Operation "Right T.R.A.C."

Proactive Prevention of Vehicle Thefts Through Public Awareness in Fort Lauderdale, Florida

by Captain Dave Ecklund

Fort Lauderdale (Florida)
Police Department

The Greater Fort Lauderdale area (Broward County), located twenty miles north of Miami, is host to 4.5 million visitors from around the world. With a population of 1,152,000, the Greater Fort Lauderdale area has a work force of 70{),000.

The city of Fort Lauderdale has a population of approximately 150,000. Its port, Port Everglades, provides a gateway to the Caribbean for cruise ships and international trade.

As in many other cities, property crime and vehicle theft—ranging from joyriding to organized theft—have become a major concern. Incidents of vehicle theft have been decreasing throughout the rest of Florida, but in Fort Lauderdale. vehicle theft has increased greatly in recent years.

During 1996, 3,300 vehicles were reported stolen. a 13-percent increase from 1995. During the first eight months of 1997, more than 2.200 vehicles were reported stolen, a 30-percent increase over the same time period in 1996.

SCANNING

Numerous factors contribute to this problem. South Florida is a part of a large metropolitan area. which includes Miami-Dade. Broward and Palm Beach Counties. Approximately 50 percent of vehicles reported stolen in the state of Florida are stolen in these three counties. Fort Lauderdale is a major seaport for vehicle shipment to South America, the Caribbean and Europe, and this provides a convenient avenue for exporting stolen vehicles.

Combined efforts, such as task force operations and other vehicle theft initiatives. have significantly improved the investigation and prosecution of vehicle-theft-related offenses.

The police department provided crime prevention presentations to homeowner and business associations, and sponsored activities several times a year. including free Vehicle Identification Number (VIN) etching of vehicles for the public. However, vehicle theft rates still increased.

ANALYSIS

The Auto Theft Unit was charged with providing a more proactive, community-based program. Who better to provide expertise on what vehicles were being stolen, who steals vehicles and how they stole these vehicles, than the unit that regularly investigates these incidents on a daily basis'?

As we developed Operation "Right T.R.A.C. (Tools for Reducing Auto Crimes)." we had to make sure we were protecting the vehicles of our citizens and of those who work in the city.

The Auto Theft Unit knew public awareness was a key element to the implementation and success of the program. If the police department could raise awareness about the auto theft problem, advise citizens on the types of vehicles being stolen **in** a given area and assist the community by providing tools to prevent auto thefts, then steps could he taken to better protect vehicles and prevent theft. The Auto Theft Unit and the police department developed a citywide, community-involved prevention program focused on opportunistic vehicle theft.

The Auto Theft Unit analyzed thefts for the entire year. Since all vehicles are targets of theft. the unit identified the top ten targeted vehicles. The unit had to evaluate current statistics and trends because available state and national statistics were outdated.

For years. General Motors vehicles were the easiest to steal. Then, GM improved the theft deterrent systems in their vehicles. making them less attractive to would-he car thieves. In our area. Japanese imports have become the more popular vehicles to he tar^{g}eted.

RESPONSE

As the Auto Theft Unit considered implementation of the program. we developed general implementation guidelines, located funding sources, identified geographic areas of concern. provided data on the types of vehicles stolen, designed a public awareness campaign and planned a citywide kick-off program.

♦ **Guidelines for Implementation:** The unit coordinated the program with an Operations Bureau supervisor. We asked the Crime Prevention and Community

Policing units to coordinate site locations for auto theft prevention activities. The Multi-Agency Auto Theft Task Force provided additional manpower assistance.

♦ **Funding Considerations:** Law Enforcement Trust Fund monies (confiscated funds). granted by our city Commission, funded the program. We decided to apply for grant funding from other agencies (i.e., Motor Theft Prevention Authority), if that was necessary. to continue the program. We also considered askin^g corporations to sponsor the ongoing awareness campaign.

♦ **Areas of Concern:** The Auto Theft Unit identified. within the city's three districts, the primary areas where auto thefts occurred. Then they targeted those home-owner associations and businesses in the areas where the most thefts were reported. The Crime Analysis Unit provided the data to identify these areas in each district.

♦ **Types of Vehicles Stolen:** The Auto Theft Unit contacted the owners of the most commonly stolen vehicles for their coopera-
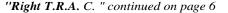
lion with the implementation of this plan.

♦ **Public Awareness Campaign:** All residents and businesses received notices in their city water hills that the program was to he implemented. Local television and cable stations broadcast stories about the program, and it received extensive newspaper coverage. The community policing officers assigned to the three districts spread the news about the program even further.

♦ **Citywide kickoff program:** The police department held an Auto Theft Prevention Fair, which included an introduction to the program, free VIN etching and display's about alternative auto theft prevention measures such as alarms and Lojack $_k$.
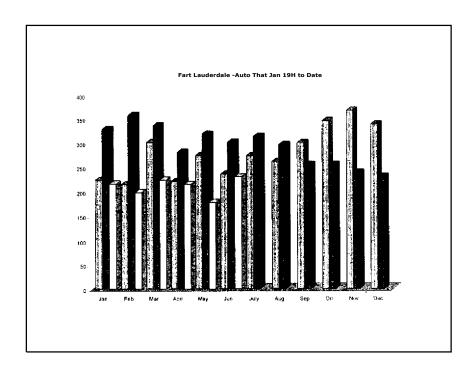
The police department presented the campaign to homeowner associations and business groups. The department provided free deterrent devices to citizens and business employees who owned targeted vehicles. Other vehicle owners were provided with alternatives for protecting their vehicles.

ASSESSMENT

The program was introduced in September 1997 and was fully implemented by December 1997. More than 4,500 steering wheel locking devices were purchased and distributed. Approximately 1.000 vehicles were VIN-etched. So far, we are experiencing significant decreases in reported auto thefts within the city.

A comparison of thefts occurring from January to June 1998 (1,258 stolen vehicles) compared with thefts occurring during the same period in 1997 (1,924 stolen vehicles) has shown a 35 percent decrease in reported thefts citywide. In some areas. reported thefts were down 50 percent. There was a dramatic 48-percent drop from the

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Problem-Solving Advances in Toledo, Ohio

by Captain Louise Eggert

Toledo (Ohio) Police Department

The Toledo Police Department imple-mented and, then, expanded community policing within the City of Toledo in 1994. Implementing community policing in Toledo has required great commitment from both the police department and the entire community and has proven to he beneficial.

The Toledo community redefined the roles and relationships between them-selves and the police, and recognized the community shares responsibility for social order with the police. Both must work cooperatively to identify and priori-tize problems. develop and implement creative and effective responses, deter-mine resource allocations, and evaluate and modify approaches, as necessary. **In** Toledo. community policing is a strategy that builds on fundamental policing prac-tices with an emphasis on crime preven-tion and lasting solutions to problems.

Through community meetings, analysis of citizen complaints and informed con-versations, officers learn what issues and problems most concern neighborhood res-idents. and use this knowledge to respond appropriately. As part of this effort, a problem-solving guide, training video and tracking form were developed to assist officers with their prohlem-solving activi-ties. Likewise, a Resource Guide to Lucas County was distributed to help officers make proper referrals. Community representatives were included in the development process of these instruments.

In December 1997. the problem-solvin [g] video and accompanying problem-solving guide won the Community Policing Communication Tool Award, one of the 1997 Governor's Community Policing Awards of Excellence. The guide and video also have been featured in several newsletters and a Best Practices booklet on community policing distributed by the Ohio Office of Criminal Justice Services.

The training video offers officers several points of information. First, it reviews community policing in Toledo and reminds officers about their training on the "Seven A's" model of problem-solv-ing. The seven steps of this model are

♦   acknowledge the issue.

♦   access information.

♦   analyze it.

♦   accurately define the problem,

♦   ask others,

♦   act, and

♦   appraise results.

Secondly. the video offers an overview of a new problem-solving tracking form and guide that employ the four-step SARA model of problem-solving. In addition to outlining steps for solving problems, a field operations division sergeant, a com-munity services neighborhood sergeant. a city resident and the community govern-ment manager gave examples of responses and resources.

The goal of the initiative that developed into production of the video was to encourage officers to engage in problem-solving activities. The dynamic nature of problem-oriented policing allows officers the opportunity to evaluate strategies and results. as well as the chance to revise and modify their approach. There were several related objectives: to describe a problem-solving model and link it to prior training. communicate ways of initi-ating problem-solving activities, explain how to use the new tracking form. and provide successful examples of problem-solving strategies.

While certain personnel. such as the neighborhood sergeants. were actively involved in problem solving before this initiative, most others were not. It was acknowledged that the effort to imple-ment community policing should be expanded. hut the planning and research

section knew success would not he achieved by forcing adoption of the strat-egy. Planning personnel discussed vari-ous ways to initiate a uniform problem-solving process.

A field sergeant who attended the International Problem-Oriented Policing Conference, sponsored by the Police Executive Research Forum (PERF) and the San Diego Police Department, returned to the department with enthusi-asm to experiment with problem-solving strategies. Soon, officers in his district were using ideas from neighborhood sergeants or school resource officers who were working on or experimenting in problem- solving. Then, there was some discussion at the district stations in the field operations departments about how to con-duct and track prohlem solving by patrol officers.

With interest in problem solving spread-ing throughout the dist[']icts. the time was now ripe to initiate the policing technique department-wide. This step would pro-vide citizens throughout the city with some similar expectations for problem identification and resolution. Even though field operations, investigative services and community services personnel are decentralized, it is vital that department policies are consistent.

The planning and research section had been compiling information regarding problem solving and had identified a way to proceed. This section knew a video was a vital instructional tool to accompa-ny the guide; the next step was to include other department personnel in planning and implementation.

In addition to preparing the instructional video, the planning and research section designed a tracking form to document each problem and the steps taken to solve it, ensure the coordination of all resources, and record the outcome of these solutions. The field operations sergeant who had attended the PERF con-ference and a neighborhood sergeant who also had been involved in problem solv-ing from another district were asked to help the planning department develop the

Toledo POP

form. The final version of the form was concise. but collected complete information.

While the tracking form was being developed. planning personnel were developing the guide. based on one they found both suitable and user-friendly. Once the guide and form were drafted, they were distributed for review.

For the first time in the history of the Toledo Police Department's policy development, a number of citizens were involved in this initiative. Draft copies of the guide were given to community partners for review and comments. They included representatives from Block Watch and the then-chairman of the Community Policing Advisory Board. A draft copy also was provided to the community government manager from the Toledo Department of Neighborhoods.

During this time. the components of the training video were identified by planning personnel. The community services officer who had previously developed video training worked with the planning captain to formalize a concise, yet comprehensive, format.

As an extension of the problem-solving guide. a newsletter was published in the second quarter of 1998 to further encourage officers to participate in problem solving. The publication. *Best Practices in Problem Solving,* provides examples of problem solving, reviews tracking forums and features success stories. To enlist officer interest, the newsletter includes bylines of those officers completing the activities.

The strongest factor in the success of the problem-solving strategies is that they do not force officers into one linear solution or mode of thought. Officers are encouraged to consider all ways to resolve problems without limiting themselves to traditional responses. Creative thinking benefitted the implementation process and encouraged the use of problem-solving tools and strategies.

The commitment to community policing is based upon the belief that a broader view of policing leads to a safer and more progressive community. Community policing is not a short-term program. hut a fundamental change in attitude. The Toledo Police Department is committed to full implementation of this philosophy to unite our community and promote pride in both the community and the police department. All officers of the department are considered community policing officers—every employee of the department bears a responsibility to implement this philosophy.

Since the video and guide have been distributed. field operations officers are more actively involved in problem-solving strategies. Officers initiate some strategies themselves, hut citizens refer other problems directly to the officers or to command staff. The community government manager or community representative also call with suggestions of problems that need to he solved.

Each district uses the tracking form. This ensures follow-up and coordination with their own community services neighborhood personnel, as well as neighborhood sergeants or school resource officers. Also, command officers can evaluate the number of hours their officers report being involved in problem-solving activities. These numbers are reported twice a month and are forwarded to the chief and deputy chief. During the first half of 1998. 574 problem-solving projects have been completed at all three district stations.

This truly has been an educational experience for the department. The Toledo Police will improve and enhance future initiatives using the newly gained knowledge about sharing information. Furthermore, summaries of the initiative have been sent to city, state and national associations and consortiums to help others expand problem solving.

The Toledo Police Department has experienced tremendous community support and officers have received positive feedback from the business community. citizens and officers themselves. The department and the community can build upon this solid community-policing foundation as we enter the 21st century.

University of Wisconsin-Madison
Police Response to People Who are Homeless and Suffer From Alcoholism

by Theodore Darden

Wisconsin Department of Justice Training and Standards Bureau

The University of Wisconsin—Madison (UW—Madison) is one of the largest universities in the nation, with a total population of nwre than 60,000 students and staff. The area known as the "lower campus area" 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 University and the city together.

During the anti-war protest movement of the I 960s and early I970s. many veterans of the Vietnam war found Madison's "politically correct" climate to he the perfect forum in which to voice their opinions. While many of these veterans were alcohol and/or drug dependent and homeless. the student population was very accepting ol'their behavior and lifestyle.

Many factors continued to support a homeless lifestyle on and around the University campus. Some of the homeless became public nuisances and began to disrupt the University community. Small business owners. UW—Madison 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 he very careful. however. in the ways they dealt with these individuals. Although some residents and business owners wanted and expected police intervention, others felt people who were homeless should he left alone. A small. vocal segment of the student population viewed any type of police action as harassment, and they were concerned about the welfare and safety of these individuals.

This concern for safety and welfare was reinforced by the death of Theresa McGovern, an alcoholic who was occasionally homeless. She was the dau^ghter of former U.S. Senator George McGovern. and she died on the streets of Madison during the winter of 1994—95 after passin^g out in a snowhank and freezin^g to death.

In June 1995, UW—Madison Chancellor David Ward convened the Lower Campus Concerns Committee—consisting of representatives from the faculty, concerned students, the Dean of Students' office, city of Madison and University Police Departments. Dane County Board, and local social service agencies—to study and develop recommendations to address safety issues in the lower campus area.

The group planned to specifically address the safety concerns of students, staff and visitors in the lower campus area and to examine how to deal with the growing homeless population in the area. One of the first recommendations made by the committee was for the University to establish its first community policing position, to he located in the lower campus area. I filled that position in June 1996.

SCANNING

People who are homeless and who suffer from alcoholism were responsible for several problems in the area:

- Sleeping inside and outside buildings, which blocked entry and exit;

- Defecating and urinating in public places—often in public view;

- Public consumption of alcohol;

- Panhandling, which was sometimes aggressive:

- Disruptive and disorderly conduct;

- Thefts;

- Drug usage; and

- Littering.

These individuals also caused problems for themselves:

- Exposure to inclement weather;

- Exposure to diseases;

- Incapacitation due to alcohol abuse;

- Improper nutrition; and

- Victimization due to a reduced ability to care for themselves.

Most of these problems were identified through police reports, records from social service agencies, citizen reports and the local media.

ANALYSIS

As I examined calls for service for the area. I discovered 11 individuals were responsible for approximately 70—75 percent of the calls in the lower campus area, or 435 calls for University Police service during a three-year period. Of these 11 individuals, two were from the Madison area and nine had migrated to Madison. Some of these individuals had lived in the area for more than a decade.

Calls started early in the morning, when employees and students began their day. Either the people who were homeless would begin panhandling when pedestrians appeared, or the sleeping. intoxicated people came to the attention of students and staff returning to work and school each morning. The calls would taper off until mid-afternoon and start again. By this time the people would he intoxicated from the alcohol purchased from earlier panhandling, and they would become disruptive and disorderly. The busiest time. however, turned out to he the evening hours. That is when individuals would he found passed out either in or around campus buildings.

The population of the lower campus area itself was at least partly to blame for the problem. Some incidents had occurred but were not reported because of sympathy for the individuals. Members of the lower campus population also provided support to these individuals by giving

them money. That money was used to purchase more alcohol.

In past years, University Police officers used discretionary enforcement to deal with these individuals. In most cases. the individuals were told to leave University property—if they complied. no further action was taken. If they failed to comply. or if the behavior was more serious. officers wrote tickets. took the individuals into protective custody or incarcerated them.

1997 rate of theft of target vehicles identified for the program. When the statistics were analyzed for Fiscal Year 1997–98, they showed a 34-percent decrease in reported auto theft during the first full year of the program.

"Operation Right T.R.A.C." may he responsible for preventing as much as $6 million in property loss and insurance claims. The community-police partnership has been the key to the program's success.

After seeing the success of this program, the Broward County Sheriff's Office and the Plantation, Fla.. Police Department have implemented similar programs. Program results have allowed the Broward County Chiefs of Police Association to acquire a grant from the Florida Motor Vehicle Theft Prevention Authority to continue and expand the program. A county-wide initiative is now under way—communities are getting on the "Right T.R.A.C. to prevent auto theft.

RESPONSE

My goal was to reduce the number of calls for police service required for these 1 1 individuals, and to try to find a permanent solution for the problem. I also hoped to involve the community in the solution and to chan ^{g}e the public's perception of the area.

As a result of a recommendation from the Lower Campus Concerns Committee. the University funded an outreach worker to assist me with the problem.

During the next three months. I varied my schedule and made frequent contacts with the people involved. 1 used those contacts to assess who needed which services and then shared that information with the outreach worker and other agencies. This information included a personal history of each individual, the nature of his or her drug and alcohol dependency, and his or her willingness to seek treatment and/or shelter.

I used enforcement whenever an individual in the group violated the law. This showed I would not tolerate any unlawful behavior. I worked with the District Attorney's office and asked for restrictions on any of the homeless who refused treatment and violated the law. I requested that those found guilty of criminal behavior on campus he banned from campus for an undetermined length of time. I also requested court-ordered treatment for illness or disease when appropriate.

I used small group meetings to inform the community that other options existed to assist the homeless beyond just giving them money. I advised community members to report any illegal activity they might witness in the area. and started a lower campus area crimewatch program

to keep the community members involved in sharing responsibility for their safety and security.

ASSESSMENT

There was a significant decrease in calls for service in the area from November 1996 to June 1997. There were only 12 calls for service involving the H individuals during that eight-month period.

Dealing effectively with these chronic offenders made it easier to identify and assist new people who are homeless in the area. The UW–Madison Police Department now deals with newcomers immediately by trying to connect them with the necessary social services.

Of the 11 targeted individuals. as of June 1997, three had left Madison. one had died of alcohol-related illness, two were in alcohol treatment facilities, one had gone to jail and was released, three found permanent housing, and one was in treatment for six months but relapsed. During the past year, another of the original I 1 relapsed and died of alcohol-related illness.

From June 1997 until October 1998, calls for police service by employees and the general public in the lower campus area were down 70 percent from the same time period in 1995 and 1996. The lower campus also has experienced less theft and criminal damage and fewer burglaries.

Dane County. Wis.. Social Services. local police and local emergency medical services have saved hundred of thousands of dollars since the program was implemented because there are fewer calls for service. ambulance runs and emergency room visits initiated because of these individuals.

In October 1998, I resigned from the UW–Madison Police Department to work with the Wisconsin Department of Justice. The UW–Madison Police Department still maintains a good working relationship with the community and other social service agencies, and the program was such a success in the lower campus area that more community police officer positions are planned for other areas of campus.

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