

1997 HERMAN GOLDSTEIN AWARD FOR EXCELLENCE IN
PROBLEM-ORIENTED POLICING

Abstract submitted in partial fulfillment of the award application.

SCANNING

The New Cassel Project was initiated in response to community problems which traditional policing methods were not able to solve. Scanning of the overall situation revealed that the community suffered from a high crime rate and a severe drug problem. In addition, poor relations between the predominantly minority community and the police complicated the situation.

ANALYSIS

The analysis centered on: reported burglaries and robberies in the community; drug related arrests; complaints from the residents; and compliance with public drinking ordinances.

RESPONSE

Specialized foot patrols and bike patrols were established and police officers participated in numerous special events, including a youth/cops basketball game, a candlelight procession, a clean-up day, and a Safety Day in which police officers distributed 125 bicycle helmets. A sergeant was assigned as community liaison, and a program in the schools was established. An Outreach Project was initiated in which police officers delivered brochures on crime prevention.

ASSESSMENT

The results have been dramatic with a greater than 60% reduction in both burglaries and robberies, as well as a 80% increase in drug related arrests. The Outreach Project and special events have greatly increased the number of positive police/community interactions.

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SECTION 2 - DESCRIPTION

A. SCANNING

New Cassel has been described as an economically blighted, crime-ridden, drug-infested community. Dilapidated, boarded-up, or abandoned properties are common. Banking institutions view the area as high risk, making it difficult to attract homeowners and businesses into the area. Racial tensions also are apparent, not only between the residents of New Cassel, which is almost entirely minority, and the adjacent communities, but racial tensions also have surfaced between the African-American residents and the increasing Hispanic and Haitian population that has been moving into the area.

Overcrowded housing and a lack of retail establishments also have contributed to the poor social and economic conditions in the community, which is an unincorporated area of Westbury, located in the Town of North Hempstead, Nassau County. New Cassel covers an area of one and a half square miles, of the 287 square miles that comprise Nassau County. It has a population of approximately 12,000 people, which is roughly one percent of the population of Nassau County. However, it is over-represented in all percentages of reported crimes.

Petitions signed by residents dating back to June of 1990 identify the problem of crime and drugs in New Cassel. Ever since the crack epidemic commenced in the mid 80s, the police also have recognized the drug problem in New Cassel, but we relied on the traditional, but ineffective, police tactic of drug sweeps almost exclusively. Every few months, a combination of uniformed and plainclothes officers would saturate the area and make a large number of arrests of low level street dealers and buyers. This would have the effect of providing significant arrest numbers so that by traditional standards, it would appear that we were

responding to the problem. However, a temporary benefit would take place since the street activity would diminish for a while after the enforcement operation, -but would gradually resume, so that within a few months the problem was as bad as ever.

This response continued for so long that it helped to institutionalize an attitude in the minority community that could be summed up as follows: the police were so ineffective in dealing with crime and drugs in the community that either they did not care about the minority community, or that they were incompetent, or that somehow they were "in" on it. Tensions between the police and the community also mounted subsequent to several national events, including the Rodney King incident. On several occasions allegations of excessive force by police officers were lodged, which even when later found to be groundless, had the effect of further deteriorating police-community relations.

A low point in those relations occurred on April 30, 1995 when an African-American youth, Ricardo Watkins, 17 years old, in the process of being arrested for smoking a marijuana cigarette on the corner of Kinkel Street and Prospect Avenue, New Cassel, pulled out a fully loaded Smith and Wesson revolver. When Watkins was within ten degrees of pointing it directly at the officer's partner, the officer, who was white, fired one shot in order to protect the life of his fellow officer; the bullet struck Watkins in the lower back. Watkins and his attorney then claimed that Watkins had not possessed any gun, and that the police and District Attorney's Office were "trumping up charges" against Watkins. A copy of the attorney's inflammatory press release is attached. It was not until February 14, 1997 that Watkins admitted in court that he made up the story about the police planting the weapon.

Coincidental to this incident, a new commander, Inspector Paul Tully, was assigned to the Third Precinct, in which New Cassel is situated. On his first day in the new assignment he

reached out to the president of the local chapter of the NAACP, and requested to meet with residents about the incident.

Therefore, the scanning phase of the project can be summed up as follows: The problem of crime and drugs in New Cassel had been well recognized for years. Complaints from residents of the community went back to at least 1990, and the police ourselves recognized the problem but continued to fight it by means of the traditional "drug sweep" method. At the same time that police-community relations hit a low point because of a shooting incident involving a minority youth, a new precinct commander with a background in community based policing, and who was trained in and committed to Problem Oriented Policing was assigned to the Third Precinct. From the first day, his top priority was to improve police-community relations in New Cassel. His first efforts at scanning the problem involved getting an assessment of the extent of the drug and crime problem in New Cassel by means of crime and arrest statistics, at the same time as he attempted to identify and reach out to responsible community leaders.

B. ANALYSIS

1. Several methods, data and information sources were used to analyze the problem: Letters of complaints and petitions, which are available, were sent by residents; the Department crime report and arrest statistics provided objective documentation of the problems in the community; and the police officers themselves observed flagrant violations of local ordinances, such as drinking and gambling in public, as well as apparent drug transactions.

2. As discussed previously, the problems of crime and drugs in New Cassel goes back at least to the mid 80s with the advent of the crack epidemic; and because it has always been a lower socio-economic neighborhood, the problem could be said to have existed for

decades. Drug transactions were taking place on a daily basis in several locations in the community, most notably at the intersection of Prospect Avenue and Brooklyn Avenue, and Prospect Avenue and Sheridan Avenue. Police officers would characterize the area as being a long-standing problem but several community leaders with whom I spoke, such as Ms. Karen Hollie, co-chair of the Neighborhood Advisory Council (NAC), state that when they were young, New Cassel was a safe place to live: no one worried about locking their doors at night and kids could play safely on the streets.

3. The most apparent victims of the problem were the local residents, who were intimidated by the drug dealers. They were forced to live in fear of being a victim of crime, even if they themselves were not the victims of a burglary, robbery or assault. The youth of the community also were victims as they grew up in an area where they were exposed to drugs, which increased their chances for involvement. The motivation for the dealers was a combination of selling drugs for profit, and drugs for personal use. The community itself also is a victim when a segment of it is involved in destructive activity, instead of achieving goals involving family, employment and education.

4. The harms of the problems are obvious: residents being victimized and living in fear; large numbers of young men with criminal records and jail time, instead of good jobs and education; a crime ridden, drug-infested community; and poor quality of life conditions.

5. As discussed under Scanning, police used only the traditional "drug sweep" approach to fighting the problem. Every few months, a combination of uniformed and plainclothes officers would saturate the area and make a large number of arrests of low level street dealers and buyers. Although street activity would diminish for a while after the enforcement operation, it would gradually resume, and within a few months the problem would

be back as bad as ever.

6. Analysis of the problem revealed that in 1995, there were 65 robberies, 68 burglaries and 107 arrests for illegal drugs in New Cassel. A case by case review of the robberies indicated that the majority were "street mugging", drug related robberies. A case by case analysis of the burglaries revealed that a large percentage of the burglaries were the result of illegal, over-crowded housing. For example, on one weekend, two burglaries occurred in the same residence, which was an illegally divided house with each room rented out to non-family members. In the first burglary one tenant allegedly stole the money and radio of the occupant of another room, and in the second case the same suspect entered the room of a third occupant and allegedly sexually abused her. Regarding analysis of drug arrests, the observation of the officers revealed that the present number of arrests was not denting the level of the drug business being conducted.

7. It was clear from the analysis that a number of steps needed to be taken immediately to decrease the levels in the crimes targeted: robberies, burglaries and drug transactions. The first step was to try to better utilize existing resources. To that end, police officers assigned to New Cassel were directed to increase their presence along Prospect Avenue, which is 22 blocks long and is the major thoroughfare in New Cassel. The second step was to make use of the Department's command post bus, which was used as a mobile police booth. The clearly marked bus was prominently displayed at the corner of Prospect Avenue and Brooklyn Avenue in order to prevent drug dealers from conducting business. However, we believe that this curtailed the drug dealing only temporarily, and ultimately just displaced it to another location. The third step was to better coordinate other department resources, especially those of the Narcotics Bureau and the Bureau of Special Operations. However, when two drug dealers were subsequently arrested (the Derr brothers, known as "Fat Cat" and "Big Red") the

problem at the corner of Prospect and Brooklyn actually seemed worse, as numerous low level drug dealers began to compete for the open territory.

8. Situational information that was needed to better understand the problem developed over the next several months. It had been generally believed that the drug sales had tended to take place mostly at night, but it was soon learned that the sales took place throughout the day, and that when we increased, our patrols at night, the drug activity shifted to the morning hours. In addition, community residents advised us that whenever a group was observed on the corner drinking or playing dice, one member of the group would be a drug dealer using the group as cover.

9. From May of 1995 through the remainder of the year there was some open discussion with the community about the crime and drug problem, but it was not until March 7, 1996 that effective community outreach took place. On that date the Commanding Officer was invited by the Neighborhood Advisory Council (NAC) to speak to community residents. The meeting took place at the Park Avenue School and was well attended by about a hundred residents. Although there were several mixed signals being delivered by the public who spoke, the intent of the organizers of the forum was clear: they would try to address the economic aspects of community revitalization, but first the police "must get the drug dealers off our corners".

C. RESPONSE

The analysis revealed that the critical issues were crime and the fear of crime, as well as the rampant drug problem and poor police-community relations. A multi-faceted response would be necessary to attack all of these issues, which were all inter-related. Therefore, at various stages, the following responses were implemented.

Personnel Resources and Minority Representation Increased

In April 1996, because of the results of the aforementioned analysis, the New Cassel detail, which supplements the contingent of officers assigned to the two sector cars, was doubled to eight officers. A major role of these officers was to target quality of life violations such as public drinking, drug sales, and dice playing. All of these behaviors contributed to the blighted appearance of New Cassel, and in keeping with the "broken windows" theory, had a direct effect on crime in the community. These officers were primarily assigned to foot patrol, and a major part of their jobs was to make community contacts by meeting local business owners and residents.

The community had been asking for more minority representation in the assignment of officers to New Cassel, and three African-American police officers volunteered for assignment to New Cassel. Two police officers were assigned to Post 316, which is one of the two posts that covers the community, and the other officer was teamed with a White officer in the detail. One Hispanic officer, who had been assigned to Post 316, also was assigned to the detail.

A Community Liaison Assigned

In addition, a sergeant was assigned full time to serve as liaison to the New Cassel community, including coordinating Third Precinct efforts with other commands within the Police Department, as well as with the N.Y.S. Division of Parole, and Town of North Hempstead and County of Nassau authorities. Sergeant Matthew Simeone attended community meetings and had daily contact with leaders in the community. The assigning of a full time liaison proved to be an important part of the overall strategy in that it provided daily feedback from the community of the police initiatives that were taking place, and that were soon to come. Complaints from residents to the community liaison provided a built-in assessment mechanism which would prove to be vital to the overall strategy.

Parole "RedZones" Established

During analysis, it had become apparent that many of the offenders who were contributing to the high crime rate were on parole. The New York State Division of Parole was contacted and through Parole Officer Calvin Moy, areas of New Cassel were designated as "red zones". Once an area is designated as such, a parolee may not loiter in or about such area without being in violation of his/her parole. During May 1996, and again in October, a joint operation between the Nassau County Police Third Precinct, Bureau of Special Operations, and New York State Division of Parole was conducted. The result was the arrest of three (3) parolees for violation of parole on each occasion, as well as several other arrests for other offenses. There are approximately 60 active parolees in New Cassel at any given time, and "red zone" enforcement prevents convicted drug dealers from going right back into business at their favorite location after release from jail.

Bike Patrol Instituted

In June 1996, it became apparent that uniformed foot patrols had limitations when it came to street level drug enforcement. The lack of mobility and the fact that the officers were easily seen from a distance gave drug dealers plenty of time to cease activities. The foot patrols, although they were effective in stopping illegal activities in a given location while they were actually physically present, did not solve the problem. At this point we reevaluated our response and following the example of other jurisdictions, decided to employ a police bicycle patrol, in order to increase the speed and mobility of the officers. Thereafter, all eight officers that were assigned to foot patrols were trained on police mountain bikes and bike patrols began the last week of June.

A Community Leaders', Network Organized

On the evening of July 4th, a large disturbance on Prospect Avenue occurred, during which a marked unit manned by two uniformed officers had its rear window blown out by an M-80 explosive; this resulted in a large scale police response. The response included the deployment of mounted police units and officers in riot gear to help clear the streets. This incident generated severe criticism from the community as an example of police overreaction, and was widely reported by the media. As a result of this incident, several meetings took place. One of the most productive was attended by fourteen community leaders, Sergeant Simeone, Inspector Tully, and the First Deputy Commissioner of Police. Since this meeting, Sergeant Simeone has kept these community leaders informed by means of a letter every month or two, providing an update on police initiatives in the community. Subsequent to this incident, two additional African-American officers were assigned to foot patrol in New Cassel.

Police-Community Partnering Increased

In early August 1996, Sergeant Simeone became an active member of the New Cassel/Westbury Neighborhood Advisory Council (NAC) at the request of NAC leaders. The NAC is a broad based community group working for positive change in the community. During the first two weeks of August, Sergeant Simeone worked with the NAC and the Nassau County Police Planning Bureau on an application for a federal grant aimed at reducing public drinking. The Problem Solving Partnership Grant was a police-community partnership endeavor which the Chief of Patrol and the Third Precinct Commanding Officer brought to NAC. It was subsequently learned earlier this year that the application had been denied, however, the experience of working as partners with the community on this project was well worth the effort.

During the month of December, the Planning Bureau of the Police Department was once again busy working with Third Precinct officers and community- leaders in preparation for another federal grant application. This one involved the designation of New Cassel as a "Weed and Seed" site. Working with Assistant U.S. Attorney Mary O'Donoghue, the application was not able to be completed by the December 31, 1996 deadline. However, work on the application continues for consideration during the next filing period.

On May 29, 1997, the Nassau County Police Department graduated its first class from the Civilian Police Academy. Out of the seventeen (17) graduates, six (6) were nominated by the Third Precinct and all were civic leaders from the New Cassel/Westbury area.

Special Events Held

On August 7, 1996, a basketball game was held in New Cassel Park between police and neighborhood youth. This event was organized through the local Police Athletic League.

On August 31, 1996 Sergeant Simeone and Police Officer Clarence Hudson marched with the Christian Torch Bearers down Prospect Avenue. Escorted by the police bike patrols, this procession was aimed at reaching young people in the community. The march was followed by a celebration in New Cassel Park.

One week later on September 7th, Inspector Paul Tully and several Third Precinct police officers joined in a Candlelight March for Community Solidarity.

During November 1996, Sergeant Simeone and three Third Precinct Officers participated in a NAC sponsored Community Clean-up Day.

On June 21, 1997, NAC held its Second Annual Community Safety Day. Sergeant Simeone, as a member of the Safety Day Committee, helped plan the event. Through Inspector Tully, NAC applied for a grant from the David R. Portmore Memorial Fund. NAC was awarded

\$1400 and used most of this funding to purchase 100 bicycle safety helmets which were distributed to neighborhood children by Third Precinct Officers. The entire event has been very well received by the community. A copy of the Westbury Times featuring the event is attached.

Youth Programs Initiated

In September, Sergeant Simeone, in an attempt to address the high rate of New Cassel youth involved in the criminal justice system, became involved with the Juvenile Justice Committee of the NAC. Over the next few months, Sergeant Simeone helped plan a series of youth forums that were held in February during Black History Week in the Westbury Schools. In addition, Sergeant Simeone met with the Superintendent of Westbury Schools and with the Superintendent's support, organized and implemented the Adopt-A-Cop Program in the Fourth Grade. After getting the cops trained in October, the program got under way in November 1996. The program involves each officer being "adopted" by a Fourth Grade class and visiting once a month with his/her class. Five (5) Third Precinct officers volunteered to participate in the program which involves seven classes in two schools. The officers, in addition to the monthly visits, go on several field trips with the class. This program was critiqued by the teachers involved and it proved to be a big success. We are looking forward to expanding the program for the 1997-1998 school year.

The Youth Forums and the Adopt-A-Cop program have offered great opportunities for positive police-community interactions. The full impact on programs such as these is yet to be seen.

Outreach Project

In the fall of 1996, we considered several responses to the high burglary rate hi New Cassel. Inspector Tully wanted to discuss crime prevention and neighborhood watch programs with residents. It was decided that a door-to-door neighborhood Outreach Program would offer

the best chance of reaching the greatest number of residents. As a result, in early December sixteen (16) police officers who work the New Cassel area participated in visiting and delivering crime prevention material to approximately 1560 individual homes. The officers spoke with over three hundred fifty residents. This project took 65 staff hours. The overall message which the officers conveyed to residents was that police and residents of the community must work together to help prevent crime.

D. ASSESSMENT

The objective of these responses was to reduce crime and the fear of crime, as well as to curtail drug transactions and improve police-community relations. In terms of crime reduction, the program is an unqualified success as evidenced by the six month comparisons identified below:

**New Cassel
Crime Comparisons
(Jan. 01 to July 01)**

Robbery:

<u>1995 YTD</u>	<u>1996 YTD</u>	<u>1997 YTD</u>
28 cases	12 cases	9 cases
18 open	6 open	3 open
10 closed	6 closed	6 closed

Res. Burglary:

<u>1995 YTD</u>	<u>1996 YTD</u>	<u>1997 YTD</u>
15 cases	28 cases	11 cases
6 open	18 open	6 open
9 closed	10 closed	5 closed

Bus. Burglary:

<u>1995 YTD</u>	<u>1996 YTD</u>	<u>1997 YTD</u>
10 cases	5 cases	1 case
4 open	5 open	1 open
6 closed	0 closed	0 closed

Drug Related Arrests:

<u>1995 YTD</u>	<u>1996 YTD</u>	<u>1997 YTD</u>
78	102	188

Not only have burglaries and robberies been drastically reduced as measured by a comparison of three six-month time periods in 1995, 1996 and 1997, but the close out rate has increased as well.

Furthermore, the number of drug related arrests, for mostly crack cocaine and marijuana, has increased dramatically over the same time periods. We are convinced that it has been a combination of this increase in drug enforcement, coupled with the increase in "police presence" provided by the foot and bike patrol, which has emphasized "quality of life" enforcement, that has been the greatest single factor that has helped reduce robberies in New Cassel. The elimination of drug dealers and buyers from the vicinity has addressed the underlying factors that helped cause the problem: drug addicts needing money from victims in order to buy drugs.

Regarding burglaries, the assessment of the responses is less measurable. Part of the reduction may be attributable to the increase in police presence in the area; part may be due to the fact that burglars working the area may have been arrested for drug related offenses; part may be attributed to a decrease in illegal housing; and part may be due to "target hardening" which resulted from the Outreach Project in December, 1996. However, it is clear that the drastic reduction in burglaries was impacted by these POP responses.

The increase in drug arrests has had the desired effect. Drug dealers are no longer openly congregating on the corners, and the information from confidential informants is that the supply and availability of drugs and marijuana in New Cassel have been reduced. However, this problem is by no means solved: new dealers appear every day to take over "open" territory. What is measurable though, is that "ordinary" residents are far more visible in the streets and

stores adjacent to Prospect Avenue, which they formerly had avoided because of the intimidation by the drug dealers.

This issue of fear of crime is less measurable but anecdotal evidence and comments by the community leaders indicating that real reduction in the fear of crime has taken place is evident.

Similarly, the assessment of the improvement in police-community relations as a result of the responses is also more subjective. Attached to this report are several newspaper articles in which it is clear that a very positive police/community relationship is being established. In addition, the five components of the "special events" POP response provide literally hundreds of direct personal, enthusiastic, police/public contacts: the youth/cops basketball game, Clean-up Day, candlelight procession against drugs, rally in the park, and Safety Day program all helped to improve police/community relations.

Furthermore, the other responses have led directly to an improvement in police-community relations as well. The assignment of African-American police officers (five at present) has had a very positive impact in the community, providing young people in the community with role models. The school Adopt-a-Cop program has received great reviews. A copy of a letter from one of the school principals is attached. The community leaders' network also has been very successful, and the leaders have expressed their appreciation for being kept up to date on police initiatives. A sample of the letters which Sergeant Simeone sends out is attached.

Also, the Outreach Project in December, 1996, continues to have beneficial results. The time spent by the officers in going door-to-door in New Cassel, delivering crime prevention

material and speaking with residents, was well spent and very successful. Not only is it believed to be a factor in the current reduction of burglaries, but civic leaders and elected officials have often stated that it led directly to an improvement in police-community relations. A copy of the cover letter to the crime prevention brochures is attached. The police-community partnering efforts also have led directly to an improvement in police-community relations. By working together on the various grants and projects, police officers and residents have built a foundation for good communication and trust. Civic leaders now see Sergeant Simeone as a very active, capable member of their organization, a strong resource in the community.

In summary, all of these responses have produced results and helped to solve the problem of minimal or poor police/community relations. No single one would have achieved the results but more than anything else, these multi-faceted and varied responses have very visibly and measurably proven to the community that we are committed to reducing crime and drugs in the community at the same time as we are sensitive to community issues and concerned for the residents. We will continue carefully monitoring the crime statistics and observing changes in the level of apparent drug activity, at the same time as we continue with these initiatives which address the subjective issues of fear of crime and improved police/community relations.

SECTION 3

AGENCY AND OFFICER INFORMATION

1. This problem-solving initiative was adopted at the precinct level with the support of the Chief of Patrol and the Commissioner of Police.

2. The Precinct Commander, identified below, was trained in Problem-Oriented Policing when the program commenced in the Department in 1994. In addition, he has a Master's Degree in Criminal Justice, is a graduate of the FBI National academy (179th Session), and, as an adjunct professor at Nassau Community College, has taught Police/Community Relations. The sergeant assigned as the liaison to New Cassel, Sergeant Matthew Simeone, was an instructor in the Police Academy for six years, and was trained in Problem-Oriented Policing when promoted to Sergeant in 1995.

3. The officers who volunteered for this project were selected on the basis of their experience, abilities and initiative. It is a desirous assignment as it is specialized duty, and is regarded as being a "stepping stone" for those who seek even more preferred assignment, such as to the Bureau of Special Operations or the Detective Division.

4. The guidelines and resources used included those commonly available, including Professor Goldstein's book on Problem-Oriented Policing. One aspect of the project, the Community Outreach component, in which police officers went door-to-door in New Cassel delivering crime prevention material, speaking with community residents, was developed in part through the interaction of Inspector Tully with one of the presenters at last years POP Conference in San Diego. At that time Inspector Tully and Captain Hawell Craig Huneycutt, of the Charlotte, North Carolina Police Department, discussed methods of reaching out to those segments of the community that are too busy (jobs/family) to attend the traditional evening

meeting.

5. The SARA model is an effective guideline, but because the specific phases of the problem solving model are subject to changing conditions, the project rarely fits neatly into the four major components, especially with a multi-faceted project such as this.

6. Additional resources in terms of personnel needed to be committed to this project. Six additional police officers were assigned and one sergeant was relieved of his other duties in order to work full time as the community liaison and coordinator of department resources,

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