

Operation Cornerstone
Milwaukee Police Department

Scanning

In the summer of 2010, several shootings involving shotguns took place in a six-block radius on the south side of the city of Milwaukee. The problem resulted from a gang war between two Hispanic street gangs, the Sureno 13, Mexican Posse Sur 13's (MP's), and Clantones Sur 13 (C14). The problem was identified by Milwaukee Police Department during an agency-wide briefing and directed to Detective Thomas Obregon of the Milwaukee Police Department's Intelligence Fusion Center. Detective Obregon is a Gang Liaison Officer recently introduced into the Milwaukee Fusion Center to coordinate initiatives with local, state, federal, and tribal partners in an effort to mitigate the threat that organized gangs bring to the region. Detectives assigned to the Criminal Investigation Bureau and Police Officers assigned to the Neighborhood Policing Bureau were addressing the numerous violent crimes involving the Latino gangs on an individual incident basis. The violent crimes continued without interruption despite the investigative efforts of the police department. Continuity problems and a lack of communication between investigators were identified as the cause of the mitigation failure. Robberies, shootings, and drug dealing skyrocketed and created a sense of chaos in the neighborhood.

Analysis

In 2009, the Federal Bureau of Investigation delivered a Situational Intelligence Report (SIR) identifying a significant threat to public safety related to a conflict between transitional Hispanic street gangs affecting Wisconsin and Northern Illinois. Additionally, the FBI SIR identified the possibility of gang members traveling from Mexico and Texas to Milwaukee to reinforce the local members in preparation for the confrontation and the plan to flee to Mexico after engaging in violent attacks against rival gang members. Following the publication of this report, Milwaukee experienced an increase in violence between the Mexican Posse Sur 13 and the C14 Clantones Sur 13. The ongoing feud was motivated by the quest for territory to initiate neighborhood level drug and weapons trafficking and along with the commission of violent crime. These criminal motivations resulted in instilling crime and disorder in the near south side neighborhood creating fear amongst many of the citizens residing in the area.

The analysis led by Detective Obregon with team members from the Intelligence Fusion Center and District Two revealed the same gang members were repeating violent crimes. Analysis also identified the offenders of these crimes were members of the identified gangs, the MP's and C14's. Analysis that led to productive results included re-interview of witnesses, identification of gaps in reporting, and geographical surveys of the targeted crimes. This evolved into a sequential process of neighborhood canvassing of affected areas and inventory of the gangs that were assembling. Analysis identified the primary aggressors from each gang and provided targeting for enforcement action.

Response

Intelligence collection focused on the two gangs identified during the analysis. The fusion center supported the efforts of front line officers assigned to the initiative by providing targeting and actionable intelligence. Detective Obregon led this effort by acting as an intelligence liaison and coordinating the flow of information between the groups. This initiative fostered the creation of a work process and guiding document called the *Crime Threat Assessment*. Tactical in nature, the document evolved to a strategic tool that has been applied to other geographic locations suffering violent crime problems. An operational enforcement strategy was developed using officers and detectives from two Milwaukee Police Bureaus and multiple Divisions. Community Partners were introduced to the initiative including the Milwaukee County District Attorney's Office, Wisconsin Department of Corrections, and the Milwaukee City Attorney's office. Federal partnership included the U.S. Attorney's Office and Department of Homeland Security Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE). The partnership with DHS provided immediate and sustained results through reciprocal participation in national and local initiatives targeting the public safety threat posed by transitional street gangs in the United States. This partnership with the fusion center continues by identifying violent gang members in the Southeastern Wisconsin region who are processed on federal immigration violations. The initiative was labeled *Operation Cornerstone* and evolved to a Milwaukee Police Department Directed Patrol Mission that has been sustained on Milwaukee's South Side.

The Operation Cornerstone team was developed by using the Leadership in Police Organizations (LPO) model. By using the Leader Thought Process, the role of the focal leader was identified, and informal peer leaders within the ranks of Detectives and Police Officers were developed. Identifying the informal peer leaders created a cohesive team that made the "buy in" process of this mission a fluid transition.

One of the initial goals in the Operation Cornerstone plan was to reduce the crime, fear and disorder in the area by using all of the resources a law enforcement agency can access. This included the community that was impacted by the violent street gangs. Tips from the community were imperative to the success of this mission. Many of the sources of information remained anonymous through fear of retaliation but assisted by identifying offender locations. Often this resulted in immediate apprehension following a suspect identification in a violent crime offense.

Assessment

The response to the violent crime problem was to develop a sustainable initiative engaging all of the stakeholders in the impacted area. The launch of the initiative had immediate results through coordinated presence and messaging to the impacted community. Actionable intelligence developed through analysis of the gangs and violent crime offenses provided targeting for officers on the street. The initial sweeps focused on gang leadership resulted in clearances of several violent crimes and the recovery of weapons and drugs tied to the gangs. Block by block,

the initiative replaced the gang influence with police presence and order. The shotgun shootings were cleared immediately and the suspects were charged through state and federal prosecution.

One example of community cooperation was illustrated when a witness to a shooting reluctantly came forward and provided information on a targeted gang member. Officers learned that this subject was a shooter in the offense and was in custody in Rockford, Illinois for unrelated weapons violations. This suspect was interviewed by investigators yielding suspect and weapon information on several of the shootings between these two rival gangs. Further investigation and interview of other suspects corroborated the citizen information resulting in arrests of eighteen gang members for shootings, armed robberies, and aggravated battery offenses.

Many challenges were overcome during the initiative. One of the obstacles overcome was process change required by the volume of arrests generated through the initiative. The initiative was generating more arrests than the assigned Detectives could interrogate in a timely manner. Rival gang members were housed in the Milwaukee County Jail. Separation and sequestration problems increased. The historical and exclusive role of Detectives conducting interrogations was changed. Detectives provided mentoring to enable Police Officers the ability to conduct custodial interrogations and create an efficient division of labor. The Officers responded well to this coaching and felt a sense of accomplishment knowing that they played a significant role beyond the arrest of an individual. This further enhanced the ability of the officers to operate as collectors of intelligence. Operation Cornerstone members were vigilant in keeping the Milwaukee County Jail advised of separation and sequestration concerns when rival members were transported to their facility.

One of the goals of Operation Cornerstone was a twenty percent reduction in crime in the target area in eight weeks. Significant reductions exceeded expectations with a seventy-one percent overall crime reduction in six weeks. Twenty-six of thirty-four violent crimes attributed to the target groups have been cleared. Many of these crimes had little or no solvability prior to Operation Cornerstone.

Weekly COMPSTAT meetings held by the Milwaukee Police Department focuses on crime initiatives and operational accountability. Crime mapping is used as a visual illustration of the success or challenges of geographic crime reduction initiatives. Comparison maps were displayed for the area where the Cornerstone initiative was applied. Part One crime reduction was nearly eliminated in the target area. Displacement of crime was not a consequence, as the adjacent areas did not reflect an increase. Operation Cornerstone focused on developing intelligence to identify and target the gang leadership and most prolific offenders. The initiative also focused on removing the tools that enable violent gangs to flourish in our community. Seizures of firearms, narcotics, and currency linked to the targeted gangs were a disabling residual to the sustained operation of the gangs and communities they impact.

Despite the success of Operation Cornerstone, gangs continue to have a presence in Southeastern Wisconsin. The measurable change observed is that gang members are reluctant to engage in the violent crime activity that preceded the initiative. Operation Cornerstone has provided an operational model for law enforcement and community stakeholders to implement long after Cornerstone concludes. Fusion centers across the nation are seeking solutions for operation in an

All Crimes – All Hazards capacity. Cornerstone is an example of exercising the intelligence cycle and demanding participation and accountability of partners at all levels.

Agency and Officer Information

The level of participation within the Milwaukee Police Department was integral to the success of the mission. The initiative was geographically focused on the south side of Milwaukee and reflective of the territory claimed by the targeted gangs. Operation Cornerstone relied on the Milwaukee Police Second District and Neighborhood Task Force police officers to provide enforcement operations and intelligence collection. Detectives in the Criminal Investigation Bureau provided guidance and oversight to criminal investigations within the target area. The Fusion Center and Detective Obregon coordinated the initiative and managed the flow of intelligence at all levels.

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