

PROJECT SPOTLIGHT

September 1, 1999 to August 1, 2003

Overview

Project Spotlight is a partnership involving law enforcement, juvenile probation, and adult probation whose purpose is to provide a high degree of surveillance and supervision of young offenders in certain high crime areas of designated cities. The program has been funded by a grant from the Criminal Justice Division of the Office of the Governor

The program was modeled after a program reported to be highly successful in reducing crime in the Boston area named Operation Nightlight. The concept was brought to Texas and funded by the Texas Legislature for a four-year period beginning on Sept 1, 1999. It was offered to seven counties: Bexar, Dallas, El Paso, Harris, Nueces, Tarrant, and Travis.

The program is designed to provide a high degree of supervision for young offenders under the age of 25 who are on intensive supervision caseloads due to involvement in gangs and a history of violent and/or habitual criminal activity. The areas of El Paso to be targeted were selected based on the El Paso Police Department's crime analysis reports. Areas were selected that included police districts with the highest incidence of certain index crimes such as burglaries and felony assaults. These areas in El Paso are the Northeast and Lower Valley areas and incorporate police districts 60 through 69 and 80 through 89, respectively. The areas targeted also needed to be large enough to contain a population of 90 to 135 probationers in total who fit the criteria for the program.

Program Description

The program was designed to create three teams of three officers each. Each team is composed of a police officer, a juvenile probation officer, and an adult probation officer. In El Paso, one team is assigned to the northeast area, one to the lower valley area (within the city limits), and the third team covers both areas, picking up the additional cases to meet the state's criteria. Each team is to carry a caseload of not less than 10 probationers nor more than 15. Keeping the number of cases low enables the teams to provide more intensive supervision of the community's highest risk offenders. The officers work independently of one another as well as in groups of two or three. Typically the teams go out and conduct home visits collectively about one night a week and visit the homes of both juvenile and adult offenders. On other evenings the police officer will accompany either his adult or juvenile probation partner to focus on the older or younger population, while the other probation officer works independently visiting his or her own probationers. The presence of the police officer provides security for unarmed probation officers, allowing them to enter more high-risk areas, conduct searches if appropriate, and test for drugs when required. The officers provide backup for each other and function as additional eyes and ears in situations where several persons may be present during a contact. Police officers also make daytime visits to schools and check on the progress of juvenile probationers in school settings. The concept of Spotlight encourages the maintenance of a high profile in the communities by the teams to discourage further criminal activity and to encourage a feeling of greater security among law abiding community members.

Besides providing community surveillance and intensive supervision of high-risk offenders, Project Spotlight had a second intention, however. The legislature also put a great deal of money into prevention endeavors for the purpose of creating healthier communities as well as providing rehabilitative services to offenders.

During the course of the first year after funding the basic grant at the cost of \$450,000, two additional supplemental grants were awarded. The first of these was to focus on prevention activities and added an additional \$133,200.00 to the grant, while the second addressed educational and vocational services and provided \$60,000.00 for this purpose. Whereas the first grant was divided between all three agencies involved and provided for the salaries of the various officers involved, the supplemental grants were awarded to the probation departments only.

The second year of the project the grant was awarded at the rate of \$660,000.00. Then in the early part of the second year, a third supplemental grant was awarded to address gang prevention. This supplement brought an additional \$28,571.00. The third year of the project combined all of the supplemental funds into one grant award of \$688,500.00.

In the early years of the project the prevention monies were available for services that could address the needs of anyone living in the Spotlight areas, probationers and non-probationers, adults and children. The Governor's Office supported such programs as mentoring and after-school programs. As a result, the Juvenile Probation Department worked with other community agencies to expand existing programs into the Spotlighted areas. Big Brothers Big Sisters was contracted to seek and train mentors for children in the spotlight areas. Parks and Recreation was contracted to develop after-school and summer programs at North Loop Elementary School in the lower valley area and in the Eisenhower Projects in the northeast area. Creative Kids, an art program that developed artistic talents, encouraged emotional expression through art, and enhanced self-esteem, was brought to both Spotlight areas through free classes offered at local community centers in these neighborhoods. Additionally counseling services and parenting classes were offered to Spotlight area families through the El Paso Child Guidance Center and Providence Corporation, respectively.

Adult Probation, on the other hand, developed the Ysleta Community Outreach Center in the lower valley where a whole panorama of services is offered to the community. Adult Probation funded a Community Coordinator position as well as that of a Vocational Specialist and several instructors who offered a variety of educational classes at the center. Juvenile Probation housed its lower valley parenting classes and Creative Kids classes at this center, while a multitude of other community agencies worked together with Adult Probation in providing groups and classes in GED instruction, adult literacy, citizenship, computer literacy, English as a Second Language, anger management, HIV/STD and safe sex, empowerment of women, AA and Al-anon, quitting smoking, substance abuse education, and a chess club. Additionally various health-related organizations used the center to provide services and disseminate information.

These programs continued until the fall of 2001 when, after the events of Sept. 11th, a shift in government spending began to take place and the Project Spotlight leadership was asked to take a hard look at the program in terms of results that could be defended to the legislature. Due to the fact that many of the programs being funded by the juvenile Probation Department targeted elementary age children in the Spotlight areas, the impact on delinquency would not be measurable until years from now when they become adolescents. Many other departments around the state were in the same boat. As a result, we were all asked to discontinue all such programs and to develop interventions for use with spotlight probationers only, with the belief that the impact of these programs could be immediately evident and measurable. As of December 31, 2001, all of Juvenile Probation's prevention programs were discontinued and a grant adjustment was submitted which included the new programs to be offered. These programs included a life skills program for juveniles and the "Grey" program to enhance the parent /child relationship between the probationer and his parent(s). The remainder of the funds was de-obligated, and it was recommended to the Governor's Office that they be returned to El Paso County in order to assist the 65th District Court with the formation of a Family Drug Court. The Governor's Office accepted this recommendation and funds were allocated accordingly.

Adult Probation, meanwhile, continued to run their Community Outreach Center and referred their Spotlight probationers to the center for services. However, in order to continue to present the services to other residents of the Spotlight area, at the end of that fiscal year, they picked up a portion of the cost of running the center out of their own budget. Their Community Coordinator also began to ride along with the Spotlight team on a monthly basis to familiarize herself with the probationers and their needs and to suggest services that might be of benefit through the center.

One small additional supplemental grant (\$28,000) was awarded late in the third year of the grant for gang prevention purposes. With this money we partnered with Adult Probation, who provided the services of their graffiti removal crew to work with our juveniles several days a week to remove graffiti created by gangs in the Spotlight areas. This summer program caused the juveniles to help clean up graffiti that their own gangs may have created and to consider the impact of this on their community and neighbors.

Finally, Spotlight entered its fourth year on September 1, 2002 with a slightly reduced budget of \$643,847.00 due to the absence of the gang prevention monies as well as reduced prevention/education monies. The basic program continued as it began and the life skills and "Grey" programs were continued from the previous year. In addition about \$15,000 were directed towards substance abuse programs for juveniles without Medicaid or insurance. Adult Probation continues to maintain its Community Outreach Center with services to the entire lower valley Spotlight area. Unfortunately, at a recent forum of all Spotlight programs, it was announced that the Office of the Governor would be unable to provide further funding for the program due to funding cuts that are affecting many areas of state government as well as nationally funded programs.

Problems Encountered

During its three years of operation, Project spotlight has not been without its problems. Trying to synchronize the activities of three agencies and nine officers to allow for the kind of joint supervision envisioned for Spotlight has been problematic, especially since organizational structure and job responsibilities differ among the officers. (For instance, juvenile probation officers have the responsibility of maintaining their files, providing case management, preparing court documents, and handling all court cases to include detention, review, and disposition hearings. This requires that they put in a considerable amount of time in the office during the day, while detention hearings can make their hours unpredictable. The structure of adult probation, on the other hand is to pair a Spotlight officer whose main function is to provide field supervision with another departmental officer whose duty it is to provide case management and the paperwork involved in the job. These adult probation officers were scheduled to work 2:00 to 10:00 p.m. five days a week. Obviously this left the juvenile probation officers with far fewer hours to devote to nighttime patrols and visitations. This generated a certain amount of resentment between team members. Juvenile Probation compensated by providing the services of a tracker to help maintain the required number of contacts. However, differences of this kind still seemed to generate a certain amount of discord.)

Secondly, the philosophies and approaches in use by the two probation departments differ in many respects. As juvenile probation works with children and families, the approach is more focused on rehabilitative interventions and services that include a respectful approach to those involved in the system. Adult probation, on the other hand, is supervising more hard core, gang involved, violent offenders who have progressed considerably in their criminal involvement. The approach used by the adult probation officers is a much tougher one, often encompassing more confrontational tactics than are found in juvenile probation. Doing joint visits with each other's probationers often left both sides feeling uncomfortable in the jurisdiction of the other and unsure of how to act in the homes of the other's probationers.

Visitation in the homes of adult probationers also exposes the juvenile probation officers to situations with a much higher potential for danger than they normally experience in the homes of juveniles, and officer safety issues became a significant concern.

A fourth problem which concerns everyone is that riding around together supervising each other's probationers is not an efficient approach to supervision. With the conditions of the grant suggesting a caseload of 15 probationers per officer and with six probationers involved in the effort, that constitutes a total caseload of 90 probationers. With each one requiring 3 to 5 visits per week, this averages out to 360 visits per week. With everyone working within the limitations of a 40-hour week, this was a virtual impossibility. Although the original program conceived of a three officer team that traveled together at all times, El Paso modified that (with the approval of the Governor's Office) to a single night per week in which all three agencies ride together. In addition, a juvenile probation officer pairs up with a police officer once a week and the adult partner pairs up with the police officer on another night. On the remaining evenings the probation officers make the remaining contacts on their own.

The Police Department operates in the midst of this and does an excellent job of trying to accommodate both departments and to provide for the safety of everyone involved. They, however, have expressed concerns over the lack of back-up they have, as they traditionally work with armed partners, and in this case they have none. The result is a heightened sense of vulnerability for the entire team.

Legal issues also arose over conducting searches and taking probationers into custody with regard to whose function it is to do what and under what circumstances. The Center for Project Spotlight at Sam Houston State University took the lead in researching these issues and providing guidance.

Results

One must keep in mind certain issues in evaluating this project as it was originally conceived. The project was conceived as an intervention to be used in small areas of intense criminal activity. El Paso, unlike some of the other Texas cities involved, really does not have any areas that fit that description. In order to meet the state's criteria for caseload numbers, we had to spread our Spotlight teams out over two very large areas of the city. This, in turn, waters down the impact of the teams on an area. They do not have the same kind of constant high visibility in a large area that they would have if they were conducting intense activities in a small area. The impact of that presence on the neighborhood is, therefore, different. Originally, the legislature wanted to see lower crime rates with increased arrests and more probation revocations for all probationers in the area. Although locally there was a slight reduction in crime in the Spotlight areas, it is probably not statistically significant overall, and this tendency seemed to hold statewide. The Policy Council for the Governor's Office is presently analyzing the data that has been submitted for the next legislative session. However, early reports have stated that the information has been hard to analyze due to three factors. One, the crime rate appeared to be going down in most cities anyway, until very recently. Secondly, many of the jurisdictions expanded their boundaries on one or more occasions in the course of the grant in order to meet the requirements for numbers of probationers, and this, in itself, naturally increased the numbers of arrests, modifications, etc. Thirdly, the program is really too new to evaluate for the desired effects. The first year was mostly spent in putting the program together and getting off the ground (in El Paso, the Police Department did not hire their team until around March, the Ysleta Community Center was being remodeled and did not open until November of the second year). Other departments had much greater problems in implementing their programs. Supplemental grants were still being added and programs developed during the second year. Programs were disrupted and had to be completely redesigned during the third year. The whole program was finally stabilizing as the

announcement was made that it will no longer be funded. The job of the Policy Council is going to be very difficult in presenting an analysis of outcomes under the circumstances.

The thing that they have come to appreciate, however, is that intensive supervision of persons already on probation is only one of the factors involved in neighborhood crime. They have, over time, suggested to the legislature that a better appraisal of the program should be based on probationary out-comes rather than neighborhood crime analysis. Looking at this aspect of the program suggests that the spotlight concept provides a very effective form of supervision for high-risk probationers. Families and probationers take probation more seriously when law enforcement is involved in the contacts and when supervision takes place in the community rather than in the probation office. Probationers have few opportunities for undetected violations, as they are constantly subjected to unexpected visits at home, at school, and at other neighborhood sites, during which they are randomly tested for drugs or searched for drugs, weapons, or gang paraphernalia. This provides greater safety to communities, in itself

OUTLINE

Overview

- Police/probation partnership
- Modeled after Operation Nightlight
- Offered to 7 counties (Bexar, Dallas, El Paso, Harris, Nueces, Tarrant, and Travis)
- Target population: Young offenders ages 10 through 25 who are considered high risk to re-offend
- Areas selected: Northeast Area and Lower Valley Area by police district
- Selection criteria for areas: Police Crime Analysis Statistics
- Funding Period: 4 years

Program Description

Basic Program: \$450,000.00 per year

- Three teams of 3 officers each: adult probation / EPPD/ juvenile probation
- Caseload per probation officer: minimum of 10 probationers; maximum of 15 probationers
- Number of contacts required per week per probationer: 3 to 5

Supplemental Grants

Prevention: \$133,200.00

Services offered through Juvenile Probation originally

- After-school and summer programs
- Creative Kids
- Parenting classes (Providence Corp.)
- Counseling (El Paso Child Guidance)

Services offered through Adult Probation originally

- Ysleta Community Outreach Center (offered classes or groups for anger management, AA and Al-Anon, substance abuse education, citizenship, English as a Second Language, HIV, STD and safe sex, women's empowerment, chess club, teen parenting, and many others)

Education / Vocational Prep \$ 60,000.00

- Juvenile Probation and Adult Probation combined resources to hire a Vocational Specialist and 2 instructors for the Ysleta Center
- Classes Offered: GED, adult literacy, computer literacy
- Assistance with job searches and preparatory skills

Gang Prevention: \$28,500.00 (Began in year 2) Juvenile Probation only

- Big Brothers Big Sisters
- Therapeutic Mentoring (Providence Corp.)

Historical Developments

Redirection of Services:

- Announced in October of 2001:
- Reduced prevention monies to be directed towards Spotlight probationers
- Remaining funds to be de-obligated and given to drug courts
- Proposed start date January 1, 2002
- Actual start date due to processing of Grant Adjustment: March 22, 2002
- New Programs for Juvenile Probation
 - o Life Skills
 - o Grey
 - o Graffiti Removal

December Forum: Funding to terminate August 31, 2003

Problems Encountered

- Difficulties in synchronizing officer hours and activities among agencies with different structures
- Philosophical differences in intervention and approach
- Higher potential for danger
- Inefficient use of time
- Legal issues surrounding procedures

Results

- Some reduction in crime and increase in arrests locally
- Confounding issues statewide
 - o Crime was decreasing anyway (until this year)
 - o Counties kept expanding areas supervised
 - o Program in existence and stabilized for too short a period
- Program is better indicator of sound probation practices than of issues being measured.

SPECIAL PROJECT / ARRESTS Northwest Area

	Persons			Property			Narcotics			Others		
	1999	2000	2001	1999	2000	2001	1999	2000	2001	1999	2000	2001
RD64	105	66	95	46	67	67	54	35	70	140	141	273
RD65	100	84	131	52	62	81	44	50	62	170	167	208
RD66	113	99	98	74	66	106	26	37	88	140	139	176
RD67	123	101	65	99	148	35	63	73	44	189	231	83
RD68	103	81	79	38	37	29	46	46	60	65	92	131
Totals	544	431	468	309	380	318	233	241	324	704	770	871

SPECIAL PROJECT / ARRESTS Lower Valley Area

	Persons			Property			Narcotics			Others		
	1999	2000	2001	1999	2000	2001	1999	2000	2001	1999	2000	2001
RD83	62	70	108	26	26	73	38	38	129	113	118	260
RD84	108	137	115	72	62	69	68	79	61	168	239	200
RD85	75	106	77	35	70	36	39	69	48	167	185	189
RD86	40	60	96	34	45	78	58	117	56	97	165	292
RD87	58	58	118	72	96	82	44	52	47	119	172	198
Totals	343	431	514	239	299	338	247	355	341	664	879	1139

TOTAL CRIME

		1999	2000	2001
NORTHWESTST	RD64	1,098	983	1,631
	RD65	1,627	1,460	1,949
	RD66	1,818	1,741	1,949
	RD67	2,339	2,211	1,393
	RD68	1,857	1,723	1,530
	Total	8,739	8,118	8,452

		1999	2000	2001
LOWER VALLEY	RD83	1,196	1,263	1,844
	RD84	2,382	2,515	1,726
	RD85	1,747	1,839	1,467
	RD86	1,279	1,108	1,626
	RD87	1,289	1,038	1,204
	Total	7,893	7,763	7,867

Crime Analysis Unit, 2002