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A Model for Police - Social Service Cooperation

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Summary

A Social Service consultant in community resources was made available to an urban police department by the Law Enforcement Assistance Administration. Wilberforce University, Wilberforce, Ohio was the grantee institution.

After an initial period of orientation and interpretation, the service of the consultant was announced and discussed with all police officers. They were encouraged to communicate with the consultant from the scene of any contact with citizens which could involve social, psychological or personality problems and for which a referral to an agency might be indicated. In order to make this referral service possible, a 24-hour a day, seven-day per week telephone service was established.

At the end of the year's grant period, it was found that the resources of a consultant benefitted the police officers, the department, the community and the citizens in many ways.

The sense of frustration and indifference which police officers faced when they were overwhelmed with emergency medical, personality, marital, and family problems on the part of a citizen was sizeably decreased. The anomie which citizens are met with in coping with complex environmental and/or psychological problems and for which there was no immediate resource available was overcome. The portrait of the police officer as a "hardened" and insensitive person in human affairs was dispelled. The image of a police department active only in negative adversary roles was changed in the cases where the service was utilized.

The essential feature of the project was the role of the consultant and his special skills and capabilities. The consultant, who served as a community social worker, must be very knowledgeable about the functions, capabilities, institutional capacity and personnel strengths and limitations of

each community resource in working through a referral process. He must be able to cut through a maze of red tape, apathy and bureaucratic malfunctioning in order to effect the service desired for the citizen, who is often a person with marked disabilities of personal, medical and/or financial natures. He frequently represents a situation with limited possibilities for a favorable prognosis, and therefore professional advocacy often has to be applied to secure the service in the client's behalf.

This project has also shown that if the command level rewards and supports the "referral process" and if the consultant "delivers", the officers are more likely to participate, support and sustain the process.

Since the vast majority of police - citizen contact does not involve actual criminal cases, the police, under this program, have become one of the first lines of defense in the community mental health network of services.

In the establishment of such a project, there are many potential hazards. If project personnel is aware of these dangers at the outset and can "handle them", the project's success increases and negative attitudes and skepticism may be overcome and managed with a minimum of difficulty.

These dangers are as follows:

- 1- Top command does not believe in the value of social services, and/or does not see its functioning as related to a police department's responsibility.
- 2- Officers who participate are not formally recognized, encouraged, supported and rewarded by the hierarchy of command.
- 3- Additional paper work is required in systematic tracking of a referral and in the "feed back" process.
- 4- Officer resistance to becoming "do-gooders or sociologists" therefore tarnishing the authority image of law enforcement.
- 5- The consultant is not immediately available at all times for consultation regarding the problem.
- 6- The consultant is not completely familiar with all the resources available.

- 7- The consultant is limited in his diagnostic skills.
- 8- The consultant hesitates to apply professional "clout" in order to get service for the citizen quickly and efficiently.
- 9- The consultant does not follow-up to ascertain that services have actually been "delivered".
- 10- The consultant is unknowledgeable of community organization, staff development, dynamic human behavior, and the stress and strains of delivery systems.

All these difficulties were handled satisfactorily in the Wilberforce University Project, and attached is a model program which may be flexible enough to be adapted by police departments desiring to reproduce the Dayton experience.

A Model for Police - Social Service CooperationThe Problem

A Police system is highly visible. With the possible exception of a periodic visit of a public health nurse, a welfare worker, a housing inspector or a sanitation man, the police are the only officials constantly on duty, especially in areas of high crime rates, where low income people live and/or social disorganization is common.

The nature of the policeman's assignment puts him into daily contact with in the problems of society - legal, marital, personal and environmental. Hence, there is a great potential for an officer to serve as a first line of contact against the myriad of daily social problems which confront him regularly.

The police system did not create these problems of social disorganization, family break-down, poor housing, unemployment and the like, yet its personnel faces the human toll and consequences and is expected to offer solutions.

People often call the police for problems which are not directly law enforcement related. What can police officers do to be of assistance to citizens? What skills and knowledge and cooperation are required to engage the intervention of other disciplines, professions and community services for resolution in behalf of human need?

The results of the project discerned the following:

A. The simplest solution would be for the police officer to give the citizen an appropriate phone number to call. For example, if the problem was one which involved legal aid, then he could leave the number of the local Legal Aid Society. There are two negatives to such a plan. First, the client may not follow through since, the act of seeking help is a very complex one for internal and external reasons and this is especially so for low income and/or minority groups. Secondly, the problems presented are

more likely to be multiple and complicated and it is difficult for a police officer to discern the "primary social diagnosis" and the most appropriate resource(s) to call. In a moderate sized city of 250,000 population, there may be as many as 150 different community agencies. All of them are active and hard at work with clients willing to seek assistance and unless there is some "push", outreach service may not be readily forthcoming. Policemen have learned quickly on the "trial and error" principle. Unless they are "successful" in their referrals, they become discouraged and discontinue future referrals because "it does no good". The exception may be with protective and/or public agencies as required by law such as in an obvious case as child abuse.

B. Another simple solution, but equally inadequate, is for the policeman to initiate the call in behalf of the potential client. In actual practice, however, there are a number of pitfalls in this approach. The officer seldom has the "know-how" of what goes into a referral, nor does he have the time to follow through. Even when he has the will and persistence, there is a "hit and miss" element present. There is a likelihood that he might not select the most appropriate agency for the referral because of the gap in his social diagnostic knowledge, depending on the size of the community and the network of services existing.

In order for him to know of the most fitting agency, he would need to be available and interested in participating in a thorough and detailed staff development program in community resources and in the art of referral. There are not many police academies set up to give this kind of training.

However, let us suppose that the officer is willing and able to make a referral, and he does take the initiative to make a proper one. Convincing the referring agency of the appropriateness takes skill and follow-up takes time. The process of making a sound referral is a sophisticated one and an important aspect of it is to have the social diagnostic capability of understanding the dynamics of the person and his problems, coupled

with the ability to "sell" the referral to the appropriate agency so (1) that they have a reasonable chance to succeed and (2) that they feel a sense of cooperative community responsibility and see their image involved. Unless an agency believes that it has a reasonable chance to "succeed" and there is a responsible professional or community person who is concerned and interested in the referral, too frequently continuity of care and service is broken in the transfer from the law enforcement to the social service system. The consultant's role is akin to ombudsman in many ways.

The Dayton Plan, appears to be a satisfactory method of resolving the problems delineated above.

The Dayton Plan

We recommend that Chiefs of Police make contact through their Community Relations Unit to link up with the local United Fund or Council. Most communities have a centralized Referral Center through such an organization. An arrangement can be made whereby referrals could be channeled through this one office. It may be desirable that one officer in the Community Relations Unit take responsibility for all referrals. In this event, that officer would secure and maintain the social information taken from the officer who was "on the scene" and then would make the appropriate referral in his behalf. The advantage to this plan is that one officer becomes very skilled in the referral making process. Confidential notations should be kept of all referral situations which officers should be encouraged to make in marital, alcoholic, drug, psychiatric and other human problems.

The Police department should set up a system of recognition and commendation for officers showing initiative and concern in this practice similar to that of an officer who makes an arrest at the scene of a robbery. There seems to be a minority attitude that it is not the responsibility of a policeman to become involved in social problems and that this is not a part of the police image. It is "too soft" and becomes confused with mas-

culinity identity, role reversal, etc. This project showed that with a majority of police the opposite attitude was more prevalent; that is, the police were interested in human problems and welcomed any assistance. Every unresolved social problem a policeman meets today will undoubtedly arise again tomorrow. And tomorrow, the social issues and difficulties will surely become compounded and more complex.

If the department decides that individual officers should make the referral to a United Fund Agency Referral Service, then each officer should receive a small card which he could carry on his person or in the patrol car, giving the name of the responsible person in the Referral Service who could be called, the telephone number to call and the hours and days which the switchboard will be open. Every effort should be made by the Chief of Police to secure a 24 hour a day, seven day a week referral capability. In some communities this may be the Red Cross, Travelers Aid, local hospital or clinic, etc. In larger cities, or communities, the recommendation is that ancillary professional personnel be added or "attached" to police departments to perform these specialized functions. The social service system and network is complex. (Psychologists, educators and lawyers are now functioning in police departments to perform unique and specific tasks.) This appears to be a much more desirable procedure than having to reach outside the department in time of need, stress and emergencies. The professional expertise of a social service coordinator is readily available hence, the consideration that a social service consultant with a background in social work and community organization could be added to police department staffs. This person would know the community, its network of service, the problems of its residents and the resources available to meet the multiple needs of people. The consultant would be as integral a part of the department as the police photographer, laboratory technician or fingerprint expert and so forth. It would be his task to provide for staff development in community services,

implement a referral system, follow through and report back.

The Social Service Consultant's knowledge and skills should also be used to mobilize the community resources system and promote its capability to meet the imperative needs of the citizenry. This would be a function to bridge the gap between law enforcement and the social service network system. Such a position may be funded by the United Fund, or arranged as a "detached social worker" from an agency, or hired by the police unit itself.

Our present system of meeting the social and psychological needs of people who are not involved in criminal behavior and who come into contact with the police are very haphazard, fragmented, and extremely inadequate. Unless the systems are formalized and interlinked with one another in behalf of citizens and their needs, the communities' problems will go from bad to worse.

The establishment of a referral system is an excellent vehicle to promote a positive image for police departments. There is very little, if anything, to lose in promoting, initiating and implementing such a program. Police departments, the taxpayers, the community, the officers and the citizenry have much to gain.

The time has come for police departments to take an active role in community affairs and its problems. A cue can be taken from a long established unit of government, the United States Army. The curriculum of the United States Military Academy at West Point, in New York has now been revised so that 55% of the course of study deals with the social sciences. Drill, once a daily event, has been cut down to 2 1/2 hours a week; less than the average officer candidate in the Reserve Officers Training Programs receives. The message from that source is clear: the future of an effective law enforcement system cannot remain isolated from other systems in the community, especially the social service system. While different communities and police districts throughout the United States may vary in readiness to enter into a flexible and experimental model similar to "The Dayton Plan",

nonetheless all indications lead to the conclusion that eventually a compatible Plan will need to be devised. The year's experience indicates that it is workable and beneficial to all.