

**THE IMPORTANCE OF INTER-AGENCY CHILD ABUSE TEAMS TO A
SMALL COMMUNITY BY THE YEAR 2000**

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This Command College Independent Study Project is a FUTURES study of a particular emerging issue in law enforcement. Its purpose is NOT to predict the future, but rather to project a number of possible scenarios for strategic planning consideration.

Defining the future differs from analyzing the past because the future has not yet happened. In this project, useful alternatives have been formulated systematically so that the planner can respond to a range of possible future environments.

Managing the future means influencing the future--creating it, constraining it, adapting to it. A futures study points the way.

The views and conclusions expressed in the Command College project are those of the author and are not necessarily those of the Commission on Peace Officer Standards and Training (POST).

Small communities throughout the United States are turning to law enforcement leadership to protect their youth from the dangers of society. In most communities, there are many organizations whose primary focus is that of protecting children in some manner. The departments of children's services, health, district attorney, county probation and schools are primary examples. Since the incorporation of Drug Abuse Resistance Education (D.A.R.E.) programs into school systems, law enforcement is viewed as a leader in child protection programs. After D.A.R.E., law enforcement has been at the forefront in designing innovative programs to guide youth toward becoming productive citizens.

Unfortunately, today in California, law enforcement agencies are faced with coping with rippling resource reductions. City governments are echoing lean time management, using the phrases, "Hold the line budgeting" or "Do more with less." Even with budget deficits, the police are expected to provide community policing centered around youth.

A paradox now exists for these police agencies. The agencies themselves are able to provide basic police services but are hindered by the lack of resources to provide programs geared to positively impact youth. The impact of budget reductions remains a concern to law enforcement agencies and the communities they serve into the next century. To overcome budget restrictions, law enforcement may look to other community organizations to form inter-agency teams geared toward youth. Hopefully, community participation in youth programs will help offset the burden of recent fiscal reductions.

Most police agencies have adopted some form of community-based policing or problem solving. These agencies are embarking on campaigns to improve the quality of life at the neighborhood level. Combining traditional policing and a proactive problem solving methodology

will create a sense of ownership by all community members. Today and in the future, community involvement will represent the standard toward resolving its problems.¹ Citizens are intolerant of a police force that fails to meet their needs especially when it involves the protection of their children.²

Soon, law enforcement will experience a transformation from enforcer to facilitator of a police/citizen youth action team.³ The ultimate goal of these partnerships is effectiveness.

Parents and other child protection advocates will demand that police leaders assume a greater leadership role in the protection of its children. Also, Law enforcement will require greater participation within its ranks in order to achieve effectiveness in youth protection programs.

Programs focused on deterring delinquency will benefit from law enforcement employees serving as mentors to its participants. The development of small inter-agency teams investigating child abuse and neglect cases might prove to be crucial to the protection of innocent youth.

Child protection issues are crucial to the success of law enforcement operations. Police agencies are required by law to investigate and report cases of child abuse, neglect, abandonment, abduction and runaways. Communities have high expectation of the role law enforcement plays in protecting children from harm. This expectation is best illustrated in the Polly Klaus murder case in northern California.

Demographic forecasts of California's population reveal that minors, ages 5-17 years, will increase 30.5% by the year 2000.⁴ This forecast will place significant service demands on law enforcement agencies through the turn of the century. Political leaders will be faced with meeting this demand both from a financial standpoint and the allocation of human resources.

The criminal justice system requires intervention by law enforcement in cases of child abuse and delinquency. The children who fall within these two categories are often labeled as high risk youth. The author was unable to find a satisfactory definition of high risk in the literature. Dr. Mary Grace Fahey, the high risk youth coordinator at the Monrovia Unified School District defined high risk youth as those whose basic childhood needs have not been met. These needs include nutrition, love, security, safety, nurturing and positive reinforcement. She feels that children from dysfunctional families often face exposure to predisposing risks such as poverty, drug abuse, physical abuse and neglect, gang violence and teen pregnancy. These risks combined with truancy, poor school performance and running away from home will likely produce teenage criminals.

Family Structure

Between 1950 and 1960, the dominant family pattern consisted of a husband and wife raising their children together, in the same household. However, a non-traditional family pattern has increased remarkably from 1960, including co-habiting couples, divorcees and those that decided not to marry. Since 1985, blended or combined families have become an emerging trend. These families consist of married individuals or those living in common law arrangements, with step and/or adopted children. An equally important emerging trend is lesbian and gay couples becoming custodial parents through surrogacy programs or adoption. Demographer, Paul Glick estimates that 50 percent of American children will become members of blended families by the year 2000. Glick states that blended families create conflict and tension for children, which is also attributed to high divorce rates among remarriages.⁵

Single family households have made the most dramatic increases in the subject of family structure. The Census bureau reports that single parent households have grown 200 percent (four to eight million), since 1970. A 1992 study (Fertility of American Women), revealed that women are choosing out of wedlock parenthood over marriage.⁶ The Census Bureau study from 1982-1992, corroborates the Fertility of American Women study. Unmarried women with children increased 60%. Their study revealed that 55% of unmarried women were African-American, 48% never graduated high school and 44% were unemployed, welfare recipients. Further, it seems that fatherless families have a direct correlation to increased crime, welfare spending, and lower educational attainment.⁷

The relationship between fatherless families and crime has impacted law enforcement service delivery. The most disturbing statistic concerning the relationship between fatherless families and crime is provided by the FBI. They estimate that 70% of all juvenile offenders are from single parent homes.⁸

Children in Poverty

Social studies show that violence is a predisposing factor of poverty.⁹ The Census Bureau defines poverty using family size combined with yearly income. In 1991, a family of three earning less than \$10,860 was considered impoverished.¹⁰ In California, one in four children lives in poverty. The national average is one in five. Impoverished children have a direct effect on law enforcement with more than 50% of this group appearing as defendants accused of a crime.¹¹ From a community standpoint, the economic forecast in funding anti-poverty programs is bleak and represents less than 10 percent of the federal budget.¹² Studies show that living in poverty is the leading indicator of health welfare, education and future prospects of a child.¹³

Law enforcement and local communities do not possess the resources to cure poverty. Poverty will continue to play a major role in high risk youth because of its significant effect on child development.

Violent Crime

In California and the rest of the nation, both the print and visual media bombard the public with incidents of violent crime. The number of violent acts in Los Angeles County continues to rise. Recently, Los Angeles County trauma centers were selected by the United States Army as a training ground for battlefield medicine with the large incidences of gunshot wounds.

Much of this violence is directed toward youth. Victims commonly range in age from 12-17 years. Children less than 18 years are 244% more likely to be shot and killed than adults.¹⁴ In this nation, one in six children has witnessed someone being shot. Nationally, juvenile arrests for murder have increased 85% from 1987 -1991.¹⁵

Child abuse is the most sinister form of child victimization. These offenses include physical abuse, neglect, abandonment and sexual molestation. The number of child abuse cases has increased 40% (1985-1991) nationally.¹⁶ More than one million children are abused each year and physical abuse is the leading cause of childhood death in the United States.¹⁷

A 1980 to 1989 Los Angeles study revealed murder rates among abused and neglected minority children were disproportionally high. Overall, children less than five years have a greater chance of being murdered by child abuse than any other age group.¹⁸

A 1993 study of child abuse homicides in Los Angeles County revealed that 60% of the victims were less than two years and 96% were less than five. More than 50% were children from welfare families and 87% of the killers was the mother, father or live-in boyfriend.¹⁹

A 1990, Rhode Island study found that children from single parents are at particular risk for physical violence. Further, the study revealed higher incidences of abusive single mothers was also impoverished.²⁰

Delinquent Youth

Psychologist, Ronald Slaby's research on high risk children reveals that abused and neglected children, those with behavioral problems, learning disabilities, or exposure to violence often become violent themselves.²¹

A 1990, United States Department of Justice study revealed that 127,100 children were abandoned or ejected from their homes. In the same year, 450,700 children ran away from home. This study defined runaways as children who left home overnight without permission.²²

Some older children who are left unsupervised tend to involve themselves in acts of delinquency including truancy, poor school performance, running away from home, alcohol and drug abuse, gang affiliation and all levels of criminal activity. Eventually, these children will encounter some level of law enforcement intervention. The criminal justice system has labeled these children juvenile delinquents. The average delinquent in this country is 16 years of age, sexually or physically abused, a high school drop out, have lived in foster care, abused drugs and lack work and social skills.²³

At Risk Parents Raising Children

At risk parents represent the final ingredient of the formula, this article will examine the relevancy to high risk youth. The author's literature search failed to identify a definition of at risk parents. Dr. Mary Grace Fahey Phd., defines at risk parents as those individuals who are dysfunctional themselves. They may be addicted to alcohol or other drugs. They tend to exhibit

impulsive behavior and are unable to control anger. Many families may be poor, uneducated, unemployed or on welfare. Most of these families also lack a positive male role model. Many of the parents have criminal backgrounds, including long standing gang associations. At risk parents usually fail to nurture, supervise or discipline their children. Due to their own dysfunctional lifestyles, many of these parents teach values and ethics counter productive to good citizenship.²⁴

Scenario

The author will utilize a scenario to illustrate the importance of inter-agency teams to investigate cases of child abuse or neglect. Scenarios are also stories about the past, present and future. Scenarios are an important aspect of forecasting. The scenario is structured around a fictional community named Anytown U.S.A. It is a diverse community of 40,000 people, located in California at the turn of the twenty-first century. Its city police department is commanded by Chief Terri Paint who is revered as a community leader. For the last five years, Chief Paint's primary mission has been to develop teams consisting of members from police department and other organizations. The teams would focus on programs and strategies that could impact youth in a positive manner. During the last four years, Chief Paint created an innovative plan to reach kids from single parent households. The Anytown School District provided the department with a list of children from single parent homes. These children were personally recruited by the police department's youth services division to attend their after school programs. The chief, with the cooperation of the Police Officers Association established the Officer Mentoring program with the local Boy's and Girl's Club of America. Officers who volunteered their time had a wide range of activities to teach. The officers coached soccer, basketball, baseball, track and karate. Officers without a sports background tutored academics to youth who had poor school performance or

volunteered as a good citizenship guide with delinquent youth. Teenage Police Explorers, supervised by police officers, conducted peer counseling sessions at local Boy's and Girl's Club. Most of the counseling centered around youth who had experimented with drugs and alcohol. It was the Chief's hope that these programs would reduce the teenage drug users' population in the community.

Reported cases of unsupervised youth engaging in delinquent acts decreased in the community within three months. The department realized that these programs were responsible for reducing acts of truancy, burglary, and runaway youth. After the initial two years, the number of kids participating in these youth programs prevailed over street gang memberships. All youth who participated in the program were rewarded at the end of summer with a trip to Disneyland. Money to pay for the excursion was raised by the Police and Fire Associations who held fundraisers throughout the year. Members of the police and fire department acted as chaperones and the school district provided the transportation to Disneyland free.

In her doctorate research in Criminology, Chief Paint was very concerned about a certain developing trend impacting our youth. A journal article by Richard Gelles entitled "Child Abuse Occurs Most Often in Single Parent Homes" confirmed that youth from single family homes were more likely to become victims of child abuse, engage in delinquent behavior and eventually turn to a life of crime. Statistics compiled by the FBI revealed that 70% of juvenile offenders were from single parent households and half of those same youth were impoverished. Her research confirmed that the tremendous increase in the youth's population would drastically deplete law enforcement effectiveness.

Another trend she identified was the increase in child abuse, neglect and sexual exploitation in the county. Currently county statistics revealed that the number one cause of death among children less than five years of age was child abuse. Eighty-seven percent (87%) of homicide suspects were identified as either the child's mother, live-in boyfriend or father.

After examining her own organization, Chief Paint found a resource she could use to impact child abuse. She had two detectives that handled all crimes against persons that occurred in the city. Statistics compiled by the department confirmed that serious crimes against children were increasing while property crime was on a downward trend. She noticed that the ratios of these cases relative to conviction rates were low and the victimized children returned to the home. Many of these children were victimized a second time within a year.

She was not surprised to learn that two surrounding communities were experiencing child molesters contacting children on the Personal Computer's information highway. Chief Paint was not convinced that victimized children were receiving quality protection under traditional methods of investigation. The Anytown Police Department had a number of innovative programs to intervene in the lives of juvenile delinquents, but none that identified or protected children from abuse in the home.

Chief Paint and her detective commanders studied the role of the detectives assigned to crimes against persons. Currently, two seasoned detectives investigated homicide, kidnaping, robbery, felony assaults, domestic violence, sex crimes and child endangering cases.

She discovered that child abuse investigations were disjointed. Patrol officers conducted the initial investigation and interview. Most patrol officers lacked the experience to conduct a complete investigation. Also, the patrol supervisors complained that when patrol officers were

assigned these cases, it consumed their entire shift. The patrol officer assigned to a child endangering case was responsible for interviewing all parties including the victim, and photographing injuries. Another officer usually was responsible for the crime scene investigation which included photographing and collecting evidence. The original officer was also responsible for placing the child into protective custody and transport him or her to the hospital. This officer then waited for at least three hours before a member of the county Child Protective Services Unit responded to the hospital to formally place the child into protective custody. This person also interviewed the child again. Since the average patrol officer had two to three years experience, their crime report was usually not detailed enough to obtain a criminal filing. The next working day, the detective assigned to the case interviewed the victim a third time. Repeating interviews not only wasted time, but any small changes in the victim's statement could damage the prosecution's case later at trial.

Chief Paint and her staff concluded that the traditional method of investigating crimes against children was redundant, lacked quality and added to the emotional harm already inflicted on the victims. Chief Paint decided that the best course of action to form a specialized child abuse response team. In her view the team would consist of a police detective, a police officer from the youth services bureau, a county pediatric nurse, and an investigator from the county department of child services. Chief Paint and her detective bureau commander designed an inter-agency team with personnel who were already trained and possessed expertise in the area of child protection.

Because of the overall crime reduction in the community, the chief decided to assign a detective and one youth services officer to the inter-agency team to investigate child abuse cases.

The detective's primary responsibility would be to investigate crimes against children. The youth services officer's would counsel and refer delinquent youth to the Officer Mentoring Program with the help of a juvenile probation officer. The Youth Service Officer's (YSO) caseload already included runaway and missing children. The YSO, who was a sworn officer, would assist the detective during abuse investigations.

Chief Paint decided that the team would respond to child abuse, neglect or sexual exploitation cases day or night, seven days a week. This team would relieve patrol officers or other detectives from the responsibility of investigating cases of child endangering. Patrol officers would still respond to these calls to protect the victim and crime scene until the child abuse team arrived. The child abuse team would conduct all interviews of the victim and suspect, collect evidence and arrange all medical examinations. If search warrants were necessary, the detective would assume that responsibility. The investigator from the department of child services would be the protection advocate for the victim. This investigator would handle all matters related to placement of the child into protective custody until the investigation was complete.

A second tier in the team approach would be the children's welfare coordinator for the Anytown school district. The YSO would act as a liaison with this coordinator to ensure that the victims received special treatment to ease the emotional difficulties associated with physical or sexual abuse. All members of the group would train together to establish the spirit of teamwork and learn each other's responsibility in the management of these cases. The team approach would eliminate the repeated interviews of victims.

Chief Paint met with the managers of the county departments of health and children services about her idea. The managers of those organizations agreed to assign a child services

investigator and a pediatric nurse to the team. Since staff was already employed, no additional funding for salaries was necessary. Each agency mutually agreed to absorb overtime within their own organizations. Chief Paint insisted that the detective on the team act as its functional supervisor and the other participating organizations agreed.

The team met for the first time on April 1, 1997 at a team building workshop. Besides the response team, their liaison personnel at the school district and the district attorney's office attended the workshop. The Anytown Unified School District assigned Dr. Mary Grace Fahey, their children's welfare coordinator, to the support team. Also, the district attorney's office assigned Deputy District Attorney Deborah Kass to advise the team on legal issues and vertically file any prosecutions of the offenders.

A protocol was established to insure uniformity during investigations. The team also established operational guidelines and designed policies and procedures. A response protocol on how and when to activate the team after hours was developed. Each member of the team possessed a vehicle, pager and cellular phone. The department installed police radios in both the pediatric nurse's and department of child services investigator's cars so the team could communicate in the field.

Eventually, the police department established a telephone message center for the inter-agency teams. The first option consisted of a recorded message explaining the response team protocol. The second option would allow a police supervisor or watch commander to page the team.

Between May first and fourth 1997, the team conducted training sessions for the entire police department. A video tape produced by the team was shown to illustrate the importance of

this proactive method of investigation. Personnel within the department were instructed when and how to activate the team. They also learned the responsibilities of the responding patrol officers before the child abuse team arrived. The officers were also given a child abuse protocol guideline card designed by the team to carry with them.

Before the team became operational, the detective was assigned as a panel member for the Child Death Review Board hosted by the county department of health services and the coroner's office. This board consisted of health services, law enforcement, departments of children services, probation, county counsel, district attorney, the department of the coroner, and county social services members reviewed selected cases of childhood death. The purpose of the panel is to provide a detailed analysis of childhood deaths, maltreatment, and their relationship to the protection agencies' involvement with these children and families prior to and following the death.²⁵

YSO Alfaro was a member of the school district's Attendance Review Board. The board consisted of school district, probation and law enforcement representatives. The board met on a bi-monthly basis to review cases of student truancy. Both the student and their parent are summoned to appear before the board to discuss acts of truancy. YSO Alfaro had the power under the city's anti-truancy law to cite offenders into juvenile court. The probation officer had the power to place the offender on immediate informal probation to force the student to attend school. Those students who chose to ignore the order of the probation officer found themselves appearing in front of a juvenile court commissioner. Little did Alfaro know that a truancy investigation would lead him to a case of child abuse.

On July 1, 1997, Anytown Police Department's Inter-Agency Child Abuse Investigation

Team became operational. Detective Sergeant Alice Percy, YSO James Alfaro, Department of Children's Services (DCS) Investigator Clarence Brown and Pediatric Nurse Julie Wong RN, met with Chief Paint and Lieutenant John Ferris. The response team recently completed coordination training with personnel from the school district, the probation department and the district attorney.

Jerome Peters and his parent failed to attend a meeting of the School Attendance Review Board (S.A.R.B.), held at the Anytown Police Department. Jerome fit the mold of the typical juvenile delinquent. He was sixteen years of age with a history of truancy and poor school performance. He had several theft, vandalism and marijuana possession arrests. He was also affiliated with a local street gang and was currently on formal probation. YSO Alfaro asked Sergeant Percy to accompany him to Jerome's house.

Alfaro and Percy arrived at the Peters's home and found the front door open. They entered the home and immediately smelled the odor of phencyclidine (PCP). Upon entering the kitchen, they found a toddler unconscious on the floor. They recognized a similar odor on the child's breath and in a baby bottle nearby. The baby bottle contained a brown liquid that appeared to be PCP. Paramedics transported the child to the hospital.

Sergeant Percy activated the rest of the team. Nurse Wong and DCS Investigator Brown responded to the hospital placing the child into protective custody. Percy and Alfaro discovered that no one else was at the house. They found a medical identification card for the toddler, identifying him as Ralph Peters, age three years. Ralph's mother and live-in boyfriend were arrested later in the day for child endangerment and drug charges.

Conclusion

In the scenario, Ralph Peters was discovered while Percy and Alfaro were searching for a juvenile delinquent. Subsequently, Peters was transported safely for treatment at a local hospital. The proactive approach of the inter-agency team in locating a high risk youth led team members to a toddler also in danger.

Minimally, the team should consist of a child abuse detective and a youth services officer, as depicted in the scenario above. The combined efforts of law enforcement and child protection professionals increase the quality of service to dysfunctional families having more than one child at risk. Child protection professionals help to increase efficiency of services and enhances utilization of stakeholder resources. The inter-agency team approach toward the investigation of child abuse, neglect and sexual exploitation allows greater cooperation among child protection agencies. Ultimately, overall community support and satisfaction of law enforcement efforts will be realized. The team approach would decrease the need of patrol officers spending countless hours placing children into protective custody, investigation of the crime and writing the necessary reports to insure a successful prosecution of the offender. The team approach would also eliminate the need to interview the victims redundantly. The concept of an inter-agency child abuse team would insure an effective solution of child protection issues for all participating agencies. Success of these issues would solidify community support. Members of the team and their organizations would view the partnership as an effective method to increase cooperation and communication. Legal advocates for children outside the organizations would view the move as a positive method to protect the rights of children.

The growing population of children in the ages 5-17 into the year 2000 will have a profound effect on law enforcement, the schools and communities throughout California. Demographic and sociological studies of youth prove that the victimization of children and juvenile delinquency will continue to impact all stakeholders in the community. Stakeholders will view Law enforcement as leaders responsible in forming partnerships among organizations to positively impact youth. Eventually, both the criminal justice system and the community will view the importance of implementing an inter-agency team approach to address child protection issues. Issues of child abuse and self-destructive behavior of youths attributed to juvenile delinquency will certainly be addressed by the team.

Recommendations

1. Law enforcement, city government, school districts and other child protection agencies must combine efforts to address the growing youth population prior to year of 2000.
2. Law enforcement must provide the leadership to rally other organizations to design and implement innovative programs that will positively impact high risk youth.
3. A truancy ordinance must be implemented with an effective action can be taken against offenders.
4. Law enforcement and school districts must form partnerships.
5. Target youth from single parent households for intervention to deter delinquency.
6. Officers should be assigned to a Youth Services Bureau to work with high risk youth.
7. Law enforcement agencies should establish an Officer Mentoring program in cooperation with local youth organizations.

8. Recruit police and fire department personnel and their associations to serve and support youth mentoring programs.
9. Within an organization, design an awards program to recognize public employees who volunteer their time to youth programs.
10. Financial support for youth programs by the merchants in the community should be encouraged.
11. Establish a parenting class for single parent households through a combined effort by law enforcement, school district and department of child services.
12. Investigate the possibility of establishing inter-agency child abuse teams in the community. Assign a detective and youth services officer to combine efforts of an investigation.
13. Share resources and personnel with other child protection advocates in the community.

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