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"BEATS AND SHOPFRONT POLICING": THE QUEENSLAND "POLICE BEAT" SHOPFRONT PROGRAM

Inspector Tony Lake, Queensland Police Service

Preface

Sir Robert Peel really gave us the "raison d'etre" for police in 1829, with item seven of his nine principles of policing:

To maintain at all times a relationship with the public that gives reality to the historic tradition that the police are the public and that the public are the police: the police being only members of the public who are paid to give full time attention to duties which are incumbent on every citizen in the interests of community welfare and existence.

In Peel's time, when citizens needed a police officer they had to find one in either a public place or the police station. When police walked they were in constant contact with everyday people in normal non-crisis interaction.

Technologically speaking, the telephone was the first major influence on policing. The telephone made it easier to locate the police, and police encouraged the use of the telephone. The more calls, the easier to substantiate their existence. Police began to go to the scene of incidents and become more involved with personal problems. "They began to encounter 'ordinary' people less and 'problem' people more" (Braiden 1985, p.8).

After the telephone came the automobile and then the two-way radio. Police began to have contact only with problem people, not only criminals but also those who couldn't care for themselves (drunks, addicts etc). Police became reactive—wait for something to happen then go and fix it.

Today statistics have become dominant when we talk of police performance. The fear of crime, or what makes people feel unsafe in their own neighbourhoods, is often given secondary importance.

Introduction

In Queensland, community policing involves the police and community working together to identify opportunities and solve policing problems. A "community" is normally people in social interaction in a geographical area, but it can also include people of the same race, religion etc, people in business, retailers, shopping centres and so on. (Booth Crompton & Lake 1991, p.3).

Crime prevention is too important an issue to be left just to the police.

All around the world, and in Queensland, governments and communities are quickly learning that throwing money at a problem is not enough to solve it.

Spending on law and order is no exception. Queensland's Government has increased the Police Budget by 60 per cent and put some 1,200 extra police on the beat since 1989.

But all the money and police in the world won't prevent crime if local communities are not asked or prepared to become involved in the process.

Smart, modern, effective policing is all about community involvement.

And that's where programs such as the "Police Beat" Shopfronts come in.

The Westfield Toombul Shopfront is just one of a mixture of thirty fixed and portable shopfronts that will be in place in Queensland by the end of 1995. The program is funded to the tune of \$1.4 million in the 1994-95 State Budget.

Together, the shopfronts constitute part of a wider campaign to take more police away from desks and offices and put them back into our streets and shops.

By providing a visible, approachable presence at shopping centres such as this, police are asking local residents to become partners in crime *prevention*.

Back to the Community

"Police Beat" Shopfronts is a re-invention of the role played by the beat cop. Now, there is a "blending of the best of the past with today's reality" (Trojanowicz 1990, p.2).

For Queensland Police, this re-invention resulted from the Fitzgerald Commission of Inquiry Recommendation No. 6 that "Community policing be adopted as the primary policing strategy, with policing again becoming a neighbourhood affair" (Fitzgerald 1989, p.381).

It is now enshrined in legislation. "Members of the Service are to act in partnership with the community at large" (section 2.4(2), *Police Service Administration Act, 1990*).

Section 7.1 of The Police Service Code of Conduct provides the behavioural orientation of officers toward the community: "Officers should ensure that they effectively communicate with, and promote participation by all sectors of, their communities".

The plain implication is that police must work more closely with the public, especially since their own morale and sense of worth may rise in the process. It makes sense to find ways of deploying police that will more effectively enhance deterrence, solicit more active support for the police, and provide better intelligence about potential criminal problems.

RAQSC

Community concerns readily combine with the problems that the Retailers & Traders have traditionally encountered, involving such matters as:

- * an apparent low prioritization of shop-stealing and related matters;
- * slow or non-attendance to complaints;
- * inexperienced officers handling fraud matters poorly.

These problems can and are being addressed by the "Police Beat" Shopfront program.

Victims of Crime Survey

The Victims of Crime Survey (1991) conducted by the Queensland State Government Statistician showed that 21 per cent of all assaults occur in shopping and business areas, 15 per cent of all threats of violence, 11 per cent of all deliberate damage and 39 per cent of thefts from the person.

Queensland Government Shopping Centre Security Policy

Under the Queensland Government's Shopping Centre Security Policy:

- There will be an official and more comprehensive police presence at shopping centres, particularly during peak periods.
- The number of police on the beat in shopping centres and in central business districts will be expanded.
- Shopping centres will be regularly patrolled by plain clothes police officers.
- Police will be situated in shopfronts or relocatable units at 30 major shopping complexes throughout the State by December 1995.
- These shopfronts or relocatable units will be clearly identifiable as a police facility.
- These facilities will be located in prime positions of high visibility during peak shopping periods.
- Officers staffing these facilities will mingle more freely with the public, deterring potential offenders.
- Interaction and visibility will be at a significantly higher level.

"Police Beat" Shopfronts Objectives

The "Police Beat" Shopfront Program was subsequently developed with the following objectives:

- To satisfy the needs of people to communicate more easily with police.
- To improve the community feeling about personal safety.
- To reduce the community fear of crime.
- To raise the perception about the risk of detection for committing offences.

Critical Elements

The success of the "Police Beat" Shopfront Program is dependent upon:

- the support of the client groups.
- the support of the Retailers Association of Queensland.
- the provision of regional resources, especially appropriate staffing.
- recurrent funding.
- the concept being professional. It must be fully co-ordinated as part of a total regional resource so that all elements compliment each other.

- a quality presentation in all elements including the policing shopfront design and construction, the creativity of visual displays and the internal and external marketing.
- the positive attitude of police.
- the staff performing duties in the shopping centres being suitable and having good rapport with members of the community.
- the policing shopfront having the flexibility to meet the needs of the local community. Shopfront policing modules must be portable and be regarded as a regional resource rather than allocated to a particular shopping centre.
- the beat patrols and processes operating from the policing shopfront being co-ordinated with formal police establishments.

Operational Beats

"Police Beat" is operational policing, it is not a public relations exercise! In order to sell the concept to retailers, centre management, the community and especially police, the shopfronts must operate as part of the policing environment for the whole district.

"Police Beat" officers walk the beat, talk to people, solve problems, handle complaints, make arrests and so on. In other words anything of a policing nature that happens in the confines of that beat is handled by the beat police.

Staffing consists of two or three police, depending on the size of the beat. One remains with the shopfront while the others walk, rotating duties throughout the shift.

Even though the concept was not developed as a public relations exercise, it does, however, have an excellent PR sideline.

Shopping Centre Management

Mahoney (1981, p.16) promotes shopping centre management, security staff and store front police officers "developing mutually acceptable enforcement and response policies together". His advocacy is that "a co-ordinated, preventative approach to policing a shopping mall can bring about nothing but positive results".

Potter (1988, p.72) claims that "the most important ingredient in police/security co-operation is mall security's regular, often daily contact with local law enforcement".

Police Attitudes

Colleen Wooley (1985:100), quotes Norman Shanks, "One of the principal difficulties which has beset community involvement work since its outset is the attitude of other police officers. Over the years there has been evidence of apathy, scepticism and outright hostility, and it is clear that such attitudes still exist".

The concept must be supported at Regional and District level and Divisional levels. Because the Houston Police Shopfront enjoyed positive police attitudes, Skogan and Wycoff (1986:198) claim that it "worked well with a minimum of supervision" and "it probably succeeded because of the strong relationship between the district commander and the officer in charge of the station".

New York City Police Commissioner Lee P Brown said "our emphasis will be on enhancing the role of the officers out there on the beat, giving them responsibility and authority, allowing them to take risks, and not punishing them for making innocent mistakes" (Webber, 1991:124).

A shopfront police officer in Canberra, A.C.T., stated "The kiosk has changed our outlook on police work totally. It's great to get a pat on the back from the shopkeepers and the general public. We feel like we really belong here. It's no longer Us and Them. Even the derelicts and street people stop and yarn with us"(Anon., Platypus, 1989:15)

Suitable staff for shopfront policing is critical. Skogan and Wycoff (1986:197) found that "some commanders might be tempted to "bury a lazy officer in a store front operation, but such an assignment would bury the station as well".

Experience in the shopfront trial supports the assertion by Skogan and Wycoff (1986:197) that "the creativeness and willingness to work on the part of the community station officers and their staff were perhaps the most critical elements of the operation."

It is evident that it is vital to the success of "Police Beat" that suitably experienced police officers who "know the ways of the world" and possess a high level of self confidence and maturity should be assigned to it.

Shopfront Policing Styles

Just as there is a need for a special type of officer there is also the need for flexibility in the type of beat required for a particular area. "Police Beat"

was piloted in three centres in three different ways and the shopfront styles which evolved became the basis for the program as it is now:

- (a) K-Mart Plaza, Rockhampton,
- (b) Garden City Shopping Centre, Mount Gravatt, and
- (c) Chermside Shopping Centre, Chermside.

(a) Fixed Shopfront + Police Beat

q A police beat operated from within a fixed shop site at Shopping Centres or in a strategic location within central business districts. Counter cards, posters and other strategically positioned marketing material would support this style in retail shops and other premises throughout the area.

(b) Portable Module + Police Beat

q A police beat operated from a portable shopfront policing unit or module located in a mall area at Shopping Centres or in a strategic position within central business districts. Counter cards, posters and other strategically positioned marketing material would support this style in retail shops and other premises throughout the area.

q Shopfront modules incorporate a professionally designed and constructed structure with quality video and poster displays, a poster display of Queensland's most wanted criminals, Police Service information brochures, and informal seating.

q Highly visual (as opposed to audio).

q Portable and mobile (fits into a commercial van).

q Flexible (adaptable to local conditions).

(c) Existing Police Establishment + Police Beat

q A police beat operated from an existing police establishment in the close vicinity of a Shopping Centre or a central business district. Counter cards, posters and other strategically positioned marketing material would support this style in the public areas of the police establishment and in retail shops and other premises throughout the area.

q Existing communication equipment and computing facilities will be utilised from the police establishment.

Option (a) - Permanent fixed shops

Permanent fixed shops in operation are at Rockhampton K-mart Plaza, Westfield Toombul Shoppingtown, Valley Centre Plaza Fortitude Valley and the Sandcastles complex, Mooloolaba.

Other permanent shopfronts approved include Village Fair in Toowoomba, Logan Hyperdome, Brookside Shopping Centre and Aspley Pick'n'Pay Hypermarket.

Sites being considered for permanent fixed shopfronts are Pacific Fair Broadbeach, Robina, Regents Park, Ipswich CBD, Carindale, Indooroopilly, Strathpine, Kipparing and Cairns CBD.

Option (b) - Portable modular units

Each region has been supplied with a portable modular "Police Beat" shopfront, with three regions (Central, South Eastern and North Coast) in possession of two modules. Modules are utilised on a temporary basis during peak shopping periods. There are a total of 11 units currently on issue.

Option (c) - Beat only from current police establishment

The third option concerns a beat operating from an existing police station or establishment. Some examples are Hervey Bay, Bundaberg, and Southport/Australia Fair.

It is anticipated that about 23 option 'c' - beat only sites will be in operation by the end of 1995.

An option "c" that has been very successful is the Mount Gravatt Police Beat. The beat operates with police on bicycles and on foot, and covers the Garden City Shopping Centre, Carindale and Sunnybank shopping centres.

1995 target

The target for December 1995 is a mixture of 30 sites. Present indications reveal that the possible number of sites may be as high as 36.

| | |
|---|---------------------|
| Option (a) - Permanent fixed shops: | 17 |
| Option (b) - Portable modular units: | 19 |
| | <u>Total</u> |
| | 36 |
| Plus: | |
| Option (c) - Beat Only: | 23 |

Site Selection Criteria

The criteria recognises that each shopping centre will "be different in relation to its location, the demographic make-up of the area, and its size and facilities" (Mahoney, 1981:16).

Note the primary criteria is that a policing problem exists. If there is no policing problem to be solved, then the shopfront becomes a public relations exercise.

- q A policing problem exists.
- q Research and Evaluation of reported crime.
- q Accessibility and exposure to the community.
- q Site availability.
- q Attractively negotiated leasing arrangements.
- q Impact of Shopping Centre policies.
- q Limitations concerning hours of operation.
- q Co-operation of Shopping Centre management - (such as liaison and co-ordination with security services and use of non-public facilities).

Evaluation Procedure

"Police Beat" is continually evaluated to see if it achieves its aims by:

1. measuring differences in community perceptions of personal safety while shopping;
2. measuring whether "Police Beat" improves the public's communication with the Police;
3. measuring whether "Police Beat" reduces the fear of crime generally;
4. measuring whether "Police Beat" affects the crime rate in shopping centres and surrounds; and

5. measuring the cost-effectiveness of the "Police Beat" in terms of all the above.

Evaluation is conducted to obtain a correct picture of the factors associated with fear of crime as this is important for policy-makers, law-enforcement and crime prevention.

For example, it is important to know whether victimisation, vandalism or perceived high crime rates in shopping centres really does increase fear because this will have an impact on preventative strategies and the kinds of services required in shopping centres.

When the public periodically considers the crime problem to be escalating, they become alarmed and the belief emerges that the judicial system needs "toughening". This generalised anxiety has been described in terms of fear, frustration and aggression, moral indignation and a desire for control and reassurance.

Evaluation Results

The independent evaluations found that shoppers interviewed, strongly supported the "Police Beat" concept. Shoppers interviewed also felt that the police presence would enhance crime prevention and crime deterrence in the shopping centres. The findings indicated a high level of fear was associated with walking alone in car parks and out of the way places in shopping centres during the evening.

Women reported that the presence of police in shopping centres would help alleviate their fear of crime and a majority would prefer to go to shopping centres where police were present.

The program has been fully evaluated by an independent body (QUT). Some examples of the results are:

Community perceptions:

It was found that 90 per cent of respondents believed that a police presence in shopping centres would be either essential or positive. 62 per cent of people have a fear of crime in shopping centres, but 86 per cent of those said a police presence would alleviate that fear. 84 per cent of people prefer to talk to police in the relaxed, attractive atmosphere of the shopfronts rather than go to a police station.

Statistical results:

Offences such as stealing cars, stealing, stealing from cars, shoplifting, break & enters, assaults and disorderly behaviour have all been reduced with the police presence. Examples: (figures compared to corresponding period)

| | |
|----------------|--|
| Ipswich | Unlawful use: 5 to nil, Break & Enter: 11 to 2 |
| Rockhampton | Shoplifting: 12 to 2 |
| Mooloolaba | Wilful Damage: 20 to 6, Steal from vehicle: 10 to 5 |
| Australia Fair | Significant reduction in juvenile "street kids" problems |
| Strathpine | 2 youths caught attempting to steal a car and charged. |
| Bundaberg | Reduction in youth problems in city area. |
| Smithfield | 2 juveniles caught attempting to destroy property. |
| Hervey Bay | 3 shoplifters caught and summonsed. |

One of the State 10 most wanted was located through the Rockhampton shopfront, and three professional shoplifters were located at Pacific Fair on the Gold Coast (135 charges).

Summary

Strong visible presence gives police the opportunity to "intervene at earlier stages to prevent problems from arising, develop a heightened appreciation of community concerns, explain police services more accurately, and solicit information that leads to arrests and prosecution" (Skolnick and Bayley, 1988:11).

Eighty-six percent of respondents who ever felt unsafe in a shopping centre indicated that a police presence would alleviate their fears, and three-quarters of all respondents indicated that they would prefer to visit a shopping centre with some form of police presence. This must have a corresponding effect on retailers.

The success of this program has been due to the way it was developed as an operational exercise rather than a public relations exercise. It is getting police back on the street where most people are - in the shopping centres.

Shopfronts do work, and Queensland has the right formula to make them work, for the public, the retailers and the police.

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