



Shreveport Police try problem-oriented approach

(Editor's note: This is a special edition of the SPD newsletter designed to inform officers about problem-oriented policing.)

Police departments across the country are changing the theory of policing. For years, officers merely reacted to crime, receiving the call, gathering the information, taking the arrest, then moving on to the next call. Their efforts had little impact on the underlying root of the problem.

But now, after 21 years of research into police operations, a new approach called problem-oriented policing holds particular promise in getting a jump on crime and providing better service for citizens.

Problem-oriented policing encourages law enforcement to work smarter, not necessarily harder. Rather than approaching calls for service as separate, individual events, problem-oriented policing emphasizes analyzing groups of incidents, identifying the underlying causes and finding solutions by using a wide variety of public and private resources. The approach can be applied to whatever type of problem is consuming police time and resources.

While it's likely that many problems will be crime-oriented, disorderly behavior and other situations that contribute to neighborhood deterioration are also targets of the problem-solving approach.

Tactics of the department that practices problem-oriented policing may include neighborhood mobilization through informal meetings, street contacts, problem-identification interviews and surveys and regular

communication with community watch groups.

In April, Shreveport Police began meeting with citizens in the Cedar Grove area in an effort to improve the relationship between law enforcement and the citizenry. Officers visited with residents and answered their questions; children climbed into patrol units, flashed the lights and sounded the sirens; and residents were actively solicited to get involved in their community and discover the root causes and solutions to neighborhood problems.

As more meetings are held police hope the gatherings will encourage support for the police department along adults and children in the

neighborhood. Once the support and trust is established, citizens will be more willing to work with police to address crime problems through P.O.P.

"You have to pat the foundation down before you raise the walls," said retired Cpt. John Brann. "If the people have no confidence in the police, they won't supply the information."

So far the community meetings have been successful and have been expanded to include the Hooortown and Mlendale areas.

Currently Shreveport Police are working to institute additional P.O.P. programs that would address street corner drug sales and neighborhood crime problems. Both programs would

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Children in the Cedar Grove area get acquainted with police officers and

police equipment at a neighborhood meeting last spring.

From the Chief. . .



Imagine what it would be like working on the same problems year after year with little success in finding any solutions to those problems. Responding to the same burglaries at the same businesses and apartment complexes, the same domestic disturbances, the same petty drug dealers on the same street corners, day after day, night after night, years into the future.

Sound familiar? It this reminds you of a typical workday for Shreveport police, it should, but it's also happening in police departments all across the country. Most cops spend the majority of their working lives responding to the same calls, spending literally thousands of hours arresting the same people and dealing with the same repeat problems!

So what's new on the horizon? What can we do differently in the future? What will the year 1995, 2000 or 2010 be like for the Shreveport Police Department? These are difficult questions, to say the least, but I do know that what we've been doing for the last 50 years or longer isn't working.

That's why the Shreveport Police Department and other progressive law enforcement agencies have embarked upon a new police approach designed to solve the underlying problems that create crime, thereby reducing calls for service. It's called problem-oriented policing and its success story is being repeated from coast to coast.

For Shreveport Police, problem-oriented policing could mean canvassing a neighborhood, meeting the residents and learning about their problems or analyzing computer data to identify crime and service trends in different beats and sectors. It could involve calling on other governmental agencies, social service organizations or existing resources like school liaison officers to help find the solution to a recurring problem.

Problem-oriented policing will not

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eliminate calls for service; however, using the P.O.P. approach, we can gather information and combine it with information provided by other sources (governmental, social agencies, volunteer groups, private businesses, citizens) to get a clearer, more comprehensive picture of the underlying problems. Only then can we begin to work on changing the conditions that contribute to those problems.

When we honestly consider the effect that increased arrests and more frequent patrols have on our criminal element, we know they do about as much good as swatting at roaches. But when we begin to deal with the underlying causes - the overall neglect, and physical deterioration of our housing complexes, the vacant and abandoned homes with out-of-state "slum lords", all of which serve as havens for drug dealers who continue to terrorize a public which can ill afford to go anywhere else - only then will we be able to adequately deal with crime problems as "community" problems.

After seeing positive results from our department's efforts in Cedar Grove and other areas, we believe we can break the cycle and get both residents and other city agencies involved.

We don't know whether problem-oriented policing will work throughout Shreveport. We don't even know how you'll accept this new

effort, but we do know we've seen positive results already.

Citizens are now responding to positive police action by working to do something about the deterioration that crime has caused in their community. So perhaps enough progress has been seen for us to believe that problem-oriented policing can work in our city.

We believe the key to a successful P.O.P. program is for our supervisors to believe they have the time, flexibility and resources to pursue problem-oriented solutions and for the officers to have the initiative to give the program a try.

I believe if we all truly pursue the P.O.P. alternative and continue our current ongoing efforts, our workload will be reduced by working smarter, not harder.

Understanding problem-oriented policing

Problem-oriented policing (P.O.P.): A method used in community-oriented policing in which officers recognize the causes of police calls, especially those that are recurring, and design a solution to eliminate the cause, thus removing the need for return responses.

Community-oriented policing (C.O.P.): A policing strategy in which individual officers work with the people of a neighborhood to identify problems and jointly determine solutions - even those not involving traditional police work - thereby maintaining or improving the quality of life in the neighborhood.

Teat policing: A tactic used in C.O.P. in which a group of officers is assigned to and responsible for an area on a permanent basis. In this way, the officers come to know the people and problems of the area.

A return to basics:

BY CLEOPHUS BARKS
neighborhood Assistance Team

Shreveport's first police-community relations program got its start 16 years ago in a storefront at 1859 Milan Street.

Later there would be others in the heart of the city's troubled and high crime communities (Lakeside-Allendale, Mooretown-Kollywood, Cedar Grove, N.L. King Jr. Drive and Stoner Hill) in an attempt to help resolve disputes, disagreements and difficulties relating to the police and community.

The strategic locations of the storefronts through this neighborhood concept would ultimately provide residents with much needed attention and assistance. But helping promote police-community relations was only part of the picture.

The storefront helped people who needed legal assistance and advice, people with substance abuse problems and those who just needed a friend or someone with whom they could talk. It was people helping people; people working and building together, taking conditions better for people of all walks of life.

During its tenure, Shreveport

Building Police-community relations

BY JOHN BRANN
Retired Captain

For years the role of the undercover narcotics agent has made drug dealers aware that the risk of arrest is present. Making drug buys, obtaining and serving warrants and taking arrests has satisfied the Police Administrator, who reports to the City Fathers. But the actual impact toward solving the underlying drug problem has been minimal at best.

If the police department has taken a different approach, becoming involved with the community for a common cause. In the department's test

police-community relations was an invaluable tool in helping Shreveport residents, police officers and city government band together for the common good.

But as Shreveport grew, the communication problem between police and citizenry resurfaced. Like other American cities, the relationship between police officers and residents of predominantly black communities became strained, largely because of an increase in community crime, drug trafficking, drug addiction, high unemployment, poverty and mistrust of authority. Once again, a barrier exists between Shreveport police and a part of the city's residents.

They are problems similar to those of the 1960s and '70s; however, in recent months, concerned police departments have put tremendous emphasis upon addressing these ills by implementing a new phenomena. It's called community- or neighborhood-oriented policing,

is a stall group of concerned citizens

area, Cedar Grove, the results have been sudden and successful.

With the cooperation of Cleophus Banks, coordinator of the neighborhood Assistance Team, day and evening shift patrol coordinators were provided with the means to be responsible Cedar Grove residents. This group continues to meet regularly in the Patrol Bureau Conference Room to discuss problems, plan street meetings and procure advertising teams. In the initial meeting, it was determined that the officers and supervisors who patrol this area daily should be present at the street meetings to mingle, meet and talk with the citizens.

Since the formation of this group, meetings have also been held in the Mooretown and Allendale communities. Long speeches and politicians were absent, and for 90 minutes district patrol officers talked one-on-one to the citizens discussing problems on both sides.

The measurable results are noted in increased support for police from the majority of the community. Groups of citizens are taking more pride in

hot Cedar Grove and supervisors of the Shreveport Police Department should be commended for their efforts in spearheading the "improving public gatherings." They are the real catalysts in getting citizens and police to mingle and build relationships.

The police and community are more dependent upon each other than either is consciously aware. There could be no social order, community life or individual security without an agency assigned the responsibility to enforce the law and maintain order. Police are necessary in our society; we could not exist without them.

Similarly, the police are dependent upon a cooperative citizenry if they are to do their assigned job with any degree of effectiveness and efficiency.

Community participation, perhaps, is the greatest deterrent to crime. Presently, the community gatherings are a giant stride toward rebuilding police and community relations in Shreveport.

their neighborhood by having "Clean-Up the Litter Day" programs for children and marching in opposition to drugs in their neighborhoods.

In many cases, district officers feel more at ease getting out of their patrol units to talk with people because they already know them.

It has been found that the majority of citizens in our city want to be involved in taking their area a safer, cleaner and better place to live; however, they are lacking the involvement of the police department in a role other than responding to a police problem. The officers needed to be educated in the benefits of talking with the citizenry and earning their support, and the citizens had to learn how to help themselves by letting the police department and other city agencies be their tool rather than their adversary.

Both will be beneficial as we enter the 1980s, where the community and police must work closely together to revitalize the economy and attract industry by providing a safe, livable, clean environment.

* Approach

draw heavily on community support established through the neighborhood gatherings and meetings of community leaders.

The first program would utilize officers in targeted areas to arrest drug dealers operating on neighborhood street corners. Public works crews and jail trustees would then go into the area to clean up trash and debris and low unkept lots. Afterward, the police department hopes to encourage area housing authorities to rent currently vacant properties to law-abiding citizens who would be charged with the responsibility of maintaining the area, keeping it clean and crime-free.

"We would take the neighborhood and give it back to the people, and they'd have to hold it," said Assistant Chief of Police Doug C. Perdue.

The program could take several weeks to complete, he said.

Another problem-oriented solution to neighborhood violence is to activate a mobile substation that could be moved from area to area as needed, said Cpt. Marshall Nelson. The substation, lost likely the mobile communications van, would be a highly visible police presence in areas victimized by gang activity and other criminal offenders.

Shreveport Police are also working with the National Guard and city's Property Standards Bureau to identify and tear down substandard housing that often breeds criminal activity. That demolition is expected to take place in the early part of 1991.

Across the country, cities that have tried the P.O.P. approach are claiming success.

In Newport News, VA, the police department targeted thefts, prostitution and burglaries as priority problems. A 451-unit apartment complex had the highest crime rate in the city, but after officers took a serious look at the problems they determined much of the crime was due to the general deterioration of the complex. Working with other agencies such as the Fire Department, Public Works and the Department of Codes Compliance, they cleaned up the neighborhood, filling potholes, collecting trash and towing



abandoned cars and experienced a decrease in crime as a result.

In Baltimore, a local quarry was the scene of one to two drownings each summer. Working with the State Attorney's Office, no entry signs were posted and strictly enforced. As a result, the number of violations reported dropped from 151 to two in three years.

The approach has been used by police departments to solve repeat problems with juveniles, narcotics abusers, loitering, vandalism, false alarms and assaults, just to name a few.

In Oxnard, CA, police utilized high-visibility patrol, narcotics investigators, the Field Tactical Unit, city building inspectors and court welfare agencies to combat drug trafficking in a residential building. In the end, residents got involved by filing a class-action suit to evict the "undesirables" on the basis that their presence lowered the overall property values. In the end, the

building owner, fearful of losing the lawsuit, agreed to the eviction.

"Problem-oriented policing deals with the grass roots problem," said Shreveport Police Chief Charles Gruber. "That way we'll have a long permanent effect on the quality of life in our community."

Gruber said the Police Department would like to establish community action centers in several low-income areas of the city to address conditions that lead to criminal activity.

The centers would assist young people in finding employment as well as offer educational opportunities, pre-natal care, enrichment activities and develop coping skills. Juveniles and young adults would be instructed on how to apply for a job and how to maintain a good work record when employed.

"When disadvantaged youths don't have these skills they often turn to the streets to find a living," said Alan Prater, executive assistant to the Chief of Police.

Prater said the centers would be a problem-oriented approach to dealing with the underlying conditions that contribute to crime.

"We're going in the back door to see why a kid is selling crack," he said.

* Portions of this article were reprinted from Law Enforcement Technology and the National Institute of Justice: Research in Brief.

Let's hear it!

If you have an idea about how problem-oriented policing can work for the Shreveport Police Department, submit your suggestion to your shift commander on this or any sheet of

paper. Outstanding suggestions may be eligible for cash or other incentives offered by the City.



A large rectangular area enclosed by a dashed border, containing several horizontal lines for writing suggestions.