

**USING ANALYSIS, COMPASSION, AND COLLABORATION TO END ANTISOCIAL
BEHAVIORS CAUSED BY VAGRANTS IN YOUR COMMUNITY**

by

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The Command College Futures Study Project is a FUTURES study of a particular emerging issue of relevance to law enforcement. Its purpose is NOT to predict the future; rather, to project a variety of possible scenarios useful for strategic planning in anticipation of the emerging landscape facing policing organizations.

This journal article was created using the futures forecasting process of Command College and its outcomes. Defining the future differs from analyzing the past, because it has not yet happened. In this article, methodologies have been used to discern useful alternatives to enhance the success of planners and leaders in their response to a range of possible future environments.

Managing the future means influencing it—creating, constraining and adapting to emerging trends and events in a way that optimizes the opportunities and minimizes the threats of relevance to the profession.

The views and conclusions expressed in the Command College Futures Project and journal article are those of the author, and are not necessarily those of the CA Commission on Peace Officer Standards and Training (POST).

Using Analysis, Compassion, and Collaboration to End Antisocial Behaviors Caused by Vagrants in Your Community

Know the enemy and know yourself; in a hundred battles you will never be in peril (Sun Tzu, Griffith, 2005). Many California coastal communities are currently under a siege of antisocial behaviors caused by vagrants. For persons that are truly homeless, unemployed, and willing to work toward changing their life, there are services available. For the service-resistant vagrants on our streets that panhandle, urinate, defecate, use alcohol, street drugs and get into fights, law enforcement needs to find an effective means to minimize these antisocial behaviors. The current economic crisis has contributed to the problem, but the reality is the antisocial behaviors of vagrants have been part of life for centuries.

The roots of laws against vagrancy and disorderly conduct in the United States can be traced to England. The vagrancy laws at that time were seen to protect local residents from the perceived potential criminality of vagrants and to safeguard parishes and municipalities from the financial burden of caring for nonresidents (Livingston, 2002). To have the best opportunity to end the antisocial behaviors related to vagrants without leading your organization into Federal Civil Rights Court, law enforcement needs to know who the vagrants are, why they are engaging in antisocial behaviors in specific areas, understand the capacity of the organization, and know what resources are available in your community to be effective and compassionate, yet respectful of individual rights.

With the use of predictive analytics and hot spot mapping, law enforcement and social service outreach workers can collaborate to effectively utilize their limited resources while finding the best outcome for the people they encounter involved in antisocial behavior.

IDENTIFYING THE SOURCE OF ANTISOCIAL BEHAVIOR AND ITS IMPACT

Many terms are used for the people we see wandering our streets. The most common terms you hear are homeless, transient, vagrant, hobo, bum, or panhandler. According to the 2007 Ventura County 10-Year Strategy to End Homeless, there are two main categories of homeless persons commonly encountered by law enforcement, firefighters, emergency room personnel, social workers, and the public (Ventura County, 2007):

- The **episodically homeless** are experiencing episodic disruptions in their lives brought about as a result of living in poverty. Episodic homeless persons are individuals or families who are homeless for a short period of time—days, weeks, or months—not a year or more. They are persons that are unemployed or intermittently employed and are truly one paycheck away from either living on the streets or having a roof over their heads. The episodically homeless actually instill a great deal of compassion from the public and are the reason many people donate to charities.
- The **chronically homeless** is an unaccompanied individual with a disabling condition who has either been continuously homeless for a year or more or has had at least four episodes of homelessness in the past three years. They are the mentally ill, drug and alcohol abusers are the individuals you commonly see passed out in our parks, panhandling and sleeping on any bench or business entrance until the liquor stores open in the morning.

There are also two subcultures among the chronically homeless that impact emergency and social services (Orth, 2012):

- The **service resistant** vagrants are the individuals that may also have drug, alcohol, and mental health issues, but choose to disobey laws, only use services when its to their

advantage, and refuse to accept any assistance that requires them to change their behavior or lifestyle.

- The **young grunge** groups are the late teen to early twenties crowd with backpacks and dogs that move up and down the California coast drinking coffee, smoking marijuana, involved in malicious mischief and they live off of panhandling and charitable handouts intended for the truly homeless. This group is additionally worrisome as they provide a negative yet potentially attractive role model/life style for youth that live within a specific community, a model of early antisocial behavior.

All of these groups benefit from social services and charitable giving; but clearly each group's needs and impact on our communities are not equal. Law enforcement can become better prepared to impact their respective behaviors by learning more about them and why they are on our streets. In the city of Santa Barbara, they have a program called "Restorative Policing." They have two police officers, three part-time outreach workers and six part-time community service liaisons working to identify and assist homeless persons with housing and services (Community Development Department, City of Santa Barbara, 2011). The goal is to connect each person they contact with available services and get them off of the streets.

In December 2001, as a result of shootings that occurred in the County of Ventura during the 1990's, the Crisis Intervention Team (CIT) program was brought to Ventura County through the efforts of Ventura Police Department, the Ventura County Behavioral Health Department, and Oxnard Police Department (Walker, 2010). Based upon the "Memphis Model" CIT training teaches officers to understand the behavior of persons with mental illness, and how to use communication skills rather than physical force to help persons in crisis. The CIT is made up of volunteer officers from each Uniform Patrol Precinct. CIT officers are called upon to respond to

crisis calls that present officers face-to-face with complex issues relating to mental illness. CIT officers also perform their regular duty assignment as patrol officers (Vaughn, 2011).

One reason CIT has been so successful is that officers learn to get to root cause of the person's behavior and determine what is the best resource to have the best outcome. By using this same model and incorporating a section of training into the existing CIT training program, officers learn how to interact with persons involved in antisocial behaviors and find the best possible outcome for both homeless and vagrant populations. Absent such a model or coordinated efforts, the community may ask for simpler means to eradicate the problem. Sadly, this all too often is the answer for those not seeking long-term solutions to the issue.

ANTISOCIAL BEHAVIOR AND ITS IMPACT

Often when the public and businesses complain about vagrants, they ask law enforcement, "Why can't you just arrest that dirty, drunken, smelly, toothless guy that is asking everyone for money?" The law enforcement response most times is, "They aren't doing anything illegal." The opposite end of the spectrum is when law enforcement makes contact with a vagrant for illegal behavior, we are asked, "Why are you bothering that poor homeless man?" Two things law enforcement has learned is; we will never arrest our way out of the vagrancy problem in our communities, and we'll never gain the support of the community by targeting persons for enforcement because they are homeless, or they make us uncomfortable to see them in our community. We will be successful by targeting antisocial behaviors that disrupt peoples quality of life and prevent them from feeling safe.

The most common antisocial behaviors impacting the quality of life in our communities are aggressive panhandling, loitering, urinating, defecating, camping, fighting and drunkenness. In addition to the visual blight and the feelings of insecurity surrounding vagrancy, there is a

financial impact to communities in the form of first responder services and lost tax revenue from decreased consumption by tourists. In Ventura, agencies are currently working on a plan to “take back” the Ventura River Parkway, now littered with trash from vagrants that have been living there for decades. Implementation of the plan is intended to improve tourism, reduce flood risks, improve water quality, and protect wildlife (Martinez, 2012).

In Malcolm Gladwell’s 2006 essay “Million-Dollar Murray,” recounting the story of Murray Barr, a vagrant in Reno, Nevada. The Police Department realized if you totaled all of Murray’s hospital bills for the ten years that he had been on the streets—as well as substance-abuse-treatment costs, doctors’ fees, and other expenses—he probably ran up a medical bill as large as anyone in the State of Nevada. Officials estimated the cost of services used to treat one of their biggest chronic offenders was over \$100,000,000 for a ten-year period. In an era of declining dollars, solutions must include means to maximize money, and not waste it by using the same unsuccessful practices over and over again.

WHERE DO WE FOCUS OUR LIMITED RESOURCES

Law enforcement needs to use its limited resources as effectively as possible, and predictive analytics will get us where we need to be. Predictive analytics are widely used in the business world today, an example of predictive analytics at work is when you use your “Loyalty” card at the grocery store, predictive analytics are tracking your spending habits. Each time you scan a card, every item you purchase is recorded into a computer file linked with data from your card application. Eventually, based on many shopping trips over time, a picture begins to emerge of your shopping habits and household characteristics. This is then linked to broader “market segments” based on age, race, income level, family size and neighborhood. The real goal is to

determine how profitable each market segment is to the store, and to treat customers in those segments accordingly (Albrecht and Vanderlippe, 2002).

The application of predictive analytics in law enforcement is just scratching the surface. Predictive analytics give law enforcement the tools it needs to increase efficiency and effectiveness. By creating the applicable metrics and inputting valid data, law enforcement can determine statistically and not anecdotally where and when crime or particular behaviors will likely occur and then direct appropriate resources. This model can then be utilized to work in collaboration with social services outreach workers and knowing where and when to deploy this resource. If you know on a certain time and day of the week with vagrants drinking excessively and getting into fights, you would be effectively using your law enforcement and social services outreach workers by sending them to that area hours before the fighting begins. By educating officers about what resources and services are available, and having social service outreach workers in the field, you increase your chances of directing people into services and not jail. Some initial results using this approach are promising.

One recent experiment employing predictive policing in Santa Cruz California represents a leap forward in the data driven crime-fighting models that began in the 1990's with CompStat, which uses mapping and statistics to track crime. By using predictive analytics and mapping, officers know where and when to find their daily hot spots. They then decide where and how to focus their time when no calls for service are coming in, focusing on the hot spot information they received in briefing. By the end of the first month using analytics, property crime was down 27 percent from the year before, an impressive drop, especially given the 25 percent rise in the first six months of the year (Thompson, 2011). Beyond crime prevention, similar means could be expanded to include behavioral patterns for vagrants.

COMPASSION AND COLLABORATION

On May 23rd, 2012 a panel of subject matter experts met to discuss using analytics and collaboration to combat chronic vagrancy. Invited were representatives from Ventura County Behavioral Health Department, Ventura County Drug and Alcohol Program, Mental Health Crisis Team, Ventura County Medical Center, Turning Point Foundation, City of Ventura Community Development, Ventura City Fire Department, and the Ventura Police Department.

The primary focus of the meeting was how best to deal with chronic offenders, the vagrants who repeatedly engage in antisocial behaviors and frequently come into contact with the police department and cause a drain on emergency services. The panel was provided a list identifying individuals with multiple emergency services contacts since the beginning of 2012. By cross-referencing the Police and Fire lists, the panel identified the seven most frequent users of emergency services. They were then given a sample of a hot spot map that showed the locations where the antisocial behavior is occurring throughout the city.

The panel began sharing their thoughts on why they saw predictive analytics and hot spot mapping as a great tool. The results of the data could be used by both emergency services and social services to know where and when to deploy proactive outreach workers to help reduce calls for service, save money, and direct people into social / behavioral services before incarceration becomes the best or only option. Due to declining resources available, many social services agencies have had to become more reactive and have done less community outreach. By partnering with law enforcement they can become much more effective. The panel also saw the value in sharing information about the most frequent offenders. When this population enters treatment or engages into available services, they can potentially be flagged for a higher priority

in an attempt to direct them out of their current situation by developing the most effective treatment plan.

The outcomes of the meeting included setting two goals to move discussions toward realistic implementation. The first goal was to develop a waiver form that can be utilized by both private and public social service agencies. If signed by their clients, this collaboration among social service agencies will help determine the best possible referrals and outcomes for each client. The second goal was to modify and adapt an existing committee to help plan better outcomes for their clients. The existing committee, named the Adult Interagency Case Management and Assessment (AICMA) meets on a monthly basis to review cases involving persons with mental illness and help develop treatment plans. A member from the panel involved with AICMA suggested they could potentially broaden the purpose of the existing committee to address chronic offenders by adding a representative from the County Drug and Alcohol Agency to the committee. The value in adding the County Drug and Alcohol Agency to the committee is that they could develop plans that would create better outcomes for chronic offenders with both mental illness and a substance abuse disorder.

The meeting was considered to be a success by all those in attendance. Participants agreed to have a follow-up meeting to initiate changes, and also to check the progress toward meeting their newly constructed goals. Although the enhanced collaboration emerging from this meeting was in one community, it provides a possible model for others to consider.

MODEL FOR THE FUTURE

The ideal future is a community where our chronic homeless and vagrants seek out available social services and commit to getting themselves into treatment, off the streets, and becoming productive members of the community. We may never achieve that utopian vision, but

we don't have to continue to just manage antisocial behaviors of vagrants on an ad hoc basis. Officers need to be educated about what public and private social service agencies exist and how to access their services. Social service agencies need to be part of this education process to eliminate any confusion about the availability or limitations of their programs. Law enforcement agencies need to develop metrics specific to the antisocial behaviors impacting the quality of life in their community.

Using predictive analytics, these metrics will provide law enforcement and social service outreach workers with hot spot maps that will help them to effectively deploy their resources to the right locations at the right time. Using this data officers and social service outreach workers contact vagrants before the antisocial behaviors begin, so will have a realistic opportunity to get them into treatment or help them seek shelter before they are too intoxicated or angry to accept help. Once the vagrant has provided personal information, signed their waiver allowing private and public agencies to discuss their case and agreed to accept assistance, the various social service agency representatives can develop a plan and case manage them until they are able to become self sufficient enough to become productive members of the community.

CONCLUSION

The impact of the chronic offender vagrants on our community and economy are a serious issue. By utilizing predictive analytics, law enforcement can become more effective in knowing where and when to deploy their limited resources be more effective. Officers can become better equipped to deal with the chronic offender vagrants by gaining a better understanding of who they are and why they are on our streets. By developing a better understanding of existing resources and the chronic offender vagrants we encounter, we will be able to find the most compassionate, collaborative, effective and long-term outcome available.

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