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Implementation Of Policy For The Juvenile Enforcement
Team Of The Corpus Christi Police Department

A
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by
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ABSTRACT

The focus of this research project is to bring attention to a problem within the Corpus Christi Police Department arising from the lack of direction in regards to the Juvenile Enforcement Team. The Department's welfare and morale will continue to suffer until action is taken to remedy the confusion when investigations focus on gang members. The problem is exacerbated by the fact that the Juvenile Enforcement Team (JET) has been reassigned from the Uniform Division to the Special Services Division. The Special Services Division is responsible for the investigation of Narcotic and Vice investigations. The JET Team is in uniform and operate marked units. This reassignment further exacerbates the morale problem which already existed.

Through the use of personal experiences, interviews with investigators and patrol officers, and other research projects, this research paper shows the importance of having a clear set of guidelines delineating the different areas of responsibilities for the different responders. This impacts not only the relationships between the different officers but hampers the ability to effectively deal with the numerous gangs, both adult and juvenile, that have been documented in Corpus Christi.

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The historical information reveals that numerous cities have initiated a response to the gang problem by forming a unit specifically to deal with those individuals. Some cities attacked the problem aggressively while other cities chose a more indirect approach. Without fail, the Police Departments that were surveyed delineated the areas of responsibility in a departmental policy which outlined the do's and don'ts of dealing with crimes involving gangs. The policies would assign areas of responsibility to certain sections for conducting investigations which will prevent any misunderstandings between Criminal Investigations Division (CID) investigators, Uniform Division officers, and the Gang investigators.

To date, the Corpus Christi Police Department (CCPD) has not defined the roles and responsibilities of the Juvenile Enforcement Team (JET) team with any kind of official policy. The JET Team currently has 22 officers assigned to the unit along with one first line supervisor (Lieutenant) and one second line supervisor (Captain).

The opportunities relevant to this issue are that the Department is not efficiently utilizing scarce resources. The JET unit is assigned a variety of tasks which include surveillance of gang members, citizen's complaints to the chief's office, assisting the narcotics and vice units on raids and responding to any major call that they deem requires a response. The inefficient utilization of resources arises when a shooting call is received and every JET unit on duty responds to the scene. On some occasions, there have been as many as five two-man JET units at the scene along with the usual number of marked units. Without any clear guidelines, confusion and chaos follow.

The field of law enforcement will benefit from this research by having the problems of not having policy for units outlined. The additional benefit will come from the suggested policies outlined in this research paper which are a compilation from several different departmental policies.

The effect on law enforcement will hopefully be that Police Chiefs will not inadvertently create animosity and distrust between members of different units. It is important to recognize that every unit within the agency needs to cooperate and function as a team to achieve the goals and objectives of the Police Department.

Review of Literature

The TELEMASP BULLETIN issue dated July 1998 outlined the El Paso Police Department's (EPPD) progression to the Drive-by Shooting Review Team (DSRT). The current structure of the DSRT consists of five investigators responsible for all gang related investigations except homicide. The writer noted that the DSRT investigators provided "substantial support in homicide cases". The EPPD utilizes uniformed officers in marked units to deal with specific problem areas in the neighborhoods. These units are referred to as Community Response Against Street Hoodlums (CRASH) and are styled after the Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD) Gang Unit referred to as CRASH.

The EPPD also assigns a Police Area Representative (PAR) officer that is the community policing officer for the district. A key element in the investigation of gang related crimes was a rapid response by the investigators to the crime scene. EPPD asked for responding units to "freeze" the crime scene and await the DSRT unit. The DSRT statistics reveal a dramatic drop in call-outs, in call-outs cleared, in DSRT arrests, and

weapons confiscated. This appears to indicate the unit's effectiveness as they were called out only 14 times in 1997 in comparison to 40 times in 1995. (Telemasp, July 1998)

The department credits the success of the DSRT to several factors:

Nigh time curfew enforcement primarily by CRASH units.

Graffiti abatement initiatives which includes a city ordinance permitting the city to clean graffiti from private property.

Diversion activities of potential gang members and youthful offenders by PAR representatives. PAR officers are Community Oriented Police officers.

An FBI Gang Task Force which includes a DSRT Investigator.

Weekly gang meetings to share information. These meetings include DSRT, CRASH, Intelligence Units, PAR officers, and other Law Enforcement officers from the surrounding area.

Another study on youth and gang problems described the manner in which the Victoria, Texas Police Department and the Mission, Texas Police Department were dealing with those issues.

The Mission Police Department decided that "heavy handed" policing was not the most effective way to deal with youth crime. The department decided to create a partnership with area schools and subsequently assigned 21 % of it's sworn complement to the schools. Officers are assigned to DARE, GREAT, and as Education Resource Officers. (Telemasp Bulletin, June 1998)

It was found that the program affects many variables of the community such as:

- There are notably fewer gang problems in schools.
- Better liaison with schools for resolving problems.
- Significantly increased avenues of communication between the department and the community.

The Gang Prevention Program with the Victoria Police Department has taken a slightly different approach but had similar tactics as well. The department has assigned four officers and one supervisor to city schools. The Victoria initiative consists of eight components which are as follows:

1. Graffiti education and eradication- training to recognize, record, and remove graffiti and gang signs.
2. Gang education (community and schools)- consists of DARE, school Resource Officer, provide training to teachers and parents on gangs.
3. Adopt-a-gang- district officers voluntarily adopt a gang in an effort to have officers develop trust among gang members and get to know them and their associates.
4. Retaliation reaction- utilizing diverse tactics to let gang members know that retaliation attacks will not be tolerated.
5. Gang Grand Jury- Special Grand Jury convened to suppress gang activity which indicted numerous members for a variety of offenses.
6. Personal Protection Classes- Resource Officer teaches martial arts classes to provide membership in a group without resorting to gangs.
7. Schools/malls/community anti-gang programs- malls and schools prohibit clothing which are characteristic of gang membership.
8. Promotion of "legitimate large gangs"- promotes membership in sports teams, boys and girls clubs, and other youth organizations.

Victoria P.D. gang officers stated that increased communication between officers and gang members was the most important result of their initiative. Open lines of communication provided officers with an opportunity to divert youth from gangs but also provided officers intelligence on potential gang violence or retaliation.(Telemasp, June 1998)

In an interview of Arlington, Texas Police Department Deputy Chief Michael Ikner explained that the Arlington P.D. Gang Unit consists of six (6) officers supervised by one Sergeant. (Interview of Arlington Police Department Deputy Chief Michael Ikner). Deputy Chief Ikner stated that the City of Arlington has approximately 300,000 citizens in population and the Police Department has a sworn complement of 500 officers. The Arlington, Texas Police Department's Filed Operations Manual outlines the organization, unit administration, and responsibilities of the Gang Unit. This is another example of a city comparable to Corpus Christi that utilizes it's Gang Unit as an investigative unit and outlines the unit's responsibilities in a policy form.(Arlington Police Department manual)

In the LEMIT research paper submitted in Nov 96, Mr. Ray Hughes quoted an article from the Dallas Morning News (Feb 19,1994) which dealt with the results of a poll. The poll revealed that Texas adults predominately blamed drugs and negligent parenting but also blamed low morals, alcohol abuse, academic problems, and physical abuse. Parents often rely on the community to control and influence the behavior of youth. (Hughes, 1996)

Many community agencies agree that the family unit should be the most important influence on a youth's life. As a number of officers have said, "Simply arresting them and locking them up is not the whole answer. We have to figure out a way to reach kids before they get involved with these gangs". "Police should be aggressive but professional in dealing with gangs. Gang members must learn that they cannot operate with impunity and that their sense of "invisibility" is a false one". (Huff, 1989)

Discussion of Relevant Issues

In 1991, the Corpus Christi Police Department (CCPD) formed the Juvenile Enforcement Team (JET) with the responsibility of dealing with the city's gang problem. A concurrent issue was the enforcement of a nighttime juvenile curfew. The department initiated a temporary curfew center at the South Side sub-station which was manned on the weekends by a juvenile detective on overtime and an on-duty uniform officer during the week.

In 1996, the department increased the size of the JET team to 15 officers and moved them from the Uniform Division and assigned them to the Special Services Division. The Special Services Division consists of the Narcotics and Vice sections along with the Organized Crime Unit. The JET team personnel are required to wear the department's uniform and are assigned marked patrol cars.

In 1998, the department increased the size of the JET Team to 22 officers which was the current staffing level until 1999 when the unit was reduced to 18 officers.

At one point, a JET officer was assigned to the Juvenile Detective section and was given the responsibility of assisting the Criminal Investigation Division with any gang related crimes but was later reassigned back to the JET unit.

Conclusion/Recommendations

It is suggested that JET Team members will be responsible for home visits of gang members and associates. Studies indicate the strong need to involve parents/guardians in the fight to prevent their children's involvement in gangs.

A billboard advertisement that appeared in Corpus Christi, Texas in 1999 stated, "If your child is in a gang, it is your fault". Although it was a simplistic point of view, there was a certain amount of depth and insight to the statement. The statement also points to the fact that many parents choose to ignore their responsibility and role in the prevention of their children's affiliation with gangs.

The most difficult hurdle to overcome by all involved is to admit that there is a problem with gangs in our family, neighborhood, or city. Once that problem is overcome, parents can begin the process of removing their children from that environment and influences.

A study that was conducted several years ago in Chicago, Illinois still seems pertinent today. "In 1987, the University of Chicago's School of Social Administration entered into an agreement with the U.S. Department of Justice and Prevention (OJJDP) to establish the National Gang Suppression and Intervention Program. The research and development program's primary goals, addressed in corresponding stages, were to (a) identify and assess promising approaches and strategies for dealing with youth gang problems, (b) to develop prototypes or models from the information thereby gained, and (c) to produce technical assistance manuals for those who could implement models". (Spergel & Curry, 1990).

The essay highlights the need for more careful evaluation in developing strategies for dealing with gangs. On a positive note, they reported that "community mobilization is a strategy consistently perceived as being effective in dealing with the youth gang problem in the cities they investigated". (Spergel & Curry, 1990)

This statement emphasizes the need for parental involvement at the very beginning of a child's life to prevent gang involvement. Community programs are needed, strict enforcement by officers is needed, stricter laws from legislators are needed, focused prosecution is needed, but none more so than involving parents from the onset.

The reason that the implementation of policy for the JET Team is so important is to delineate the areas of responsibility and to provide clear goals and objectives. The reasons children join gangs are as varied and complex as the children themselves. Without clear-cut goals and objectives on how to approach and deal with a gang problem in our community, efforts will be sporadic and will only lead to aimless activity.

A Community Oriented Policing approach appears to have had the most effectiveness in dealing with gang members on a long term basis. In an article reprinted from the Los Angeles Times (Jan 96), interviews of Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department Gang Unit (OSS) and Los Angeles Police Department Gang Unit (CRASH) depicted two contrasting styles.

CRASH officers routinely check on gang members and will "jam" them. "Jamming" is described as frisking for weapons and arresting for any offense.

OSS officers take the approach that is similar to a Community Oriented Policing philosophy. Officers check on gang hotspots, but approach gang members with a non-confrontational style. OSS officers stated that they take enforcement action when it is necessary, but otherwise will attempt to get to know the gang members in an effort to familiarize themselves with individual members. OSS officers feel the reason they are having more success is that they wear plainclothes and drive unmarked units.

Although every gang member knows who they are and what they drive, it seems that the gang members are more willing to approach an unmarked unit than a marked unit.

The figures and statistics are interesting when LAPD and LASD are compared. Although these numbers are several years old, the message seems to be the same. In 1984, LASD had 50 officers in a gang unit compared to 201 officers with LAPD. LASD had 25,000 gang members while LAPD had 12,500 in their respective areas. A chart comparing major crimes listed the homicide, attempted homicide, felony assaults, armed robbery, and total gang related major crimes. In almost every category, LASD figures were lower than LAPD. This research appears to indicate that the more effective approach to dealing with gang members is with a Community-Oriented Policing philosophy. (Freed,1993 : 288-291)

Some suggested guidelines for developing department policy include the following:

- A. The Juvenile Team (JET) will be responsible for the investigation of crimes involving gang members as victims or perpetrators.
- B. The JET Team will be assigned to the Uniform Division.
- C. The JET Team will consist of one Captain, one Lieutenant, and eight officers.
- D. Two JET Team officers will be assigned follow-up investigative duties will consist of responding to major crimes involving gang members, excluding homicide, and conduct a full investigation. On cases involving a homicide, JET Team investigators will provide support and intelligence information to the assigned Homicide investigators.
- E. Six JET Team officers will be assigned the responsibility of gathering intelligence, monitoring activities of gang members, and establishing rapport with the district beat officers.

- F. JET Team officers responding to the scene of a major crime scene will be under the supervision of the field supervisor assigned to the call.
- G. JET Team officers will conduct follow-up home visits to suspected gang members and /or associates. Parents/Guardians should be informed of their children's suspected gang activities and methods on how to deal with the problem.
- H. One Uniform Division officer from each shift will be assigned to monitor gang activity on their district and act as a liaison between JET, JET analysts, and patrol officers.
- I. JET Team officers will utilize the Community Oriented Policing philosophy when dealing with gang problems.
- J. JET officers will adhere to all Departmental policies.

These suggestions are by no means all-inclusive but are general in nature. Outlining the guidelines into a policy form will reinforce to all officers the need for a cooperative effort by all individuals involved in the investigation.

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