

SUBMISSION FOR OPERATION SPOTLIGHT/ pAinnna ...  
FOR HERMAN GOLDSTEIN AWARD

OPERATION SPOTLIGHT ABSTRACT  
CPL. FREDRICK AVENDORPH

SCANNING:

There was a need inside Palmer Park, Maryland to improve public safety, and offender's chances of successfully reintegrating into the community, focusing on both youthful and adult offenders, who are already in the community, and who have a history of serious or violent offenses, or who may be disruptive to the community's safety.

ANALYSIS:

Operation Spotlight began listening to the concerns of the citizens regarding criminal activities in their neighborhoods; to take immediate action to resolve the problems created by offenders under supervision, and then provide feedback to the citizens on the resolution of these problems.

RESPONSE:

Using a teamwork concept, COMMUNITY POLICE OFFICERS conduct field investigations and observations of Operation Spotlight offenders in conjunction with other team members; provide relevant crime analysis data to team members; investigate and relay concerns and complaints from citizens of illegal conduct of Operation Spotlight offenders (and offenders not in the program) to team members, and alert non-participating police officers of special situations involving Operation Spotlight offenders, which may affect other officers or the community; COMMUNITY BASED PAROLE/PROBATION OFFICERS supervise a caseload of approximately 65 at risk/violent offenders to make weekly office and home visits; prepare and provide identifying offender data to COMMUNITY POLICE OFFICERS assigned to Operation Spotlight; utilize community resources and advise citizens of Operation Spotlight objectives, attend community meeting's, and elicit their assistance in program projects; THE CITIZENS share information with the COMMUNITY POLICE OFFICERS AND COMMUNITY PAROLE/PROBATION OFFICERS about criminal activities within the community, provide assistance and resources to offenders, who have exhibited a sincere desire to become productive members of the community, and participate in the renovation and renewal of their community.

ASSESSMENT:

Accountability and responsibility/ employment/ court ordered substance abuse counselling, and graduated sanctions/ which provide immediate intervention in recidivist activities. These may include volunteer community work, increased reporting, increased urinalysis, and supervisory reprimands, to more stringent sanction, which include curfews, electronic monitoring, parole-retake warrants, and violation of probation warrants.

## OPERATION SPOTLIGHT DESCRIPTION

### CPL. FREDRICK AVENDORPH

#### SCANNING:

Palmer Park is a traditional and established African-American community of over 5,000 residents inside Prince George's County, Maryland. It is also the home to Prince George's County Police Headquarters. In the summer of 1995, Palmer Park was experiencing an increase in crime, specifically relating to drugs, assaults, robberies, and shooting's, which included homicides. The problem was further identified by the Community Policing Officer as being committed by violent offenders under parole or probation supervision, or by those formally under supervision. There were a large number of offenders for drug related distribution and possession offenses, and the assaults were a direct result of the drug activity. The Community Policing officer received monthly statistics on calls for service, which indicated "drug pockets," where these offenders lived and/or conducted business. Criminal history checks revealed all the violent offenders had several drug related charges in connection with other violent offenses. This problem was selected as priority, because of the close proximity of the incidents, and the brazenness of the criminal activity within 75 yards of the front doors of the third police district.

#### ANALYSIS:

Drugs and overall crime inside Palmer Park have been an ongoing problem for many years. What made this problem dangerous, was the

caliber of the offender; violent and repeat offenders operating within the purview of the police department. As a result, there was no remorse or feeling's for the law-abiding citizens, no regard for human life, and no responsibility or accountability for their actions.

Further analysis revealed a lack of supervision and sanctions on offenders on parole or probation for certain crimes. For instance the majority of violent offenders had criminal history backgrounds for drug related crimes, either through distribution, sales, possession, or as a user. Incidents of assaults were invariably drug related, and youth gang activity increased over both territorial and drug turf. Analysis also determined most of the juveniles involved in criminal activity, were under the supervision of the Department of Juvenile Justice system. Several harms seemed consistent:

1. Youth related assaults occurred in the community and schools juveniles from the community attended.
2. Juveniles congregated together in "patches" within Palmer Park, and gravitated towards their peers, instead of their parents or youth-oriented programs.
3. More youth were arrested for possession and possession with intent to distribute drugs.
4. Gang related graffiti began to appear as a consequence of drug related activity.

Very little was done in the past, with no fault of the police department or the other agencies. There was a lack of communication

between the community and the police department, and no communication between the community, the police department, and parole and probation. There was definitely no communication with the criminal element.

Crime analysis did not show statistics on prosecution, because residents were intimidated and afraid. However data on overall crime did bring up several issues:

1. environmental- abandoned and vacant dwelling's, where the criminal element operated, littered and unkept lots, trash, and numerous code violations.
2. federally subsidized housing- a large influx of people from Washington, DC, and other areas with criminal backgrounds into Palmer Park.
3. location of the "crime pockets;" Are they consistent with past problems? Are the same offenders committing the same crimes?

Community leaders and residents inside Palmer Park were brought into the problem solving component, and sat in during the preliminary and final discussions regarding Operation Spotlight inside Palmer Park. The residents also felt, by having supervised offenders report to the parole/probation officer inside Palmer Park, they would gain valuable information on the criminal element surrounding them, and it would be of immense assistance to the Community Policing Officer and other components of the police department. It also provided a means of communication between the

Palmer Park community/ and the Community Supervision member's, Maryland parole and Probation, and the Maryland Department of Juvenile Justice.

RESPONSE:

Crime analysis research showed a pattern of criminal recidivism. Those selling drugs, committing robberies and burglaries, and assaults were on parole or probation, or have a past history of one or both. There was a need for more intensive supervision, along with the need for the Community Policing Officer to know, who the violent offenders are inside the community for investigative closure, proactive solutions, and officer safety. Data supported much of the criminal history of these violent offenders to have backgrounds in assaults on police officers, and resisting arrest charges.

The ideology behind Operation Spotlight was teamwork, between the Prince George's County Police Department, Maryland State Parole and Probation, and the Maryland Department of Juvenile Justice. The key to the success of this program was a decrease in authoritative demeanor. What is meant by this statement; if the community supervision component fully utilizes the "police" mentality with clients who are not intimidated by any form of control, nothing is accomplished. A "firm but fair" policy was initiated, and respect became the determining factor. There will always be a dislike for authority, but in most cases, if the violent offender sees a working relationship with the criminal justice system, the violent

offender will work with the program.

Proximity to reporting was essential for success. There was no excuse for an Operation Spotlight client to miss a meeting inside Palmer Park for the following reasons:

1. The Operation Spotlight office is centrally located in Palmer Park, and no one in the program has to walk more than six blocks.
2. It demands accountability and responsibility for reporting, and being punctual.
3. It provided a mechanism for having the client report to the Community Policing Officer's "turf." The client has to see and talk to the police officer in the police officer's environment/ which makes it easier for the home visitation.

A Client in the Operation Spotlight program must become gainfully employed, and show determination to find employment if not working or going to school.

A violent offender in the Operation Spotlight program has a minimum office visit of fifteen minutes. The client will be asked important questions by the Community Supervision Officer and the Community Policing Officer, and is fully expected to be truthful. For instance, the team becomes familiar with each client, their moods, their emotions, their roles as people. In 90% of each case, the team can immediately detect a problem, and in the case of

urinalysis, the offender will admit drug usage before the test, giving room to work with the offender, and monitor substance abuse counselling. Some offender's have to submit a urinalysis twice a week; some offenders have to report every day, depending on their attitudes towards their personal success, and the Operation Spotlight program.

Resources inside Palmer Park were minimal in the beginning of the Operation Spotlight program. Office space was donated by a local Palmer Park shopping Center business owner, but he died before remodelling the office. For two years, the Spotlight team had no heat, air conditioning, and a door that opened one quarter of the way. However the Spotlight team has prospered, and the program has advanced. The Palmer Park Neighborhood Action Partnership, a local community organization has provided support, a job referral bank, and community volunteer assignments.

Few problems were encountered, when the program began in July, 1996. There was one business owner inside the shopping center who was opposed to our having office space, but since our arrival, drug dealing and prostitution has decreased to almost nothing, loitering is fully enforced, and there have been no commercial armed robberies. Another problem were offenders not taking the program seriously. However the "strong will" of the Operation Spotlight team prevailed.

The Governor and Lieutenant Governor of Maryland, Maryland



Department of Crime Prevention and Control, Prince George's County Police Department, Maryland State Parole/Probation, Maryland Department of Juvenile Justice, and the Palmer Park Neighborhood Action Partnership and Palmer Park Citizens Association have been extremely supportive in the Operation Spotlight program in Palmer Park.

#### ASSESSMENT!

The overall results of the response plan are excellent. There are between 65-70 adult violent offenders, and 12-15 juvenile violent offenders. Approximately 85% of the adult caseload are employed, with several working two or three jobs. The Community Policing Officer and Senior Parole Officer assisted a client in obtaining space for his business by convincing the owner of the space the client was headed in a positive direction. Approximately 65% of the adult offenders are actively involved in court ordered or mandatory substance abuse counselling. There has been a low recidivist rate of 12%, since July, 1996. The recidivism frequency does not include new charges; it only relates to violation of parole or probation. Alternative to idleness, which lead to criminal activity, such as employment, counselling, community volunteer projects, and innovative sanctions have been very successful. These results have been measured in a new form of community awareness. Several adult violent offenders are involved as coaches in the Palmer Park Boy's and Girl's Club, and act as mentors to juveniles in the program.

There is always a concern about displacement of crime into other

jurisdictions and communities. There is a decrease in crime inside Palmer Park with violent offenders in the Operation Spotlight program, but these same offenders commit crimes outside Palmer Park, when they become involved with former associates, or become "weak." Criminal activity is "learned," and in the process of higher education, some never change, they merely do it a different way.

Authorization for a mobile trailer to replace the satellite office is in motion. By moving the Operation Spotlight program into this trailer; it will provide for a more conducive atmosphere to increase our expanding capabilities.

There has been change in the widespread negative attitude towards police and parole agents for three quarters of the adult offenders; we are slowly working with the juvenile offenders. One on one, the juvenile offenders show respect, however it is a sign of weakness to communicate with law enforcement as a whole. There have been episodes of offenders adamant about the parole agent, and especially the Community Policing Officer conducting home visitations, but those fears have been alleviated.

There will be a continuing effort to monitor and maintain results, and to improve on mistakes we have made in the past.

AGENCY AND OFFICER INFORMATION:

The level within the Prince George's County Police Department of this problem solving initiative was with a few select officer's within Community Oriented Policing.

All of the Community Policing Officer's in the Operation Spotlight program received training in both problem oriented policing and problem solving, utilizing the SARA model.

Additional incentives given to officers engaged in problem solving were "flex" hours, which adapt to the community and the related problems.

Operation Spotlight in Palmer Park was a pilot project, and a manual, or Standard Operating Procedure was created by the Operation Spotlight team in Palmer Park. Problem solving was introduced to the Community Supervision team by the Community Policing Officer.

The issues and problems, which were criminal activity being committed by violent offenders under parole or probation supervision, were addressed using the problem solving SARA model.

The Operation Spotlight project is under the auspices of the Hotspots initiative grant under the Maryland Department of Crime Control and Prevention.

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