

Proactive Community Attack on Problems

Grady Judd, Jr. and Mary Beth Shiver

Tenants who cause problems have been served notices to vacate their premises. Nearby, two mobile homes deemed uninhabitable have been padlocked to prevent unwanted entry and to await their removal from the property. An endless stream of raucous traffic, from mid-afternoon throughout the night, has ceased. Transients no longer lay claim to the area. Children play in a field once overrun with weeds and debris. Crime is down by 34.5 percent; there has been a 11 percent reduction in dispatched calls for service; and citizen complaints against law enforcement have dropped by 10.5 percent from the previous year. Neighborhood reformations are becoming the norm in this central Florida county.

This scenario can become a reality in your community, too. As a local government manager, you can join with your police chief to reduce crime, solve problems, and improve the quality of life of your customers. Never again will you have to say, "There is nothing more we can do." Through partnerships within the community, leadership from the police chief, and support from the manager's office, you can deliver police services in a holistic way that guarantees positive results.

Updated County Philosophy

During 1997, the sheriff's office of Polk County, Florida (population 460,000), processed more than 200,000 calls for service. While state and national crime rates were decreasing, the sheriff's office reported a 15 percent increase in violent crime. Clearly, traditional policing methods alone were not addressing the county's crime problems.

Urban blight often is considered to be a condition confined to metropolitan areas. Dispersed throughout Polk County, however, are neighborhoods suffering the same

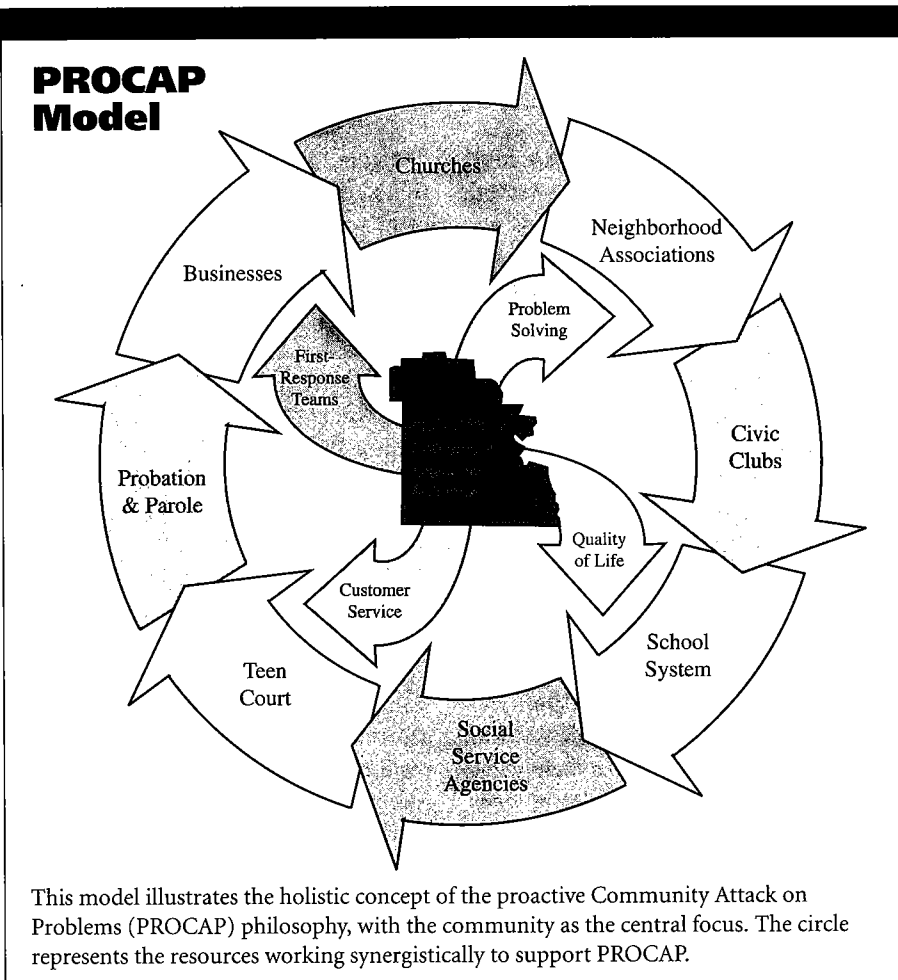
indignities that afflict larger communities. Problematic situations and the resulting neighborhood decay are preying on residents in these areas. The U.S. Department of Justice's Community-Oriented Policing Services (COPS) program, however, has blazed a trail that has taught the county how to form partnerships within the community.

Because of these established partnerships, the sheriff's office has been able to try more risky experiments to provide the community with proactive COPS law enforcement services, which are supported by citizens. Crime reduction, increased customer service, a reduction in repeat calls for service, and most of all an improvement in the quality of life for county residents are the ultimate goals.

After attending a 1997 conference hosted by the New York City Police Department, sheriff's administrators were optimistic that Polk County could achieve the same success. Proactive Community Attack on Problems, or PROCAP, was born and has evolved into the county's philosophy of partnering with the community to deliver police services.

How could this understaffed law enforcement agency make the transition to proactive policing and increase the quantity and quality of customer service without a significant increase in personnel?

With PROCAP, the concepts of traditional policing, problem solving, data-driven police responses, customer service, and crime analysis are blended with a solid base of the COPS program to reduce crime and crime problems while improving the quality of life in troubled neighborhoods. PROCAP is the framework for refurbishing Polk's communities. Residents become community caretakers to maintain ownership of their neighborhoods. Accountability, empowerment, data-driven service delivery, first-response teams, problem-solving teams, resource maximization, and problem-fighting tools are implements being used to construct this framework.



Accountability and empowerment. PROCAP holds all members of the sheriff's office, from the top administrator to the patrol deputy, accountable for analyzing crimes, identifying neighborhood problems, and devising solutions. The power to implement solutions, however, accompanies accountability. Empowerment for deputies begins when they bid where and when they want to work, based on seniority. As owners of an area, they become the problem solvers who tailor strategies for each issue and concern.

Problem solving can only begin when sheriff's office personnel have identified the problems and learned how to solve them. Enlisting community members as partners to serve as the "eyes, ears, and pulse of law enforcement" aids in finding the true causes of community concerns and crimes. This can be done by taking the first steps toward problem identification: making door-to-door contacts, attending community association meetings, consulting with business owners, conducting neighborhood watch meet-

ings, and distributing surveys on which residents can list their concerns.

Data-driven service delivery. Knowledge of when and where crimes are occurring, of suspect identifiers, and of suspects' methods of operation are vital in problem identification and problem solving. Crime-trend reports—depicting real-time activity, weekly activity, and the previous 28 days of occurrences—are distributed to each supervisor and deputy sheriff to help focus on problem people and places.

The reports include a list of current warrants and repeat calls for service, detailed by zone and address. It is easier to arrest violators for outstanding warrants than it is to follow behind them and react to the additional crimes they commit. To aid in serving warrants, deputies are given a daily list, by patrol area, of warrants issued in the previous 24 hours. This information also is shared with all local, state, and federal law enforcement agencies.

Judicial process personnel also conduct warrant checks on people served with civil papers. When individuals are found to have outstanding warrants, instead of having civil papers served on them, the sheriff's office dispatches a deputy to arrest them.

Addresses that prompt a deputy response five or more times within a month are reviewed to determine the nature of the complaint(s), whether domestic situations or criminal incidents. Many times, for example, deputies are called upon for conflict resolution although a criminal act has not been committed. Deputies must be sensitive to customers' social needs. In these instances, deputies can use a referral guide to free community resources (made available by the local United Way office) to help customers get problem-specific long-term assistance for concerns that lie outside the scope of law enforcement expertise.

In cases of ongoing criminal activity, problem-solving strategies are used to prevent the recurrence of these activities, thus eliminating the need for repeated deputy responses. As a result of these strategies, Polk County had an overall 4.5 percent decline in dispatched service calls in one year.

First-response teams. Patrol supervisors work with their squads to address crime occurrences by forming first-response teams. Each team is staffed with patrol deputies, shift detectives, a K-9 deputy, community policing deputies, and traffic-crash investigators. Supervisors from other agency components (aviation, vice, drug interdiction, intelligence, major investigations, school resource, and community services) commit their members and resources to augment those of the first-response teams. Investigations are no longer protracted over weeks, as in the traditional method of addressing community problems. The focus is on sending all the needed resources to an incident location to start problem solving immediately.

Problem-solving teams. PROCAP meetings are conducted twice a week in each

division to review the weekly crime-trend reports, to pinpoint areas of concern, to share intelligence data, and to discuss and devise solutions. Detective and patrol supervisors, school resource deputies, and intelligence, narcotics, and gang detectives are only a few of the many agency components that compose the problem-solving teams. Attendance at these PROCAP meetings is not limited to sheriff's office members.

Supervisory and line-level members from each division also attend a monthly PROCAP meeting conducted by the department commander. A countywide review of crime trends from the previous month is conducted. The management team, including all levels of supervision, is accountable for reporting problem-solving initiatives, both short- and long-term. Attendance and participation by line-level members is encouraged so they can broaden their understanding of this new holistic approach. Team members analyze, compare, and assess crime-fighting and problem-solving strategies; discuss approaches that proved effective; and solicit input on alternative approaches to problem solving.

Resource maximization. Finding alternative ways to make the best use of limited sheriff's office resources is vital to this program. An internal restructuring of agency resources was implemented in order to meet customers' needs:

- Property crimes detectives have been reassigned to the first-response teams to conduct immediate follow-ups on investigations, while witnesses and suspects still have fresh recollections of events.
- Sheriff's service officers have been trained to process the service calls that do not need the response of a deputy sheriff.
- Non-sworn pawn compliance officers perform daily checks of stolen property against items listed on pawnbroker transaction forms. Compliance officers also conduct pawnshop inspections to ensure compliance with

all applicable local and state regulations and do background checks on all pawnbrokers and their employees. Pawn activity by individuals under community control or on criminal probation also is monitored. Pawn compliance officers notify the warrants section of a pawn transaction by a wanted person.

- Problem-solving squads, secured through a federal grant to supplement community policing efforts, have provided additional deputy sheriffs. Patrol supervisors direct these mobile squads to infiltrate problem areas throughout the county, as indicated by data-driven information. These problem solvers also embrace community policing philosophies in the performance of their duties.
- Patrol deputies are temporarily assigned to the tactical drug unit on a 30-day rotation to receive training in all aspects of street-level drug enforcement. Deputies then apply the drug interdiction techniques they have learned to the street-level drug problems in their own communities.

Problem-fighting tools. Sheriff's personnel use various tools to deliver customer service, to target criminal elements, and to frustrate criminals' efforts to commit more crimes. These tools include innovative technology, community-focused ordinances, and grant funding. Without federal grants obtained through such agencies as the U.S. Department of Justice Office of Community-Oriented Policing Services (COPS) and the Bureau of Justice Assistance, the foundation for PROCAP could not have been laid. Overall, these are some tools that have proved invaluable in building the PROCAP framework and improving the quality of life within Polk County:

COPS MORE and funds from local law enforcement block grants. Polk County continuously seeks alternative grant funding to augment resources. Laptop computers and cellular digital packaging data (CDPD) terminals have been ac-

quired through two grants: the U.S. Department of Justice's COPS MORE (Making Officer Redeployment Effective) grant, and through the law enforcement block grant (LLEBG). These programs have placed important problem-solving resources in the hands of patrol deputies. Enhanced capability to query databases, to conduct person-to-person communications from the field, and to bypass the dispatcher with on-site inquiries are significant time-saving benefits.

Within seconds, stored data like active warrants, criminal histories, or missing-persons information can be easily accessed. Deputy safety is increased because critical information about potential suspects can be obtained with greater speed and accuracy. Likewise, research and design are under way to give deputies access to the geographic information system, to pin-mapping capabilities, and to a paperless reporting system.

Automated fingerprint identification system (AFIS). This system eliminates manual searches of fingerprint cards for comparisons of latent prints. It also can search unidentified crime-scene prints to determine who has been at a crime scene. And a method of "inkless" fingerprinting allows an instant review of scanned fingerprints. Acceptable prints are searched against the database to determine the person's identity. In many instances, AFIS can eliminate the use of aliases by criminals and aid in identifying persons with outstanding warrants.

Automated telephone system. An automated telephone dialing system using a computer-based program relays daily messages to county residents who are involved in such community partnership programs as neighborhood watch initiatives. These messages include reports of any newsmaking activity, community meeting notifications, suggested personal safety precautions, crime prevention tips, information to help in locating suspects or identifying sexual predators, and patterns of property crimes within problem areas.

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World Wide Web. The information highway makes it possible for customers to be apprised of news bulletins as soon as they are added to the Web page of the sheriff's office. Anyone accessing the Web page can conduct searches for inmates in custody, query local and statewide listings of fugitives and registered sexual predators/offenders, and view warrants records. Representatives of bail bonds companies can quickly determine if a client is incarcerated, instead of having to do a physical search. Crime information requests are made in conjunction with the local Crime Stoppers chapter to help clear unsolved cases.

School-based partnership. A grant has been obtained from the COPS office to spearhead a problem-solving initiative to identify the causes of school-related property crimes and to monitor the activities of students who are expelled, truant, or suspended from school. Sheriff's service officers telephone absent students' residence to find out if the students are complying with the youth protection ordinance, which imposes a curfew from 8:00 a.m. to 3:30 p.m., when minors should be in school. A civil cita-

tion is issued to students who fail to comply with the ordinance.

The program goals are to encourage students and parents to comply with school regulations, to urge students to stay in school, to encourage parents to assume a more active role in discipline, and to reduce the chance that any student will become a victim of crime or will commit any act detrimental to the community, especially during school hours.

Civil infractions enforcement. Deputies maintain a heightened awareness of persons who violate traffic laws. Detaining a vehicle with an expired tag or improper tag display, enforcing bicycle safety laws, and ensuring compliance with vehicle window-tint regulations are simple yet effective tools to help control the criminal element.

In one crime-prone area, a deputy stopped a bicyclist whose bicycle lights were malfunctioning. Using a laptop and a cellular modem, the deputy made a criminal-history check on the subject at the scene. Within seconds, the query had revealed an outstanding warrant for the individual, who later confessed to committing 35 burglaries.

Youth protection ordinance. In response to an increase in juvenile crime and violence, especially acts committed by juvenile gangs, a curfew ordinance was enacted in Polk County. Imposing time and place restrictions for youths 17 years of age and younger had been deemed essential to ensure minors' safety. Violators may be issued a civil citation unless they meet any of the ordinance exemptions. Parents and business owners who knowingly permit minors to violate the ordinance also may incur penalties at law enforcement's discretion. The intentions are to protect juveniles from accruing a police record, to protect others from being victimized, and to promote parental control and responsibility for minor children.

Public nuisance abatement ordinance. Sheriff's office members and county at-

torneys have collaborated to revive and strengthen the county's public nuisance abatement ordinance, and residents have approved its reinstatement.

The original ordinance was aimed at curbing drug activity, but the revised ordinance targets prostitution and gang activity as well. Now, property owners who receive two or more complaints within a six-month period must appear before the nuisance abatement board, which has the authority to declare a building a nuisance and to order the nuisance to cease, to impose fines of up to \$250 per day, to place liens on a property, and/or to obtain injunctions against violators to stop the nuisance.

To further improve the quality of life in the neighborhoods, the sheriff's office is working with landlords to draft leases, making it easier to evict tenants. Deputies also conduct local record checks on prospective tenants when asked to do so by landlords.

Noise ordinance. After consulting with a representative cross-section of customers, the sheriff's office proposed revisions to the existing noise ordinance. Some of the additional issues covered by this customer-tailored ordinance include excessive amplification of voices and outdoor concerts or neighborhood parties that create disturbances.

The Benefits

In the past, the department of corrections, probation, and parole and the sheriff's office had been moving on parallel or even opposite tracks to apprehend the same offenders. Now, these agencies reap the benefits of integrated resources. There is a continuous exchange of information; probation and parole officers attend agency PROCAP, intelligence, and investigations meetings; and deputies work with probation and parole officers to identify and attempt to charge problem probationers with appropriate violations.


Probation and parole officers can cut through red tape and move a probation

violation through the judicial system swiftly. Sheriff's staff have committed resources to aid in the crime-fighting efforts of probation and parole officers; deputies assist with the random drug testing of probationers; probation and parole officers are invited to ride with deputies; and each substation has office space and equipment reserved for probation and parole use. Here is an example of the close interactions of the two agencies:

Code enforcement. Deputies work closely with code enforcement to address code violations, including abandoned vehicles, overgrown lots, illegal dumping, and dilapidated structures. This partnership has led to the demolition of three residences, with 14 more slated for razing.

Investigation revealed fines accumulating since 1994 on an abandoned lot cited for code violations. With the deputies' assistance, the property was foreclosed, and the county seized the land. Within the same community, signs prohibiting standing or parking on the right-of-way have been posted by road maintenance staff. As a result, loitering and prostitution complaints have decreased significantly.

To further stifle drug transactions and loitering, consultations are under way with the telephone company to block incoming calls on public pay phones, especially those located at convenience stores. Law enforcement's presence in one problem area has led offenders actually to circulate a petition advocating that deputies leave their neighborhood so they can carry on with their illegal activities!

In short, customers are the core of the PROCAP methodology. Members of the sheriff's office adhere to the agency mission statement to practice honesty, courtesy, and teamwork in the performance of their duties. They are committed to providing their customers with the most efficient, professional law enforcement services available. 

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the department of law enforcement, and Mary Beth Shiver is the department's special projects coordinator, Polk County, Florida.

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Eight Ways to Deal With Other People's Voice Mail

- 8.** Make your message last 40 to 50 seconds. Too short, and it may seem insignificant. Too long, and you may rile the other party.
- 7.** Say your name, your organization or where you're calling from, and then, slowly, your phone number. Follow that with a short but essential message.
- 6.** Pretend you're writing your phone number in the air as you're reciting it. Too many callers speak much too fast, making recipients replay the message repeatedly.
- 5.** Speak louder than usual, enunciating as you speak. Your recipient may retrieve your message in an airport or another noisy place.
- 4.** Let the other party know if your call doesn't require a return message.
- 3.** Be generous when offering times and dates when you can be reached.
- 2.** Be friendly, engaging, and personable. You'll stand out like few other callers that day.
- 1.** After five working days, if you receive no reply, leave a quick repeat message saying, "I'm calling to follow up on the message I left on Tuesday."

Source: Jeff Davidson, Breathing Space Institute (<http://www.BreathingSpace.com>), Chapel Hill, North Carolina. Copyright 1999.