

# Problem Solving Quarterly

A NEWSLETTER OF THE POLICE EXECUTIVE RESEARCH FORUM

## Problem-Solving in Practice #1: Working Together in Ybor City

By Captain R.W.B. Seal and  
U. K.C. Newcomb

### Description of Problem

Ybor City, an inner city area of Tampa, Florida, has long been plagued by a multitude of crime problems, including commercial burglaries, auto burglaries and robberies. Rich in the Hispanic heritage, the area is a drawing card to tourists who wish to sample "real" Cuban food or marvel at the old historic cigar factories and true Spanish architecture. The leaders of this highly ethnic community have made great strides in their efforts to revitalize the area. New construction reflecting the Hispanic culture is in progress and other endeavors to put new life into the area are also underway. Originally the nucleus for the city of Tampa, Ybor City is surrounded by low-income single and multi-family dwellings. Two subsidized housing projects border the Thor City area and a number of commercial establishments.

Due to a number of unfortunate, highly visible incidents and a continuously high crime rate, business owners, residents and others approached the Tampa Police Department and solicited our help. The crime in Ybor City, they said, was drastically affecting the tourist industry as well as the quality of life for those living in the area.

After reviewing the the facts of the Ybor City problem, we determined that we could apply problem-oriented policing (recently implemented at the Tampa Police Department) to the situation. The project was assigned to Officer Lois Marrero, who to our benefit speaks fluent Spanish, and to Officer Dana Sanger.

It was discovered by the officers that several sub-sections within Ybor City had poor lighting, overgrown grass, and debris and trash at the rear of buildings and vacant lots, making them very attractive areas for criminal activity. Many of the area alleys, too, were cluttered with garbage and overgrown foliage, which obstructed the patrol officers' view from the streets.

### Response

Officers Marrero and Singer conducted meetings with the business owners and residents and solicited their **involvement** in the problem solving process. As a result, a strong rapport and working relationship between the police and the community was established and the officers were able

Sovitg may, p blisl d by the Police Bte,cutive Research Forum (PERK and pair Tally funded by the National Institute of Justice (NIJ), seeks to foster exchanges of information and experiences r problem-oriented policing. The opinions expressed herein do not nec a-ily reflect those of PELF or NIJ. Please submit articles, ideas and suggestions to Diane Hill, 'tor, at 2300 M Street, N W., Suite 910, Washington, DC 20737.

to obtain information about the problems without any difficulty.

One of Marrero's and Singer's goals was to return Thor City to the clean and the respectable place it once was — a place for people to eat, shop and enjoy the architecture that is a part of its history. To this end, the officers enlisted the help of several public agencies. The Parks and Recreation Department cleaned the alleyways, public works took responsibility for city-owned lots that stood vacant and unkept and the local electric company was more than willing to repair/replace lighting that was inoperable due to vandalism.

In addition to using the city's resources, the officers conducted security surveys on businesses and discovered why so many were being victimized. Members of the business community were receptive to the security suggestions and also shared in the responsibility of improving the conditions in Ybor City.

## Results

After spending approximately four months improving the Ybor City area, it was determined that a survey designed to measure citizen satisfaction was in order. The results of the survey were encouraging, even to skeptics of the problem-solving approach. Those surveyed generally made positive comments about the impact of the efforts of Officers Marrero and Singer. The merchants and residents expressed a renewed confidence in the police department's ability to deal with their problems, and noted that the aesthetic value of the area as a tourist center had been greatly improved. Statistical analyses revealed an overall reduction in index crimes in that area. (Not enough time has passed yet to measure any long-term changes.)

Since the implementation of the problem-solving project, the residents and merchants of Ybor City have organized a Crime Watch program and assumed the responsibility of maintaining their properties. Their partnership with the police department continues even without day-to-day, one-on-one contact with Officers Marrero and Singer.

For more information, contact Officer Lois Marrero or Officer Dana Sanger, Tampa Police Department, (813) 225-5860.

# You Want to Know

**Q.** NA PROBLEM-ORIENTED POLICING AGENCY, WHAT DO YOU SEE AS THE ROLE OF FIRST LINE SUPERVISORS?

**A.** "As supervisors, we should make ourselves available for guidance and assistance when needed. The officers involved in a problem-solving situation should be given ample time to work on their assigned projects, and it should be explained to the other officers that the time invested now by one officer will save them much time in the future if the project is successful. Supervisors should also be aware that this is not a good time for over-supervision, as the officer(s) involved will gain more respect for the program, and themselves, if given the opportunity to prove their worthiness."

**Sgt. Daniel Chesney and  
Sgt. Eric Tischner  
Baltimore County, MD  
(301) 494-2370**

**A.** "The supervisor should be totally familiar with all the procedures (methodology) and forms concerning problem-solving."

**Cpl. Robert Fraser  
Baltimore County, MD  
(301)494-2370**

**A.** "The supervisor is to be in a command position where he is an intermediary between his patrol officers and the problem-oriented community which he oversees."

**Off. David Hansford  
Baltimore County, MD  
(301) 494-2370**

# Staff Notes

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## The Role of First Line Supervisors

By Diane Hill

From the beginning of the problem-solving process, when the supervisor must share in the responsibility of prioritizing and assigning identified problems, to the final assessment, when the supervisor must share in the accountability of problem-solving efforts and results, the influence of the first line supervisor in a problem-oriented policing agency is paramount. Throughout the process, the first line supervisor is, or at least should be, the central component of problem-solving efforts.

The responsibilities of the first line supervisor are varied. **First, for the most part, assignment of problems falls on his or her shoulders.** That calls for knowing the staff: their strengths, weaknesses and interests. Successful problem-solving efforts are most often realized by conscientious individuals who have some interest in and commitment to addressing particular problems. How the supervisor conveys the assignment to the officer is just as important; a negative, condescending attitude exhibited by the supervisor toward the utility of problem-solving stands a reasonable chance of eliciting the same kind of attitude from the officer assigned the problem. He or she may ask, "Why should I put a whole lot into this, when my supervisor doesn't even think it's important?"

**Second, the supervisor is responsible for follow through on officers' efforts.** At no time should the officer be assigned a problem and then told, "Come back when you have the solution." Sure, officers are to be encouraged to use their own discretion, creativity, and resources, but at the same time they should have the continued commitment and support of their supervisor. No, the role of the supervisor is not to stand over someone with a PR24; instead, the role should be more that of a facilitator or coach—inquiring, probing for more creativity, encouraging broader resolutions, and removing barriers, both internal and external, when necessary. It should be noted that existing practices and procedures may in some cases be

hindrances to exploring alternatives for responding to problems; personnel of particular agencies may not feel it "appropriate" to speak directly with the patrol officer, or may believe it more "suitable" to approach a ranking officer.

**Third, the supervisor must see to it that officers get the necessary time to work on problem-solving efforts.** Analyses, strategy building, and assessment take time. If an agency has made the commitment to adopt problem-oriented policing, then it should give its officers a realistic amount of time to conduct problem-solving efforts. If officers are expected to conduct problem-solving activities during their routine daily work hours, then time requirements for completing tasks must be flexible. It is here that the supervisor must accept responsibility for assuring that officers don't abuse this flexibility.

### Giving Credit

**Finally, the supervisor should be one of the first to formally and/or informally recognize the efforts and results of his or her officers.** Not every effort will result in a dramatic impact on the problem; in fact, some efforts may end up having no impact at all. But that surely doesn't have to mean that an officer's efforts were useless. If departments are committed to problem-oriented policing, then they should also make it clear that problem-solving efforts are not only expected and important, but that these efforts will not go unnoticed. Departments should announce that individuals will be rewarded for the demonstration of problem-solving skills, knowledge and practice just as individuals are rewarded for good investigative skills, traffic control skills, and felony arrests. Moreover, departments should say that it's okay to take the risk of trying strategies that may not work.

With such varied responsibilities, how could the supervisor not be seen as an important link in the entire process? When the supervisor does not share in the accountability of problem-solving efforts, then the results achieved will surely reflect less than desired outcomes. When the immediate supervisor does not see and respond to the significant impact he or she has on the successful implementation of problem-oriented policing, then the entire problem-oriented policing agency may suffer.

## Problem-Solving in Practice #2:

# 84 Lumber: Nothing To Be Alarmed About

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### Description of Problem

There is no claim of victory when it comes to solving the 45,000 + calls for false alarms received annually by the Baltimore County Police Department, but Lt. Glenn Reese is very pleased with the efforts of his shift in resolving one very specific problem with false alarms. "Yes, the alarm problem in Baltimore County still exists, but for one car on one post in one sector, one alarm problem is solved. The twenty-plus hours spent on that one location per month for the past few years can now be applied to other problems in the community," said Lt. Reese. Until recently, officers repeatedly responded to the location, each time knowing that there was a very good chance that it would be just another false alarm.

The location is the 84 Lumber Company in Baltimore County, Maryland. For several years, officers had responded to the burglar alarm at 84 Lumber an average of twelve times per month. When officers arrived they would be confronted with a business surrounded by an 8' high fence with a locked gate. Weeds covering the fence would limit visual checks by the officers. And, neither the alarm company owner nor a representative for the lumber company would respond to the scene.

Frustration, on the part of the officers and Lt. Reese, finally led to efforts to develop more effective responses to burglar alarms at 84 Lumber. The officers realized it was time to do something more than react over and over again, in the same manner, to the same (always false) call at the same address.

### Response

Officer Larry Jackson was assigned to coordinate the problem-solving efforts. Jackson, along with other shift members outlined the goals: a reduction in the number of false alarms at 84 Lumber, better

responsiveness of the alarm company and manager, and the clean-up of weeds obstructing the view of the property. Lt. Reese met with the owner of the lumber company to explain the problem and solicit support and cooperation from him. He pointed out the number of times officers had gone to 84 Lumber and the difficulties they had faced once they arrived on the scene. Lt. Reese recommended that the owner consider adjusting the sensitivity of the alarm to reduce the number of false alarms, trim the weeds so that officers would be able to conduct better visual inspections of the property, and make every effort possible to respond to the alarm on future occasions so that officers could check the interior of the business.

### Results

Without hesitation, the owner agreed to follow through with the recommendations. After six months, the alarm has activated only once and that was during an electrical storm. The weeds have also been cleared up.

"Don't assume that a problem cannot be successfully resolved because it has been around for a long time. Personal interaction with those who are directly affected will produce results," Lt. Reese said.

For more information, contact Lt. Glenn Reese, Baltimore County Police Department, (301) 494-2370.

## Problem

Connect all nine dots, without taking your pencil from the paper, using four straight lines.



For the answer, please turn to pg. 8.

# Drug Problem Solving Project Picks Up Pace

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By Deborah Lamm Weisel

The pace of research in problem-oriented policing has accelerated with the selection of four cities as sites for the Problem-Oriented Approach to Drug Enforcement project administered by the Police Executive Research Forum (PERF) and funded by the Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA).

The two-year project, launched to proactively address the nation's drug problems, will be conducted in San Diego, Tampa, Atlanta, and Philadelphia. The cities were selected on the basis of an objective analysis of their applications by a panel of experts on problem-oriented policing.

## Tampa

Problem-oriented policing is not a new strategy to the Tampa Police Department. The jurisdiction is already part of an ongoing three-city project on problem-oriented policing. The emphasis on drugs, however, is a more narrow application of problem-solving in the Florida city.

To meet the conditions of the Problem-Oriented Approach to Drug Enforcement project, Tampa police will tackle drugs and drug-related problems in a 700-unit public housing complex located in District 2. The housing project, home to at least two riots during 1987, is plagued with drug problems. Tampa police plan to survey residents in this neighborhood and then develop innovative methods of tackling the area's complex problems. The project is being executed primarily by the X-Ray squad, a foot patrol unit attached to the city's most troublesome housing complexes.

## Philadelphia

Philadelphia's Police Department, South Division, has a unique problem in its D, O, and E Sectors. The area includes three 25-story public housing units and adjacent garden apartments. Within three blocks are rehabilitated town homes

occupied by the city's "Yuppie" population. Within a few more blocks is a thriving, circus-atmosphere business district which attracts throngs of tourists, **shoppers and sightseers. Both shoppers and tenants** of the rehabilitated housing are a ready "victim pool," says Inspector Edward McLaughlin. The consensus is that the area is a cornucopia of crime problems driven by drug trafficking.

The Department selected this area of high crime as the project site because of its deeply-rooted drug problems. Five "community problem specialists," working with community organizations, will identify specific problems. Problem-solving will be oriented around a Mini-Station located in the target area.

## Atlanta

The Bureau of Public Safety in Atlanta has undertaken an ambitious program in three of the city's troubled southeast public housing projects, where drugs and drug-related crimes constitute a significant problem. The police will engineer a coordinated interagency effort, buoyed by community involvement, which will focus on interrupting street and mid-level suppliers. This strategy will involve training regular beat officers in the affected zone in the techniques of problem-solving.

As in Philadelphia and Tampa, problem-solving is a long-term departmental objective.

## San Diego

San Diego's problem-oriented drug enforcement policing project will focus on enhancing the department's ability to collect and use data from their Crime Analysis Section, by adding incident-based mapping and analysis to current services. The project will also provide cross-training throughout the department between specialized units such as Street Gang and Narcotics Street Crime, and establish a formal protocol for handling drug-related problems.

The police are likely to concentrate on the city's Section 8 voucher housing, even though public housing in San Diego is not located in as contiguous an area as housing in the other three test cities.

The problem-oriented approach to drug enforcement will be oriented around the department's Walking Enforcement Campaign Against Narcotics (WECAN) unit.

# Problem-Oriented Policing: Where Are We Going?

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By Darrel W. Stephens

Our work with problem-oriented policing in Newport News represents a milestone in ongoing efforts to change the way the police carry out their responsibilities and relate to the communities they serve. The experience in Newport News did not happen in a vacuum, however. The department and the Forum benefited greatly from the research and experimentation that others had the courage to carry out before us, and we in turn, believe the experience in Newport News will contribute to further work aimed at improving police effectiveness.

For example, the Forum's current project in Tampa, St. Petersburg, and Clearwater, Florida, is designed to determine whether or not the problem-oriented policing concept can be implemented in an environment with even less outside assistance than was available in Newport News and other previous efforts.

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**...problem-oriented policing will be a keystone in the further improvement of policing.**

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While the results in each city have been promising, none have reached the level we believe is possible. All problem-solving efforts so far have demonstrated that improvements could be made in the way problems are addressed, and that police officers have the capability to implement this approach.

And, in spite of the earlier work and literature, many who are involved with the development and implementation of problem-oriented policing have difficulty understanding the concept. They are also uncertain where the concept itself is headed.

**Problem-oriented policing is a department-wide strategy aimed at solving persistent community**

**problems. Police identify, analyze, and respond to the underlying circumstances that create incidents.**

J We often hear from police departments, "That is not new. We have always been doing that." While it is true that some officers and departments engage in problem-solving occasionally, we have yet to encounter a police department that has adopted problem-oriented policing on a department-wide basis, and has reached the stage where where the organization is more problem-oriented than incident-oriented. Our goal is to help police adopt a more problem-oriented philosophy of policing.

## Profile of a Problem-Oriented Policing Department

Problem-oriented police departments generally exhibit several positive features. A police department with this philosophy:

- continues to deal with incidents—but every individual in the department understands that one of the most important activities is to identify, analyze and solve problems;
- expects much interaction between citizens and police;
- fosters an environment where employees at all levels of the organization are secure in the knowledge that they are the key element to the service delivery system and have the freedom to take risks and make mistakes;
- uses a variety of indicators of success, including citizen satisfaction, problems solved, and most of the other indicators currently being used in policing; and
- is flexible and capable of changing today to meet the needs of tomorrow.

In conclusion, we think that problem-oriented policing will be a keystone in the further improvement of policing. We want to be a part of that progress and will continue to encourage further experimentation and the sharing of knowledge in order to move toward the widespread adoption of this policing philosophy.

## Problem-Solving in Practice #3:

# On the Road Again

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### Description of the Problem

In 1985, the Newport News Police Department received 333 runaway reports; from August to December of 1985 alone, the Department received a total of 145 runaway reports. When the Youth Services Division of the Newport News Police Department identified as one of its goals for 1985 a reduction in the number of runaways, Det. Linda Robinson of that division was assigned to use the analysis model to determine who these juveniles were, why they were choosing a life on the streets, and what could be done to significantly improve the situation.

"At first I thought we could focus on decreasing the number of runaways as a whole, but that goal was found to be too broad," explained Det. Robinson. After some preliminary analysis, she discovered that 18 of the 145 runaways had run away more than twice, and five had run away five times within a five-month period. The focus of Robinson's efforts then shifted to an analysis of the repeat runaway offenders.

Det. Robinson consulted the crime/problem analysis model, and came up with approximately twenty different variables that she wanted to analyze, and developed an interview guide based on those variables.

The variables included basic demographic information regarding age, sex, race and education, as well as more detailed information about the incidents themselves: reasons for running away; activities engaged in during the juveniles' absence from home; and locations where the runaways stayed while away from home.

Det. Robinson found that most of the juveniles were 13-17 years-old, white, female and living in single-parent households. Most had run away because they had been physically or sexually abused by a family member or a close friend of the family. The runaways generally stayed with friends while away from home, and remained away from home no more than three days before voluntarily returning.

### Response

Realizing that the police department didn't have the resources to effectively handle the problems identified by the juveniles as reasons for running away, Det. Robinson began soliciting input from other agencies. The Department of Social Services, the Hampton Roads Missing Children Association, the court system and Child Protective Services, as well as other police departments, assisted in the development of strategies to reduce the number of repeat offenders.

As a result, repeat runaways are now identified by the Youth Services Division through a color-coded filing system and are referred to the court system more readily than before. Additionally, all runaways are interviewed by youth service detectives, and those juveniles who have been abused are immediately referred to Child Protective Services. Further, parents or guardians are no longer allowed to withdraw runaway petitions (which currently place the child under more court influence), once the child returns home.

The department also continues to develop other means for responding more appropriately and effectively to the runaway problem. One area already identified as needing improvement is the amount of time available for interviews with runaways.

### Results

Of the eighteen repeat offenders targeted by Det. Robinson, not one has runaway since 1985. (Two have since become adults.) Additionally, the application of problem-oriented policing in this instance has highlighted the benefits of community-police involvement: Said Det. Robinson, "Networking with other agencies and organizations is an area where the [problem analysis] model has positively influenced the way the department responds to community crime problems." For more information, contact Det. Linda Robinson, Newport News, VA, (804) 874-3330.

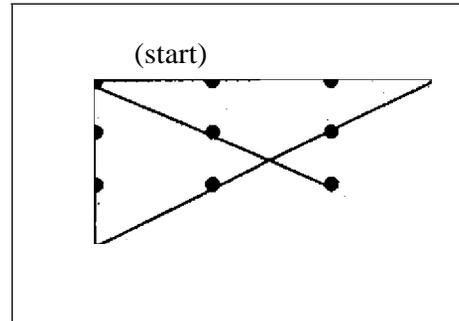
### ow+ **PointofFact**

A **problem** can be defined as a group of incidents occurring in a community that are similar in one or more ways, and are of concern to the police and the public.

## Solution (tromp. 4.)

The nine dots represent the constraints of traditional policing relative to problem-oriented policing. The **nine dots** may well stand for traditional responses to problems.:

- Increased Visibility
- Aggressive Enforcement, Criminal
- Radar Enforcement, Traffic
- Covert Operation
- Foot Patrol
- Stakeout
- Saturation
- Denial
- Lip Service



In order to solve the problem, you must go beyond the nine dots. In order to resolve policing problems, it is necessary to go beyond the limitations of traditional policing strategies. We must learn to call upon and utilize governmental and private resources and coordinate our efforts toward a desired end.

Most importantly, we must learn to expand our thinking and philosophy beyond the nine dots.

—Captain Richard D. Engel, Baltimore County, MD (301) 494-2370.

**To the Readers:** Thank you for **the** overwhelming number of responses to requests for "Helpful Hints" and "You Want to Know" articles. Due to a lack of space, many of these responses were not able to be included in this issue. Be sure to look for them in our summer publication. - The Editor

**Police Executive Research Forum**  
**2300 M Street, N.W., Suite 910**  
**Washington, DC 20037**

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