

Effective Focused Deterrence: Systemizing Custom Notifications

Voiceover

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This is *The Beat*—a podcast series that keeps you in the know about the latest community policing topics facing our nation.

Vonda Matthews

00:08

Hello, my name is Vonda Matthews for the Department of Justice COPS Office. I'd like to welcome you and introduce you to Major Larry Casterline of the High Point Police Department. We're going to discuss their latest developments on how they're improving the safety of his community. Let me just say that the High Point Police Department has been working closely with David Kennedy and the National Network for Safe Communities. I know he's talked and we have some publications on these subjects but I want you, if you can tell a little bit for our audience, who may not be familiar, can you tell us how the partnership started and how it has evolved?

Major Larry Casterline

00:39

Sure, how you doing, Vonda? We were introduced to David Kennedy in 1997 and, subsequently, began implementation of what we refer to as "Focused Deterrence Strategies" or "Focused Deterrence Policing." Some folks know it as notifications or call-ins and we started with chronic offenders back in 97. And, really, this was just an adaptation of what was being applied in Boston, Massachusetts back in the late 80s, early 90s. They were essentially using it for gang homicide, a youth gang homicide problem that they were dealing with. We continuously built community support and participation as we were recognizing significant reductions in violence and a large portion of the violent individuals that we were having direct dialogue with, putting on notice or notifying, were clearly making rational decisions to stop acting violently. Because of this success, David encouraged us to apply a very similar notification to street-level dealers so that we could impact the violence surrounding open-air drug markets, and in High Point we refer to this as "drug market intervention." It became very apparent to us that direct communication with our most prolific offenders using specific messaging accompanied with swift and certain sanctioning was really having more effect, more of an impact on violence reduction, than arresting them was.

We then applied the strategy to gangs to reduce robbery, and we used it on juveniles returning from training or reform schools (called different things depending on where you're from). In law enforcement, we all recognize that juveniles have a very high recidivism rate returning from reform school. What we discovered is that, between the times we were spending identifying violent individuals and scheduling these notifications with them, that there were other things occurring in the community. There were disputes and beefs between individuals, groups, and gangs, and these would sometimes erupt into violence. We decided to take this notification method that we were using directly to

individuals who were “hot,” or engaged in back-and-forth beefs, and we simply evaluated the situations we were dealing with, determined who key impact players are and what their legal exposures were at the time, and we crafted very specific deterrence messages for them. And we would simply take the message with the community, the community’s moral voice, to their home, neighborhood, street, or anywhere we could contact them.

Matthews

03:11

What exactly is a custom notification?

Casterline

03:15

It’s really not completely different than what we were doing when we were scheduling notifications, but a custom notification is really direct communication with impact players by law enforcement and community together, notifying the impact player of his or her circumstances and exposures if involved in further acts of violence. So, we’re really bringing home to them, “you know, look, you’re exposed and this is what’s going to happen to you and we’re focused on you now.”

Matthews

03:45

And what kind of results have you seen from that effort?

Casterline

03:48

Really a multitude of things. We were able to directly communicate with individuals that were driving violence, that typically can’t be reached during these group call-ins because they’re not on probation or parole, so we could get them in the street. It helped us sustain the impact of the community moral voice message in between our notifications, which . . . we know that the community’s moral voice message is very important here. It provided us a more nimble communication tool than group call-ins to quell these beefs that we spoke of, to prevent retaliations and calm hot spots. It allowed for us to provide a tailored message to individual impact players and their circumstances and exposures; and overall it just equaled a reduction in retaliation and back-and-forth violence.

Matthews

04:35

Why do you think it’s been so effective?

Casterline

04:38

Going back to the beginning, I mean, we’ve really learned through 17 years of experience of implementing National Network strategies that offenders are far more rational than we first believed. That’s why this stuff works; we’ve been treating them like they’re not rational for so many years. We’ve also figured out that offenders can’t be deterred by what they don’t know. We need to provide them

this critical information. We know that it works because the community's moral voice is one of the most powerful deterrents (which is more of an informal than a formal sanction). And to conclude it, we kind of bring all of what we know that is highly effective directly to an individual's living room. So, literally within hours of knowing that something's occurring or that somebody's hot, we can sit with them face-to-face and get the same impact by this custom notification that we've gotten in our more scheduled type of notifications.

Matthews

05:33

It sounds like it's very, kind of, resource intensive. Do you think this is a sustainable effort?

Casterline

05:39

I do; and I think the overall piece here for people to understand, and this is the most important piece that people have to wrap their head around, is that there's really a small number of people that drive most of the significant violence. So, when it comes to considering whether it's sustainable or not, we have to remember that there's just a small number of folks that are, that are this violent. I think police and community have the ability to identify impact players on a daily, weekly basis—it's not difficult—and determine what types of exposures these individuals have by looking at their records. Custom notifications are simply conversations with key individuals about specific rules regarding violence, what will be tolerated, and what to expect if the rules aren't followed. And it's accompanied with this very important community moral voice and I really feel like it's a matter of people wrapping their heads around the idea of deterrence as an effective law enforcement tool. We recognize we're not going to arrest our way out of this and what we have found in High Point is that we can really impact violence and impact violent players without using arrest as a main tool. So, we're really arresting fewer people and having a greater impact.

Matthews

06:59

And your violence rates have gone down significantly at the same time.

Casterline

07:02

Yes, significantly.

Matthews

07:03

Is there anything else you'd like to add?

Casterline

07:05

I think at this point in time, there's a multitude of effective focused deterrence models and strategies being used across the country. David Kennedy and John Jay College's National Network for Safe

Communities have the staff, the information, the data to really help launch any other jurisdiction or any community who's interested in having a serious impact on violence using focused deterrence and it just—really, people need to act. It's time to act.

Matthews

07:38

That's very helpful. Thank you so much for joining us today.

Casterline

07:40

Oh, happy to do it.

Voiceover: *The Beat* Exit

07:43

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Voiceover: Disclaimer

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