



# **Plano Police Department's Submission for the Herman Goldstein Problem-Oriented Policing Award**

## **Bad Trip**

### **SUMMARY**

In 1995 the suburban community of Plano, Texas experienced its first heroin overdose death. There were another three heroin deaths that year, followed by three in 1996 and nine in 1997. More shocking was the fact these deaths were not homeless people shooting up heroin on street corners; these were well-to-do teens being given heroin disguised as Chiva at parties. Plano is better known for its corporate headquarter campuses and status as an All America City rather than that of what some nicknamed it "Heroin City USA" To combat the problem the Plano Police Department partnered with the community to form a collaborative response. The Police Department led the response with a three prong response while the community created a task forces to support the police. Working together, the police department and the community significantly reduced heroin deaths through target hardening and education.

- **Scanning:**

The scanning phase there was little doubt that teens dying of heroin overdoses met the definition of a problem and there was an outcry from the community for the police department to do something about the situation. The department historically treated overdose deaths as accidental deaths, so little computerized statistics were available. Through research the department realized that there had never been a heroin problem in the city before.

- **Analysis:**

In response to the public outcry and the national media attention, the Chief of Police created a task force to use problem solving techniques to work on a response to the heroin overdoses. The task force based it's response to answering these three questions;

- Why heroin was coming to Plano?
- Why kids were trying the heroin in the first place?
- Why parents were not catching on to their children's severe drug usage?

- **Response**

While researching the answers to the questions posed in the analysis phase the department discovered that this issue was larger than the department itself. A collation was formed based on a collaborative effort through the police department's three pronged response and the community's education and rehabilitation efforts.

- **Assessment**

In assessing the previous four years, the police department saw that the heroin deaths had significantly reduced, the community was happy with the reduction and the media attention slowly turned to other topics. Plano was happy to be out of the public spotlight, but vowed continue the collation to assure that it was never affected like this again.

## INTRODUCTION

In the 1960's the Town of Plano, was a one light stop on the map, about 20 miles north of Dallas Texas. In the seventies Plano became a residential escape for the Dallas wealthy to move to avoid the big city problems Dallas was facing. Many of the Dallas professionals moved to Plano to create the ultimate community to raise children. The forefathers of the City did just that. In the 25 years to come, the small dot on the map would become a city with a quarter of a million residents, corporate headquarters, gated communities with tract mansions, and state champion football teams. Plano received awards such as All-America City and always placed among the best places to raise kids in America.

Along with the good came many families that wanted the lifestyle but had to work twice as hard to keep up with the Jones'. Many of the new families to Plano were two income houses where both parents worked many hours to keep up the Plano lifestyle.. The first indication something was wrong was in 1983 when Plano gained national attention for a suicide epidemic which took the lives of nine Plano High School kids in just one year. Fourteen years later the community was hit with its second big epidemic that garnered the Nations attention. Nobody knew how, but heroin had made it to the community. Plano was shocked by the heroin not only because of the deadly effect, but the fact that heroin had a reputation as being an inner city problem where addicts laid around in abandoned buildings and shot up. Nobody ever expected heroin to be something their teen aged kids would be doing in the living room of their million dollar homes. The sobering reality pounded the city harder weekly as the death toll rose to 18 kids over a 3 year period. The town that had never had a heroin death now was labeled "Heroin City USA" on the cover of a major national

magazine and was featured on a MTV special on Drug abuse. The police department, along with the community used problem solving techniques to define the problem, attack heroin and make sure it stayed solved. A problem of this magnitude could not be left with any opportunity to re-surface.

## SCANNING

In July of 1995 Plano experienced its first heroin overdose death. At the time the Plano Police Department was responding to the overdoses calls, completing and information report and leaving. Since the city only averaged a few overdose deaths a year, this practice was never questioned or challenged. In 1995 four Plano youths died of accidental heroin

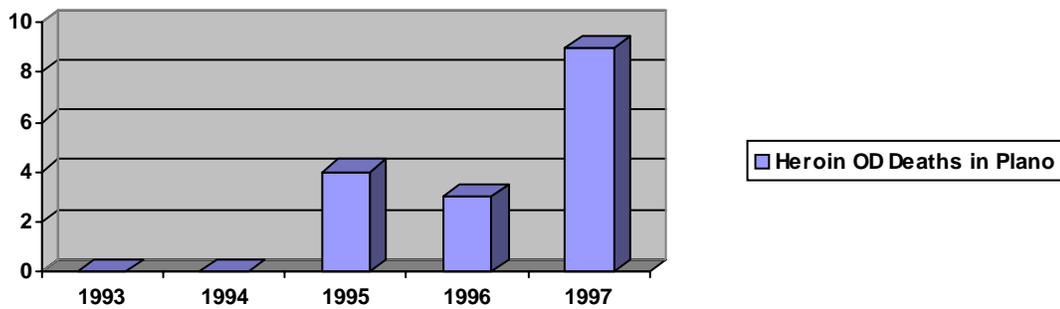


overdoses. What was odd about these heroin overdoses was the blunt fact that it was heroin. The citizens of Plano and the Plano Police Department had always considered heroin a distant threat that never quite made it to its borders. Heroin had a reputation as being a dark drug that street people used in major metropolitan areas and ghettos. Another fact that the community found hard to swallow was these deaths were not

street people or vagrants scoring a quick hit of heroin; these were sons and daughters of professional members of society, which had previously thrived in school and lived in small mansions. It became obvious, that heroin had made its way into Plano and there was no indication of it leaving.

The police department knew they were on the verge of an all-out media blitz when the word of the heroin overdoses got out. While there was no attempt to cover up the overdoses, they knew a quick and effective response was necessary. The SARA model was easily applied to this situation. There was no doubt the deaths of sixteen young residents met the definition of a problem. Obviously there was more than one incident, the deaths were similar in nature due to the fact that they were all heroin related, and there was definitely a public expectation for the police department to do something about it. The scanning of the problem revealed the obvious issue of the deaths, but also revealed the reputation of the community was at risk. As with the broken window theory, the police department was concerned that once Plano received the reputation of “Heroin City USA” that youth in the community who would not normally have tried the drug, might just because they thought that was what was expected of them. They knew the problem of heroin was new to the town and the general population was not well educated on the drug or the devastating effects it could have on ones lives even if they did not overdose and die.

In the initial Scanning phase an attempt to collect data of past overdoses and heroin related offense was conducted. The police department’s record system was old and did not properly log incidents if no criminal charges were filed. A look at past narcotics unit yearly summaries was not much help either due to the fact they only logged cases where charges were filed. Documentation finally ended up as a polling of department personnel to see who had information of past heroin incidents. The research concluded that heroin incidents in the city were isolated at best.



### ANALYSIS

There was little need to gather data on the heroin overdoses as the numbers were being published in major magazines and newspapers across the nation. As the police department entered the analysis phase they knew several questions had to be answered before a solution could be found;

- Why was heroin coming to Plano?
- Why were kids trying heroin in the first place?
- Why were parents not catching on to their children's severe drug usage?

The Chief of police tasked the narcotics unit with determining why heroin had made its way to Plano. The obvious answer would be supply and demand, but that theory did not hold true since there had never been a demand for heroin in Plano. It was obvious the demand was created, but how and why was it created in Plano? The narcotics unit started interviewing many of the kids who overdosed and lived as well as branching out to friends and family of the kids who died of heroin overdose. The interviews revealed that there was no demand for the drug in the beginning, but enterprising dealers from Dallas realized they could make more money off of rich Plano kids who could easily afford the drug and were naive as to the

seriousness of heroin. The dealers discovered and benefited from was the fact that many of the Plano families were two income families where both parents worked long hours and sometimes did not have the time to monitor their children's day to day activities. The heroin dealers came to Plano and shopped the high schools looking for potential addicts. As with many drug dealers, they created addicts by giving heroin to their potential customers to allow them to get hooked. Once the kids were addicted, the dealers started charging for their product and recruiting sentinels and new addicts.

The analysis stage of this issue also brought to light a disturbing fact about the heroin dealers. They had little or no fear of being caught or even investigated. The task force saw the need for both criminal and narcotics investigations on all overdoses whether there was a death or not.

Though stats for the deaths were readily available, the stats for other overdoses reported to the police department were not. The task force was able to manually pull up records about past overdoses but there was no way to find out what types of collateral call load was created from the overdoses. The task force also looked to other agencies and the hospitals for statistical information. The task force was really shocked when they contacted the Medical Center of Plano and found that over seventy-five heroin overdoses had been treated at the small local hospital. At the time the hospital was not required to report overdoses to the police department. Most of those seventy five overdoses were non-fatal cases, and were not reported or investigated. Once the overdose issue hit the media, teens became scared when their friends overdosed, which resulted in several cases when cars would simply dump an overdose victim out at the Emergency Room doors and then flee the scene.

The second issue the task force had to look at was why Plano teens would try a drug known to be fatal in many cases. They discovered the Plano youth were severely under-educated about heroin. As mentioned before, heroin was foreign to Plano. Many of the youth interviewed reported they had no idea they were taking heroin. Dealers cut heroin into a powder form and presented it as “Chiva.” Since most kids had never heard of Chiva, they thought it was just a new recreational drug. Since the heroin was cut to powder form, it was able to be snorted or taken in a pill format. This type of drug was much more attractive than injection with a needle. After all was said and done, the task force determined the Plano youth had to be educated about the dangers of heroin no matter what name it is given.

The last question the task force had to respond to was why are the parents of these teens not picking up on the fact their kids are doing heroin. Again the task force set out to interview not only the heroin users, but their parents and school counselors. The task force discovered there were three reasons the parents did not know about the heroin use.

- Plano parents were simply too busy to notice changes in their kids life.
- Parents knew their kids were drinking and smoking marijuana but being baby boomers, they did not see much harm in it.
- Parents were also just uneducated when it came to heroin.

All three of these reason boiled down to education. Taking into consideration the answers to the three questions the police department realized there was no way to tackle this problem by it's self. A coalition would need to be formed. This problem would have to be a joint effort between the police department, the school district, the entire community and the media.

## RESPONSE

A cooperative coalition was formed in response to the heroin crisis and involved two major parts. The police department would implement a three pronged approach to heroin dealers while the community would take on the task of education and re-habilitation. The mission of the coalition was to;

- practice target hardening techniques to make Plano an un-desirable place to sell heroin
- educate the youth as to the dangers of the drug
- educate the parents so they can be responsible for the activities within their own family.

The police department's narcotics task force and the administration developed a three pronged approach to the heroin issue;

- Aggressive Enforcement
- Education / Reduce Demand
- Coordinated Aggressive Prosecution

The first prong, Aggressive enforcement found the department had always had adequate narcotics officers to manage the drug problem in the community. Heroin raised the need considerably. As a result the police department doubled the number of narcotics investigators. The department began a coordinated response to all overdose deaths with the Crimes Against Persons detectives and narcotics detectives working together. The narcotics detectives would trace the heroin back to its origin and the capers detectives would work the overdose deaths with the same detail they would work a homicide.

The department met with the DEA, FBI, State Police, and other local agencies to create a heroin task force. The task force began to aggressively pursue heroin dealers, and investigate all past heroin overdose death cases with an eye toward federal prosecution. The task force identified the overdose cases with the best investigative and prosecution potential and with the use of an Access database that was created by a detective tracked and plotted out the heroin networks and their connections to the heroin overdose deaths. All of the work paid off in July of 1998 when Operation Chiva resulted in the indictment of 29 suspects who were accused of conspiring to distribute heroin and cocaine in the Plano area and of deliberately contributing to Plano heroin overdose deaths. Some of the defendants sold drugs through a highly organized hierarchy that funneled the drugs from their home town of Guerreo, Mexico to the new home in McKinney, Texas and then to Plano. Through a federal sentencing enhancement law the defendants could have received life sentences if the prosecutors could prove their alleged dealings led to a lethal overdose. In all 18 of the defendant's pled guilty and 11 of them were prosecuted in a federal trial. The tight bond and cooperative effort with the federal law enforcement community, especially the DEA, FBI and U.S. Attorney's Office is what made the investigation and prosecution possible. The task force believed these prosecutions were the turning point in the battle against heroin.



At the same time that Operation Chiva was going on, the task force implemented an undercover operation in the senior high schools called Operation Rockfest. The operations goal was to identify drug problems in the senior high schools, target offenders both on and off campus and take measure to eliminate drug problems. People were scared and there were

rumors that heroin dealers were everywhere in the schools and a student could not go into a restroom without being offered drugs. Through this undercover operation the department found that this was not true and very few people actually brought drugs to school. There was a fear of being caught by the PISD drug dogs, the school liaison officers, the school crime stoppers program, or by a watchful teacher. This investigation confirmed the most common drugs were introduced to students was off campus at social events, such as parties. Rockfest started in August of 1997 and ran for the majority of the school year. Rockfest netted 84 narcotics cases, nearly half of which were heroin cases, on 37 defendants. Of the 84 cases only 6 cases were made on school campuses. The average age of the Rockfest defendant was 19, which ironically is the same average age of the overdose death victims.

The second prong of the three prong responses to heroin was education and demand reduction through education. The DEA provided the assistance of their Demand Reduction Specialist, who was a Plano resident. He provided the department with guidance in demand reduction, spoke at community meetings and helped utilize the press effectively. The department hosted several community meetings, the biggest meeting was held in November of 1997. That meeting was attended by approx 1,800 citizens and was televised on the City television network and had all local television and media affiliates in attendance. The department took the opportunity to announce the new drug tip hotline number. The tip hotline was a dedicated phone line that rang into dispatch and was answered 24 hours a day. All tips were immediately directed to a narcotics officer. All leads received were logged into a relational database that linked names, partial license plate numbers, addresses and the like, and those leads were all followed up on by the narcotics unit.

The third prong in the three prong response was hooking up the local prosecutors and the federal prosecutors to work together to provide a coordinated and aggressive prosecution strategy. The department found that the federal system had the laws in place to prosecute those responsible for providing the heroin that caused the overdose deaths, while the state had no such statutes. Texas rules of evidence are stricter than the federal rules, and federal law had a sentencing enhancement if death occurred from the drugs that were sold to the victim. Thus the prosecutors, state and federal, agreed with law enforcement to prosecute the cases federally.

As would be expected in a crisis like the heroin deaths, there was an abundance of community response. There were too many educational meetings and forums to mention, but there were three major players in the community's response;

- Plano Community Task Force
- Plano's Promise
- Community Information Meetings

The Plano Community Task Force was a group of residents representing a cross section of the community from education, the religious community, law enforcement, health care, social services and the business community. Their mission statement was to create a safer, healthier, more informed community. It became a focal point for the community where the average citizen could come and participate and create an awareness of the community's problems and their focus was on the heroin crisis. They conducted mass mailings, maintained a speakers bureau, a 24 hour crisis hotline manned by volunteer counselors, and distributed literature on different community resources. One interesting thing that the department noticed was that members of the families of the overdose death victims gravitated towards the task force and

used it as a means to constructively deal with their grief and warn others of the danger of heroin. Plano's Promise evolved from the national program, "America's Promise- The Alliance for Youth." This program was created to develop resources and secure community commitments for at risk kids. Just one example of the programs offered involved Chuck Norris' Kick Drugs out of America Program. Mr. Norris himself appeared at the Plano Schools to rally support for the program. The goal of the program was to find other interested for the students and keep them active with useful activities instead of drugs.

The Plano Community sponsored a number of educational programs. High school student groups, PTA's, neighborhood associations, parent groups, scouts, and schools, all mobilized against heroin. They held meetings, seminars, brainstorming sessions, anything they could do to educate the community on heroin and think of new approaches to fight the problem. The media helped greatly with this public education effort as well. Detective Meeks was quoted as saying "There is one thing I can say with certainty, that there is not a person in Plano who was not educated about heroin, that didn't know of its deadly effect and that didn't know that we as a community were not going to accept what had occurred to continue in Plano any longer."

### **ASSESSMENT**

While Plano may never totally heal from the 90's heroin crisis, it has recovered nicely. After the media attention slowed and the deaths stopped, the administration of the Plano Police Department was able to assess what had happened, how it analyzed the situation, and how it responded. The assessment had to look back and see what the goal for the department was when the first few deaths occurred in 1995. Of course the obvious goal was to stop the deaths. That fact is easily documented in the fact that heroin overdose deaths dropped from 9 in 1997 to 3 in 1998, 2 in 1999 and 1 or 0 in every year since then. That was the stat that the media

reported and that is the stat that made the community happy. It cannot be debated that the problem solving techniques used significantly reduced the problem and reduced the harm of the problem to the community. The department's assessment revealed many more successes than just stopping the heroin overdose deaths. From this project came a full-time overdose investigator position, continuing education for Plano youth and their parents, and a narcotics unit that aggressively pursues drug dealers who target the youth of Plano. The department also noted the success of the effort to harden Plano as a target for heroin pushers. Heroin is still a major problem in cities close to Plano, but has again become a threat that looks in from outside the city limits.

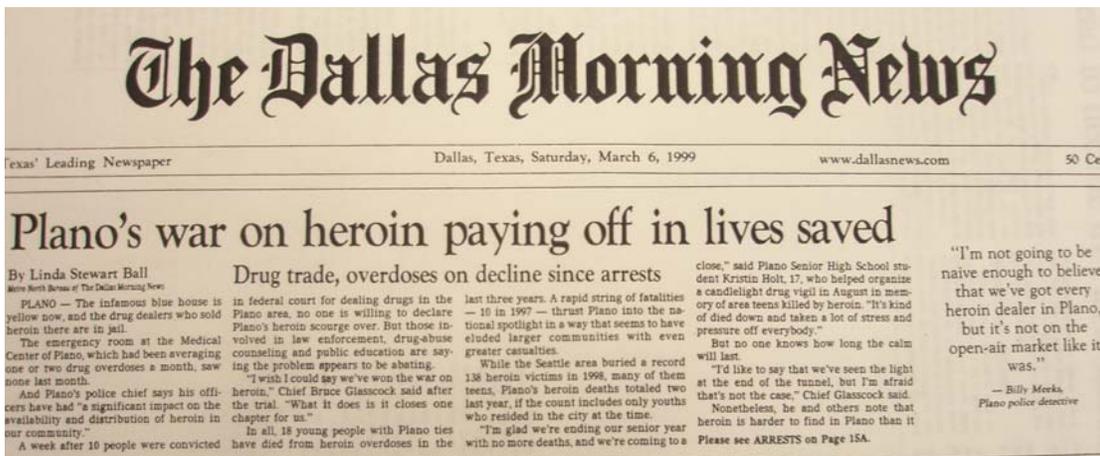
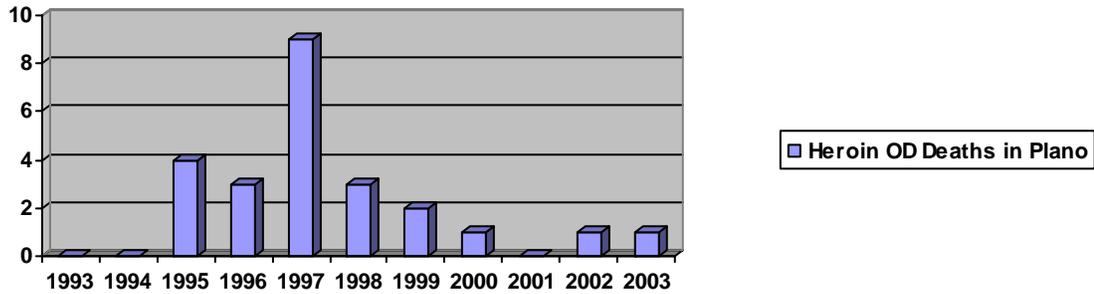
In the assessment phase the department looked back to the scanning phase and to the original questions that needed to be answered, the answers to those questions and the response to those answers.

The first question was why heroin was coming to Plano. The answer was that heroin dealers intentionally targeted the Plano youth due to the financial status of the community. The response to that question was to aggressively prosecute those dealers, and attempt to reduce the demand of the drug by educating everyone in the community. The question was answered and the response was a success. Published interviews with incarcerated heroin dealers verify that they thought that in 1995 Plano was an easy target but since then has gained a reputation as a dangerous community for drug dealers to try to start a business.

The second and third question was why Plano youth would try heroin in the first place and why parents did not notice. The answer was lack of education. The response to that question was to educate the youth and their parents. The coalition between the police department and the community set out to inform the youth and parents of Plano that Chiva was

heroin and both were killers. The success of that response is evidence today by talking with any Plano Middle School child or parent and asking them if they know what Heroin, Chiva, or Cheese is. They will all know, because the coalition still exists and still educates every child and every parent in the city.

While Plano is currently relatively free from heroin, the drug is sky rocketing in nearby Dallas. There is a new form of heroin called Cheese, again a nice name for a nasty killer. Just this year Dallas has had more than 10 youths die from Cheese overdoses. Plano has never dropped its guard against heroin, but with Cheese knocking on its door, the community coalition has already increased the town hall meetings and is aggressively educating the community about this new threat. The narcotics unit is working closely with Dallas narcotics, county and state agencies to target the dealers who are seeking to recruit new addicts. The Plano Police Department and the community have vowed to do whatever it takes to prevent heroin from sneaking into the city again.



## **AGENCY AND OFFICER INFORMATION**

- This project is a classic example of a collaborative collation that included every member of the police department working with the community to resolve a problem that affected the entire community.
- This is an old project, but even ten years ago, the department knew of the SARA model of problem solving and utilized the model as a guide to the response.
- Every member of the police department assisted without any additional incentive.
- With a project as large as this one the fiscal requirements are immeasurable. The department did double the size of the narcotics unit and the community policing unit in the years to follow. The expansions of these units were directly and indirectly related to this project.
- Many of the officers who led the task force and project solving issues involved have retired. Officer Richard Glenn completed this award submission, but there are too many officers and citizens to name individually.

### **Contact Information**

#### **Sergeant Frank McElligott**

Supervisor of the Neighborhood Police Officer Unit  
909 14<sup>th</sup> Street  
Plano, Texas 75074  
(voicemail) 972-941-2527  
(fax) 972-941-2547  
[frankm@plano.gov](mailto:frankm@plano.gov)

#### **Officer Brad Ewell**

Neighborhood Police Officer  
909 14<sup>th</sup> Street  
Plano, Texas 75074  
(voicemail) 972-941-7401 #6168  
(fax) 972-941-2547  
[brade@plano.gov](mailto:brade@plano.gov)

#### **Officer Richard Glenn**

Problem Oriented Policing Officer  
909 14<sup>th</sup> Street  
Plano, Texas 75074  
(voicemail) 972-941-7401 # 6108  
(fax) 972-941-2547  
[richardg@plano.gov](mailto:richardg@plano.gov)