instead, it presents factual information in a straightforward manner.

OCC is typically presented in a two-day period, with one class session per day. In the first session, an officer and a medical doctor lead the discussion, with the officer explaining the incidence of morbidity and mortality from gun violence, and the doctor offering vivid examples of the effects of gunshot wounds. The next day, the lawyer contributes information on the legal ramifications of possessing or being in the company of someone possessing a gun. Time for class participation and discussion was deliberately incorporated into the curriculum, as students often have strong reactions to the information, and many have personal experience with gun violence. Some of the most common reactions include statements such as, "I didn't know gunshots hurt." and "I didn't know you could get in trouble just for being around someone with a gun." These are exactly the types of "I didn't know" the program was created to counter.