

***APPLICATION FOR 1999 HERMAN GOLDSTEIN AWARD FOR
EXCELLENCE IN PROBLEM-ORIENTED POLICING***

"PROJECT PKPPERCORN"

99-54

ABSTRACT

The City of Burnaby is located between the Cities of Vancouver to the west and New Westminster to the east, in the Province of British Columbia, Canada. The Greater Vancouver area supports a population of nearly two million people, although only approximately 190,000 are Burnaby residents. The City experiences a large increase in daytime population as it is composed of significant commercial and industrial areas and is home to two major post secondary educational institutions. The police agency of jurisdiction is the Royal Canadian Mounted Police with an established strength of 241 sworn officers.

The police started receiving complaints in early 1998 concerning a marked increase in drug activity in the vicinity of an Advanced Light Rapid Transit station. This station, bordered by a large shopping complex; an area of high density, affordable housing; and a new elementary school is one of the busiest on the ALRT route. Police quickly verified that this was an actual, rather than a perceived problem. Neighbouring police departments were also starting to feel the impact of this activity.

Analysis revealed that there was a convergence of factors which contributed to this problem, such as the close proximity of transit, the large shopping complex and low rent housing. The majority of persons involved in the drug trade were refugee claimants from Honduras who had recently arrived in Canada. These refugees were congregating in three low rent apartment buildings in the area.

The impact of this influx was felt throughout the greater Vancouver area. They were using the apartments in Burnaby to produce and distribute 'crack' cocaine. Potential buyers were being drawn into the area, resulting in the shopping complex being victimized. Area residents were intimidated and school officials expressed concern for student safety.

The response developed involved partnership with the local business community, residents, the school, various enforcement agencies, as well as a number of United States agencies. Our approach to resolve the problem involved forming two task forces, each to address the problem from a predetermined perspective. The one task force focused on traditional enforcement objectives, while the other addressed the environmental issues associated with the activity. The results of this approach proved to be very effective as a significant drop in reported crime occurred which was recognized and applauded by elected Municipal representatives, the media, the business community, school administrators and most important, area residents.

SCANNING

In early 1998 police started to receive complaints from the public concerning apparent drug trafficking activity in and around an Advanced Light Rapid Transit (ALRT) station. This station, bordered by the Metrotown Shopping Complex, (the second largest shopping center in western Canada); a large area of low rent, high density housing; and a newly opened elementary school had traditionally been one of the highest traffic volume stations along the entire ALRT route. Uniform patrol members and our Neighbourhood Liaison Officers tasked with ownership of this area were able to verify that this was an actual problem quite quickly and attempted to curtail the activities through increased patrols. This had no impact on the drug trafficking, in fact increases in the numbers of individuals selling drugs as well as the hours the activities occurred was noted.

Through investigation, three apartment buildings on Dow Avenue, in the immediate area were identified as the base of operations for a growing number of Central Americans claiming refugee status in Canada. It was these individuals, many with limited English language skills, who were creating the drug trafficking problem. Based on police observations, the problem appeared to be the manufacturing and distribution of crack cocaine by these persons. Crack cocaine had not been an enforcement problem up until this point in time, however it was quickly realized that a market was being created through the activities of this group. The scope of the problem rapidly increased to include the cities of Vancouver and New Westminster due to the ease of access to transit. The perpetrators utilized the ALRT to move from their base of operations in Burnaby to neighbouring communities to distribute crack cocaine. As they were also active within our community, potential buyers were using the transit system to come into Burnaby to buy the drug, and commit property crimes to support their growing dependence.

The quality of life and livability for area residents was visibly deteriorating. Members of the community started contacting police regularly expressing concern and fear about what was occurring in their neighbourhood. From January 1,1998 to June 30,1998 police received 293 calls for service in and around the three apartment buildings, which only contained between 15 and 20 suites per building. These calls all related to reported criminal activity.

Research of Municipal taxation records revealed that these three apartment buildings were owned by a common landlord. It was apparent from contact with him that he was negligent in exercising the responsibilities of an owner. As such, these buildings degenerated physically and the demographics of the area changed dramatically, indicating that the building owner put profit ahead of the well-being of the surrounding community.

As mentioned, an elementary school was located adjacent to the three apartment buildings. School administrators were extremely concerned about the safety of themselves and their students as well as the negative influences occupants of these buildings had on the children. They were in constant contact with our School Liaison Officer responsible for this area, attempting to find a resolve to the situation.

The crack cocaine distribution scheme, once identified, spread rapidly, impacting not only Burnaby but our neighbouring communities. It became a dominant community concern for a number of police agencies, as the numbers of users mushroomed, including many of our youth. The availability, price and ease of use all lead to its appeal for many recreational drug users, as well as hard core substance dependant individuals. The highly addictive nature of crack cocaine ensured the sellers

repeat business. As its wrath was being experienced by the various communities, the media began to feature stories on a daily basis, both in support of, and critical of police actions in dealing with the problem.

ANALYSIS

Intelligence was gathered utilizing our Crime Analysis software; the canvassing of other vested agencies; consulting with the residents of the affected area; surveillance by Drug Section, Neighbourhood Liaison Unit and School Liaison Officers; and the recruiting of informants all in an effort to understand the developing situation.

For the purposes of conducting analysis, the City of Burnaby is divided into specific 'atoms'. This allows the police to obtain and examine crime statistics for small geographic areas. Crime analysis revealed that from January 1, 1998 to June 30, 1998 police had received 1,114 calls for service within the atom containing the noted apartment buildings and ALRT station.

This drug situation was unique in that it developed and escalated simultaneously because of the large number (300) of refugee claimants descending into a small geographic area in Burnaby. This was a phenomenon never before experienced in the community. These refugees were working in shifts making the crack cocaine available to users twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. Initially, the police simply did not understand what they were facing. It was learned that Portland, Oregon had experienced a similar situation and liaison with their Central Precinct revealed that the pattern experienced in Burnaby was in fact the 'modus operandi' for this particular ethnic group.

Through intelligence received it was learned this group of individuals was from Honduras and were actually recruited to come to Canada specifically to traffic drugs. Interviews with the refugee claimants, as well as informants, revealed that organized recruiters in Honduras promised transportation to Canada, \$500.00 a month in Social Assistance from the Provincial Government and \$200.00 a day in profit from selling drugs. Given the standard of living in Honduras, this offer was very appealing and there was no shortage of volunteers. The majority of persons involved were young adult males. Of note, by international standards, many consider Canada's immigration laws liberal. As a result, illegal border crossings and subsequent claims for refugee status were appealing to the Hondurans.

Upon arrival in Canada, the Honduran refugees congregated in three adjacent apartment buildings on Dow Avenue in Burnaby. Acquiescence of the landlord contributed to the escalating problem. Once a nucleus of Hondurans established themselves in these apartment buildings, subsequent refugee claimants were drawn to this location. United States Border Patrol reported that individuals intercepted near the border had the Dow Avenue apartment addresses on their persons, presumably so they knew where to go when they arrived in Canada.

Area residents and police observed a marked dilapidation of the apartment buildings. Broken windows, doors with locks removed, holes in walls, discarded vehicles and furniture became common place in and around the apartment buildings. Compounding this was management's desire to obtain the most revenue possible by creating illegal suites in previously unused storage areas and renting individual apartments to multiple tenants. These practices in essence allowed the Hondurans to take control of the three apartment buildings, consisting of more than fifty apartments in total.

Calls for police service continued to increase negatively impacting the quality of life for residents of the surrounding area. Traditional enforcement methods and response to call had no impact on this problem, creating the need for an innovative police approach. Individually, citizens were concerned not only for their own safety but also for the safety of children attending the neighbouring school. Unfortunately, area residents were not taking ownership of this problem, but abdicated full responsibility to the police.

During our analysis, a Neighbourhood Liaison Constable spoke to the owner of the apartments to ascertain the nature and extent of the problem occurring within his three apartment buildings. The owner was less than forthright and provided essentially no insight into the problem.

An expanded crime analysis revealed the true extent of the problem. It was determined that there was a significant increase in all types of crime in the surrounding area, encompassing everything from robberies, theft of and from motor vehicles, prostitution, shoplifting and assaults. As an aside, other criminals were being attracted to the area and were conducting crime such as 'fencing' stolen goods, 'pimping' and trafficking in other drugs that the Hondurans did not have access to. This created a further deterioration of the neighbourhood, exemplified by resident complaints of finding used condoms and needles in the area. All of this contributed to an increased fear of crime and a decrease in the livability of the neighbourhood.

RESPONSE

Following our analysis, it was obvious that a number of pertinent issues needed to be addressed in responding to this problem for the impact to be meaningful and lasting. While the overall policing intent for this project was to: 1) reduce drug trafficking activities; and 2) reduce criminal activities which were associated with drug use, in a specific location within the City of Burnaby and other neighbouring municipalities, it was realized that other strategies could also be utilized effectively.

It was determined that a "two pronged" approach would be taken to deal with this problem. As a result steps were undertaken to create two separate, but coordinated task forces to address the problem from differing perspectives. One of the task forces was tasked with investigating and charging those responsible for the criminal activity in a traditional policing manner. In order to accomplish this, neighbouring police agencies, specialized support units and investigators from Citizenship and Immigration Canada, as well as our own Drug Section, Neighbourhood Liaison Unit, School Liaison and seconded members from uniform duties were tasked with adopting a multifaceted approach to the problem, utilizing surveillance, undercover officers, and informants to stop the flow of this drug to the community.

The second task force, which was unique at the time, was a partnership formed by a Neighbourhood Liaison Constable with a Provincial Welfare Investigator, a Citizenship and Immigration Canada Investigator, a Revenue Canada-Taxation Investigator, a Fire Department Inspector, a Building Inspector, Health Department Inspector, City Licencing office and even the City Manager, Mayor and City Councillors. This group was tasked with addressing what is described as

"social engineering." This is, in essence, the livability and area environmental issues, which, while not traditionally a policing issue, certainly has an impact on the attractiveness of the area to the criminal element.

Once a course of action was established, members of the Portland, Oregon Bureau of Police, United States Immigration and Naturalization Service and Border Patrol, who had experience in dealing with this ethnic group and their criminal methods were invited to Canada to instruct all the investigators, politicians and vested partners concerning their knowledge of the problem. Once enlightened, the two task forces were much better prepared to address the problem in an effective and direct manner. By utilizing the knowledge that other police personnel possessed in developing a response to the problem, it is felt that countless hours were saved in developing action plans. The avenue favored by investigators in this case was the repatriation of the criminals to their homeland through immigration procedures. As Canada's immigration system is somewhat different from the United States, several aspects of this strategy had to be reworked in order to accomplish some of the goals desired.

The *"social engineering"* task force set about paying surprise visits to the apartment buildings, inspecting units, interviewing tenants and inspecting the landlord's financial records under the tax laws. All infractions of building, health, fire and licencing bylaws were documented. A 'zero tolerance' strategy was used in all avenues of dealing with the problem. All persons were documented and particulars supplied to the enforcement task force. After all the apartments and buildings had been inspected and numerous violations uncovered, the Mayor and Council called the owner before them for an "in camera" meeting. Included in this meeting were many of the members of the task force

who assisted in discussing the various deficiencies in his buildings. At the conclusion of the meeting, the landlord was given two weeks to correct all violations or he would lose his occupancy permit, effectively shutting down the apartment buildings.

As part of this task force function, City maintenance workers were tasked with cleaning up the immediate area and maintaining an acceptable standard. This involved removing a great deal of garbage, discarded furniture, derelict vehicles and general refuse that accompanies drug dealing and related activities. This helped to reduce the run-down appearance of the area and ease the concerns of residents.

The next aspect involved British Columbia Transit agreeing to Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) recommendations made by the investigators with regard to the ALRT stations where the dealer traffic was heaviest. By removing the conditions which made these types of activities conducive, incidents were reduced at these sites. Transit also redirected their security personnel to concentrate on stations where problems had been identified. Information regarding suspects was immediately passed on to police by Transit Security.

Shopping center management became working partners with police, strategically placing surveillance cameras at key locations to both assist the enforcement team as well as to provide valuable intelligence. Security officers on site were constantly exchanging information with police on sellers working in the area and wherever possible, curtailed their activities by having the dealers move off the shopping center property.

Block Watch groups were utilized to observe and record suspected criminal activity in the neighbourhood which they immediately reported to police. At the same time the "Crime Free Multi-Housing" program was introduced to the area, to encourage local apartment managers and owners to take an active role in reducing crime in their neighbourhoods.

In addition, the Citizen's Crime patrol began concentrating their efforts in the area, recording the activities surrounding the suspected buildings. All information was then forwarded to the investigators for analysis.

One of the earliest strategies employed was the formation of a 'concerned citizens group' in the immediate area to encourage citizens to take ownership of the problem and assist in its resolve. This group provided intelligence information regularly, as well as offering a number of valuable ideas to deal with the situation. Furthermore, the well established District Community Policing Consultative Group wrote to the Federal Minister of Immigration demanding that a closer look be taken at this situation and that viable solutions be investigated to deal with the refugee problem.

The task force dealing with time honored enforcement techniques was comprised of numerous investigators, as previously outlined. Officers with Spanish language capabilities were factored into the resourcing needs of this group. The eighteen officers, comprised of uniform, plainclothes and undercover personnel, working in the area also exercised a "zero tolerance" approach in dealing with all persons apprehended. It was apparent that there existed various levels of a drug regime that needed to be attacked to be successful, so not only was street level enforcement undertaken, using the undercover/surveillance techniques, but informants were recruited to provide key information on the

production of the crack cocaine. Throughout this entire project, both task forces were providing a dedicated crime analyst with information which was placed in a file management software program to provide daily activity reports, target profiles, and crime analysis required when dealing with the nearly three hundred suspects identified during this project.

During the operation one (1) pound of crack cocaine was seized, along with a substantial amount of money from one of the mid-level traffickers when he was arrested while delivering a one day supply of the drug to street level dealers in the area. In another instance, eight (8) persons were arrested and several ounces of crack cocaine were seized from a production site, in one of the apartment buildings. Both of these events received extensive media coverage, as one of the enforcement tactics was to discourage the activity through the enabling of wide coverage of the events on television and in print. The combined impact of these two significant seizures, and the concentrated street level enforcement effectively curtailed the open criminal activity in the area very quickly, particularly when coordinated with all the other strategies undertaken.

In dealing with charged persons, Federal Crown Counsel (Prosecutor) was approached and the circumstances surrounding the investigation laid out. Crown Counsel agreed to help coordinate release conditions for any persons in the target group who were arrested and charged with an offence. As part of the Bail conditions, a Court ordered prohibition was obtained restricting the accused persons from returning to specific geographic locations within the Cities of Vancouver, Burnaby and New Westminster where the preponderance of drug trafficking activity was occurring.

Once the area was cleansed of the problem, only a maintained presence has been required to discourage any reoccurrence.

ASSESSMENT

In total, approximately 280 persons were identified during this project, with a significant number ultimately charged with a variety of criminal offences. Most of this number were found to be Honduran citizens claiming refugee status in Canada. With the numerous media stories surrounding the problem and the voiced concerns of citizens, our Immigration Adjudicators and Investigators are looking much more favorably on deportation of individuals convicted of drug trafficking, or other serious criminal offences, a situation that was unheard of prior to this problem coming to the fore. This has resulted in many of these refugee claimants being sent back to Honduras, with many more in various stages of deportation. In addition, a great deal of positive feedback has been received from City officials, the media, the business community, school administrators and area residents on the prompt and effective method of dealing with a serious problem. Correspondence relating to one of the comments received is attached.

The owner of the Dow Avenue apartment buildings, who appeared more interested in financial gain than in the concerns of the neighbourhood, was cited for numerous building/health and fire code violations relating to his properties. These violations, identified by the task force, resulted in City officials revoking his occupancy permit in July, 1998 effectively emptying all three apartment buildings until they were brought up to standard. This included an Order issued under the Health Act to have the buildings treated by pest control, a major clean up of the property was ordered, fire regulation

violations had to be addressed and all apartments had to be brought up to building code standards. When all the work was completed and inspected at the end of September, 1998, any financial gain he had realized and substantially more had been invested in the properties. These buildings are now contributing to the overall quality of life in this neighbourhood.

Following this project a crime analysis examination revealed that calls for service in the area dropped by approximately 6% overall in the six months following the project. In addition, Dow Avenue specially showed a decrease during the same period of almost 33%, as shown on the attached graph. As well, it would appear, through on-site observation that drug activity in the area has been significantly reduced. While some of this reduction may be due to displacement, which was expected, it is interesting to note that there has been a marked decrease in property crime in the area as well. As mentioned, ongoing monitoring of this area is essential to prevent any reoccurrence as it is recognized the locale is conducive to criminal enterprise.

AGENCY AND OFFICER INFORMATION

Initially this problem was identified and two Neighbourhood Liaison Officers were assigned to assess the nature and extent of the problem. Once the assessment was completed, it became clear that considerable resources would be required to deal with this particular problem. No additional funding beyond the existing unit budget was available to address the problem. Resourcing was accomplished through the redeployment of various officers and/or units with the Detachment.

Our Neighbourhood Liaison Officers are well trained in Problem Oriented Policing (POP) and utilize the "Clients, Acquiring and Analyzing Information, Partnerships, Response and Assessment" (CAPRA) model for their action plan. This is, in effect, the same as the SARA model and for the purposes this presentation, it has been re-formatted to fall within the SARA guidelines. Early in the project, Senior Management empowered these Neighbourhood Liaison Officers to make use of any and all resources available to them, and to establish their own contacts within the local community and at all levels of Government. One of these officers played a key role in funneling all intelligence, coordinating resource needs and acting in a liaison capacity for all the various agencies and departments involved in this project. The other played a lead role in the response to the problem by spearheading one of the task forces coordinating his efforts closely with the Drug Section commander who was in charge of the enforcement task force.

Through the use of the our Crime Analysis computer, along with the analyst, officers were able to chart the number of calls for service in the area immediately affected by the criminal activity in question. Use of the file management software during the project assisted greatly in identifying and tracking activities of the numerous individuals involved in the use and trafficking of crack cocaine. These two tools assisted in the sharing of information with police departments in other jurisdictions who were dealing with the same problem. The open lines of communication and exchange of information that was established early was essential to a successful conclusion to this project.

The problem solving model used in this case was simple, direct and to the point, while at the same time exercised innovative measures. Although this project was the largest POP project undertaken by this Detachment, the use of the CAPRA model allowed the investigators to keep focused on their

goals and priorities at each phase of the operation. Once the action plan was properly outlined and implemented, the guidelines remained clear.

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