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FINAL REPORT

EVALUATION OF SHENANGO VALLEY DRUG UNIT

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ACQUISITIONS

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Northwest Regional Planning Council
Governor's Justice Commission

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INTRODUCTION

In the summer of 1975 this researcher was requested by the Northwest Regional Planning Council of the Governor's Justice Commission to evaluate the various drug units in Northwest Pennsylvania which it had funded. A total of \$356,994 in federal dollars had been granted to Millcreek, Erie, New Castle and Mercer County. Later, this request was modified to cover only Mercer County (Shenango Valley) from its inception in May, 1972, to the present. To date, Mercer County has received \$229,583 in federal monies.

At an earlier Council Meeting the evaluator proposed two types of evaluations. The first proposal had two objectives: the measurement of actual drug use in the area within the jurisdiction of the operating unit; and the measurement of the impact of the drug unit on drug use. The cost of this level of evaluation was considered beyond the financial capacity of the planning budget. An alternative evaluation was suggested, and accepted. The alternate design assessed the activities of the drug enforcement unit with respect to:

- a. Numbers and types of arrests for drug possession and use.
- b. Charges altered by the Court for evidentiary or other purposes.
- c. Conviction-dismissal or acquittal rates.

- d. Cooperation between the State Bureau of Drugs, local police departments, federal authorities and law enforcement officials in the State of Ohio.

DATA SOURCES

The data used in the evaluation was obtained from the files of the Shenango Drug Unit and the Office of Criminal Justice Statistics (OCJS), Pennsylvania Department of Justice. The latter source provided approximately 4500 cases which reached the Court of Common Pleas in Mercer County between 1972-1976. These records were used to verify the Drug Unit's records for all cases between 1972 up to 1976. No verification was possible for summary offenses or juvenile dispositions which were not filed in Common Pleas Court. All adult drug offenses represent either misdemeanors or felonies and are handled by the Common Pleas Court of Mercer. But frequently drug charges are reduced to summary offenses (disorderly conduct, etc.) and are sent back to the courts of first instance. For all dispositions at this level we relied upon the raw files of the drug unit.

Mercer County has an envious record of avoiding court delay. Final dispositions were almost always rendered in a given case within 3 months of an arrest. We were able to verify most cases with the OCJS up to September 30, 1975. Our statistical analysis of cases after that date at both magistrate and county court levels relies entirely upon drug unit data. The separation point also roughly corresponds to a new unit's formation in the fall of 1975.

For these reasons we have analyzed cases resulting from arrests between 5/1/72 and 9/30/75 separately from cases resulting from arrests between 10/1/75 to 4/1/76. The patterns of arrest and disposition are summarized in Tables 1 and 2 below.

(See attached Tables 1 & 2)

INTERJURISDICTIONAL COOPERATION

The Shenango Valley Unit was responsible for approximately 24% of all drug sale arrests which reached the Mercer County Courts between 1972-1976. Since the Unit was not in operation until May of 1972, the 24% figure reflects a sizeable percentage of drug arrests. In addition the figure does not include cases brought to court in Pittsburgh, in Ohio or in federal court on the basis of information and witnesses supplied by the Unit. Moreover, Sgt. Gary Lenzi of the Shenango Drug Unit pointed out to us that many drug arrests by officers outside the Shenango Drug Unit were acting on information supplied by the drug unit.

Interjurisdictional conflict between drug units and other police jurisdictions is not uncommon. The Shenango Drug Unit has had some conflict with other police jurisdictions, but has also had commendable cooperative relationships between Ohio police, Federal Officers and local police departments. The number of arrests by the Shenango Drug Unit prosecuted in these jurisdictions attests to that relationship.

TRENDS IN ARREST PATTERNS

The early years of the drug unit included the arrest of major dealers in hard drugs such as cocaine and heroin. The trend in the last year has been away from the arrest of major heroin dealers (Table 3). However, several cases pending do deal with heroin dealers and users in 1976.

TABLE 3

Type of Arrest 5/1/72-9/30/75		Type of Arrest 10/1/75-4/1/76	
Heroin	11%	Heroin	3%
Marihuana	76	Marihuana	82
Other	13	Other	16
N=238		N=101	

FINDINGS

With regard to the strength of evidence, a number of cases were lost through suppression hearings and subsequent nolle pros, or grand jury dismissals. The District Attorney also decided not to charge a number of offenders. However, to what extent nolle pros and failures to charge resulted from either a negotiation for testimony, a trivial charge, or an evidentiary weak case due to poor police work or faulty procedure cannot be determined. In all, 82 per cent of "no charge" instances (Table 1) represented cases involving small amounts of "soft" drugs. Most of the harder drug cases resulted in a conviction either in federal court, on other serious charges (such as larceny or felony restraint) or on the

original charge in Mercer County Court. Only one "no charge" is recorded on an original arrest for sale of heroin, and two no charges are recorded for sale of marihuana.

TABLE 1

DISPOSITIONS OF JUVENILE AND ADULT OFFENDERS ARRESTED BY SHENANGO VALLEY-FARRELL NARCOTICS UNIT^a
5/1/72-9/30/75

NO CHARGE BY DISTRICT ATTORNEY	MAGISTRATE'S COURT		DISMISSED IN COURT OF COMMON PLEAS			CONVICTED		TYPE OF CHARGE ^d & YEAR OF OFFENSE	OTHER JURISDIC.
	Convicted	Dismissed	Nolle Pros Not Sent to Magistrate	Quashed, Dismissed Demurrer	Suspended Sentence Probation/Costs Only/Parole Vio- lation/Juveniles ^b	Jail or Prison ^c			
						Less than 1 Year	More than 1 Year		
			1	1			3	Cocaine or Heroin Sale '72-73	1
1				1		1		'74-75	6
2		1				3		Cocaine or Heroin Use or Possession '72-73	
			1			2	1	'74-75	
2			2	1	1	2	5	Marijuana Sale '72-73 '74-75	
9	11		6	3	5	2	3	Marijuana Use or Possession '72-73	
33	58		2	5	22	3	2	'74-75	
2					1	3	1	Other Sale '72-73	
1								'74-74	
					2			Other Use or Pos- session '72-73	
1	1			1	1			'74-75	
6				1				No Charge listed, but arrest made '72-73	

DISPOSITIONS OF JUVENILE AND ADULT OFFENDERS ARRESTED BY SHENANGO VALLEY-FARRELL NARCOTICS UNIT^a
5/1/72-9/30/75

NO CHARGE BY DISTRICT ATTORNEY	MAGISTRATE'S COURT		DISMISSED IN COURT OF COMMON PLEAS		CONVICTED		TYPE OF CHARGE ^d & YEAR OF OFFENSE	OTHER JURISDIC.
	Convicted	Dismissed	Nolle Pros Not Sent to Magistrate	Quashed, Dismissed Demurrer	Suspended Sentence Probation/Costs Only/Parole Vio- lation/Juveniles ^b	Jail or Prison ^c Less than 1 Year		
	4				1		1	'74-75 Other Charge, but related to Drug Offense '72-73
	1				3	1	2	'74-75

n=238

- a The City of Farrell dropped out of the Unit as of 9/30/74
- b Eight cases of possession and use of marihuana, 2 cases of other soft drug use, and one case of sale of LSD were referred to juvenile court. Juvenile dispositions were unverifiable and sketchy. Where dispositions were uncertain, they were placed under the "probation" category. Where information was specific, such as for a drug center or Camp Hill sentence, they were categorized elsewhere.
- c Only one defendant was acquitted during this period.
- d The type of charge column refers to the final charge in a given case, rather than the charge made at the time of arrest. The many charges for marihuana use and sale, and some for other drugs were reduced to summary offenses, usually disorderly behavior. Those cases are correlated according to their original charge.

TABLE 2

DISPOSITIONS OF JUVENILE AND ADULT OFFENDERS ARRESTED BY SHENANGO VALLEY NARCOTIC UNIT^a
10/1/75 - 4/2/76

MAGISTRATE'S COURT		DISMISSED IN COURT OF COMMON PLEAS			CONVICTED			TYPE OF CHARGE ^d	PENDING	OTHER JURISDIC.
Convicted ^d	Dismissed	Nolle Pros Not Sent to Magistrate	Quashed, Dismissed Demurrer	Suspended Sentence Prob/Juvenile ^b	ARD	Jail or Prison ^c				
						Less than 1 Year	More than 1 Year			
			1	1		1	1	Heroin Sale		1
								Heroin Use		2
								Marihuana Sale	19	2
10		1		8	1	2		Marihuana Use	34	
						2		Other Sale	3	1
1								Other Use	10	

n=101

- a The City of Farrell dropped out of the Unit as of 9/30/74
- b As of April, 1976, one juvenile case was pending for sale of marihuana, twelve juvenile cases were pending for marihuana use and four juveniles had been convicted for marihuana use.
- c To date there have been no acquittals
- d The type of charge column refers to the final charge in a given case, rather than the charge made at the time of arrest. The exception to this is the column under magistrates court. Many charges for marihuana use and sale, and some for other drugs were reduced to summary offenses, usually disorderly conduct. Those cases are correlated according to their original charge.

END

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