



**UW POLICE RESPONSE
TO ALCOHOLIC VAGRANTS**

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PREFACE

This particular problem solving initiative was begun by Officer Theo Darden with the support of his first line supervisor at the time, Sgt. Dale Burke. Sergeant Burke had previously done research on police agencies' responses to homeless problems while enrolled in the 82nd class of Northwestern University's School of Police Staff and Command. Sergeant Burke and Police Chief Susan Riseling provided advice, support and resources to Officer Darden in his quest to find permanent solutions to these issues. Officer Darden has also received assistance and support from other officers in his efforts to reduce crime and complaints in the lower campus area. Other officers have provided additional information and spent extra time in the area, both on foot and on bicycles, in an effort to maintain a visual presence during those periods when Theo is not working.

All police supervisors have attended problem-oriented policing training. All officers are expected to engage in a problem-solving effort at some level during each job performance evaluation year. In addition, each year since its inception, the Department has sent one supervisor and one officer to San Diego for the National Problem-Oriented Policing Conference.

No additional incentives are given to police officers involved in problem-solving as we are limited by State employment contracts in this area. We do, however, acknowledge and reward those

individuals involved in successful problem-solving efforts each year at our annual Awards banquet. We award Excellent Service plaques to each individual and the individual's name is engraved permanently on another plaque which is displayed prominently in the Department.

All departmental resources were used to facilitate crime analysis and other agencies and social service providers were consulted. As mentioned previously, the training and expertise that both Sgt. Burke and Chief Riseling had coining into this project, and which they graciously shared with Officer Darden, helped immensely. Officer Darden had also read and researched Professor Goldstein's writings on the subject prior to the project. In addition, he has had the added benefit of being able to meet with and discuss problem-solving with Prof. Goldstein directly throughout the project. Officer Darden is also a regular attendee at the Wisconsin Problem-Oriented Policing Seminars which are held quarterly around the State, and has in fact hosted one of these training seminars.

The model allowed us to identify a core group of alcoholic vagrants who were responsible for a disproportionate number of calls for service in a localized geographic area. They had also contributed to a perception of increased crime problems within the area.

Officer Darden's position was funded by money from the University not initially provided for in the budget. He was given office space in the Memorial Library and all office equipment was provided from existing Department resources. Officer Darden was also equipped with a cellular phone, pager and computer terminal with modem supplied by the Department.

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DEMOGRAPHICS

To understand the full nature of this project, you should be familiar with the demographics of the area. The University of Wisconsin-Madison is one of the largest universities in the nation with a total population of over 60,000 students and staff.

The area this project took place in is often referred to as the lower campus area. It serves as the gateway to the University and sits at the edge of an energetic, pedestrian dominated, downtown Madison business district. This area ties the city and the University together.

As you will read later in the project, these factors and others will play a major role in identifying a problem in the community. They will also significantly factor into planning a response to the problem which has plagued the University community for close to three decades.

INTRODUCTION

During the 1960's and early 1970's, the University of Wisconsin at Madison was facing one of its toughest challenges.

The anti-war protest movement became a part of Wisconsin's history that few residents will ever forget. It is believed that many veterans of the Vietnam war found Madison's politically correct climate to be the perfect forum in which to voice their opinions. While many of these veterans were alcohol and/or drug dependent and homeless, they found the student population to be very accepting of their behavior and lifestyle. It is also believed by many that Madison's reputation and the existence of the University also attracted many other segments of the homeless population.

No one knows for sure why transients and alcoholic vagrants came to Madison and the University. Factors which likely made Madison attractive are the city's economic strength, a strong social service infrastructure and its nationally recognized welfare programs which provided instant cash to people in need. The fact that the University contributes 40,000 students with excess cash and a naivete for being taken advantage of makes this an atmosphere conducive to the lifestyle which most vagrants choose to live.

In the years to follow, other factors would surface to support this lifestyle on and around the University campus. Although the protests would subside and welfare would become harder to receive, the University of Wisconsin-Madison continued to attract vagrants and transients. Some of these vagrants became public nuisances and began to disrupt the University community. Soon there would be a public outcry to do something about the problem.

THE NEED FOR CHANGE

While the lower campus community has traditionally been very tolerant of vagrants and the homeless, by the late 1980's and early 1990's many had begun to criticize the UW Police Department's handling of problems stemming from homelessness. Small business owners, UW building managers and staff had become frustrated with repeatedly trying to remove these people from their premises for some offensive conduct.

Police officers had to be very careful, however, in the ways they dealt with the vagrants. Although some people wanted and expected police intervention, others felt that vagrants should be left alone. Any type of police action taken against the vagrants was viewed as harassment. A small but vocal segment of the student population would prove to be a force to be reckoned with in addressing the issues of vagrancy on campus property. One of the main concerns of the students was the welfare and safety of these individuals. Students felt that vagrants had the right to choose to live as they please with support from the community and without fear of harassment or intimidation by police.

The concern for safety and welfare was reinforced by the death of a notable Madison alcoholic and occasional homeless person, Theresa McGovern. She was the daughter of George McGovern, former

U.S. Senator from South Dakota and Presidential candidate in 1972. Theresa McGovern died on the streets of Madison in the winter of 1994-95 after passing out (as a result of alcohol abuse) in a snowbank and subsequently freezing to death.

In June of 1995, UW-Madison Chancellor David Ward convened a committee consisting of representatives from the faculty, academic staff, concerned students, the Dean of Student's office, City of Madison and University Police, Dane County Board, and local social service agencies to study and develop recommendations to address safety issues in the lower campus area.

The group would specifically address the safety concerns of students, staff and visitors in the lower campus area and to look at how to deal with the growing homeless\vagrant population in the area. First and foremost, among the recommendations made by this committee at the conclusion of their efforts was for the University to establish its first community policing position, to be located in the lower campus area. The position would ultimately be filled in June of 1996 by me, Officer Theodore Darden.

SCANNING

The first thing that had to be done was to identify the specific problem. Through scanning I found that alcoholic vagrants

and homeless individuals were responsible for several different problems in the area.

The problems identified were:

- sleeping inside and outside of buildings\blocking entry and exit
- defecating and urinating in public places\often in public view
- public consumption of alcohol
- panhandling (sometimes aggressive)
- disruptive\disorderly conduct
- thefts
- drug usage
- littering

These individuals also caused problems for themselves:

- exposure to inclement weather
- exposure to diseases
- incapacitation due to alcohol abuse
- improper nutrition
- victimization due to reduced ability to care for themselves

Most of these problems were identified through police reports, records from other social service agencies in the county, citizen reports and the local news media. The next step was to analyze the data I had gathered.

ANALYSIS

When starting my analysis, I knew some of the work had been done. I knew part of the history of the problem as well as the target area of the problem. What I didn't know is why the problem continued. As I looked at calls for service to this area, I found that eleven individuals were responsible for approximately 70-75 percent of the calls in the lower campus. These eleven individuals were responsible for 435 calls for University Police service in a three-year period. Of these eleven individuals, it was found that only two were from the Madison area and the other nine had migrated to Madison. Some of these individuals had been around for more than a decade.

I then checked the records system in order to determine if there were time periods when activity was more frequent. It appeared as though the calls would start early in the morning when employees and students are just beginning their day. The reasoning behind this activity was thought to be that either the vagrants would begin panhandling as soon as pedestrians began appearing, or that the sleeping, intoxicated vagrants came to the attention of students and staff returning to work and school each morning. In either case, the vagrants were usually in a location which obstructed the normal and routine flow of pedestrian traffic.

The calls would then taper off until mid-afternoon and start

up again. By this time the vagrants would be intoxicated from the alcohol purchased from earlier panhandling and would become disruptive and disorderly .

The busiest time, however, turned out to be the evening hours when individuals would be found passed out either in or around campus buildings.

In my analysis I also found that the population in the lower campus area itself was at least partly to blame for the problem. I found through meetings with the staff that some incidents had occurred and were not reported because of sympathy for the individuals. Members of the population were also providing support for these individuals by giving them money which in turn was used to purchase alcohol. This was a very important finding in my analysis.

Now that my analysis was finished, the next step was to come up with responses to my findings. In past years, University Police officers basically used discretionary enforcement to deal with these individuals. In most cases the individuals were told to leave University property and if they complied, no further action was taken. If they failed to comply or if the behavior was more serious, then writing tickets, taking them into protective custody or incarcerating them was always an option. These responses alone had obviously not been working as the individuals involved

continued to repeat the unacceptable behavior and their numbers were increasing. Through my analysis, I would tailor my responses toward the eleven individuals mentioned.

RESPONSE

I knew I had to have several responses to be effective with this group. My goal was to reduce the amount of calls for police service required for these individuals and to try and find a permanent solution to the problem. I also hoped to involve the community in helping to solve the problem rather than unwittingly enabling it to continue. Through my response, I wanted to change the public's perception of the area. Another response had already been provided for me, also as a result of a recommendation from the Lower Campus Concerns Committee. An outreach worker was funded by the University to assist me with the homeless\vagrant issue in the lower campus area.

From my analysis I came up with the following responses:

- frequent contacts with vagrants to build trust and rapport
- providing help in finding housing and maximizing resources
- work closely with shelters and food pantries
- work closely with other social service agencies
- strict enforcement of all unacceptable behavior
- develop partnership with District Attorney's Office

- communicate and share information with other police agencies
- educate the University community about the issues

The Department provided me with most of the resources I needed to respond properly to the problem. Chief Susan Riseling and recently promoted Lt. Dale Burke of the University Police Department were very instrumental in this process. Other officers were also willing to assist me in the area in an attempt to proactively reduce calls for service.

In a three-month timeframe all the responses were implemented. My schedule was flexible enough to come in at varied hours to make frequent contacts with the vagrants. I used my contacts with the group to assess which vagrants were in need of which services. I would share that information with the outreach worker and other agencies. This information included a personal history of each individual, the nature of their drug or alcohol dependency, and their willingness to seek treatment and/or shelter.

I used enforcement whenever an individual(s) in the group would violate the law. Enforcement was important because it showed them I was not going to tolerate any unacceptable/unlawful behavior. I also worked with the District Attorney's Office and asked for restrictions on any of the vagrants who refused treatment and violated the law. I requested that vagrants found guilty of criminal behavior on campus be banned from campus for an

undetermined length of time. I would also request court ordered treatment for illness or disease when appropriate.

Finally, I had to educate the general public in the area. I used small group, informal meetings to inform the community that other options existed to assist the vagrants which were preferable to just giving them money. I advised the community to report any illegal or unacceptable activity that they might witness in the area. I also started a lower campus area crimewatch program to keep the community involved in sharing responsibility for their safety and security.

ASSESSMENT

Assessing the responses in this project is still ongoing. However, we have noticed a very significant decrease in calls for service in the area from November 1996 to June 1997. There have been twelve calls for service involving the eleven individuals in that eight month time period.

Dealing effectively with these eleven chronic offenders has made it easier to identify and assist new vagrants to the area. We no longer have a problem with any new vagrants staying in the area for more than a week. The response time in dealing with new vagrants is immediate. We try to connect them with the necessary

social services as soon as possible before they become a problem.

What has happened to the eleven individuals targeted as a result of this POP project?

- 3 left Madison (2 found jobs in another state, 1 relocated).
- 1 died of alcohol-related illness.
- 2 are in alcohol treatment facilities (1 at an Indian reservation and 1 at "The Theresa McGovern Center" in Monona, Wisconsin).
- 1 went to jail and has since been released. We have had one contact with the individual since his release in Jan. 1997.
- 3 found housing.
- 1 was in treatment for six months but has since relapsed. No calls for service involving that individual since Oct. 1996.

I still work very closely with all the agencies involved. This plan will need a continued effort to maintain its results. The community has been very receptive to the responses of the plan and continues to be supportive and involved. I have learned through, my many meetings and daily contacts with faculty, staff and pedestrians that public perception of safety has improved dramatically since the vagrants no longer maintain a continued presence in the area.