

## THE SWEDISH MODEL

**Following a surge in street crime, police in Stockholm adopted a high-visibility, community-oriented approach to the problem. It was a reduction of 70 per cent in muggings. Rennie Campbell reports.**

Since the early 1990's, community and problem-oriented policing (POP) has become increasingly prominent throughout the 21 districts of the Swedish National Police (SNP). The 16,000-strong force has implemented high-visibility community policing with each community police station responsible for a specific area of the policing district. Simultaneously, officers are required to work in partnership with the local community in a problem-oriented manner. Officers are assigned to individual areas and tasked to focus on quality-of-life offences, including public disorder, burglary, theft and criminal damage.

One such POP project identified and reversed a dramatic increase in street crime in the Sollentuna district, north of Stockholm.

In a six-month period, street crime increase by 53% - specifically muggings in which juveniles were victims and offenders. Of particular concern to officers was the profile of both offenders and victims: 70% of offenders had a non-Swedish background (mostly Turkish), while 95% of victims were of Swedish origin.

To understand and counter both the rises in crime and the potential for racial hostility, the local SNP department initiated detailed analysis of the victims, the offenders and the incidents. Based on this analysis a range of responses designed to address the causes and consequences of these crimes were implemented.

The analysis focused on interviews with police officers, school personnel, parents and young people, as well as the scrutiny of police reports and legal judgements.

Police officers and social workers were aware that many victims were reluctant to report the attacks. In many cases, incidents were reported only after the victim told their family about the attack. This delay in reporting attacks hampered the police investigation and contributed to low conviction rates. In turn, this reduced the incentive for victims to report the attacks, as they believed the police could not or would not do anything to tackle the offenders.

The majority of offenders had a non-Swedish background, came from lower income families and had poor academic records. Over 40% abused drugs and around half had a criminal background. In contrast, the victims were from upper and middle-income families and of Swedish origin.

While victims and their families wanted the crimes cleared up and the offenders punished, they were also reluctant to become involved in court cases and wanted to remain anonymous. This made the police investigations time consuming and difficult.

The analysis of police reports indicated the attacks frequently took place at commuter train stations, peaking between 7pm and 8pm during the school summer holidays, and coinciding with the arrival and departure of commuter trains. It was rare for weapons to be used during the attacks; however, many incidents finished with the offender threatening to kill the victim if they contacted the police.

Third-party involvement in or after an incident was recognised as an important factor in when, or if, attacks were reported. Friends of the attacker were often passive participants in the attacks and, due to loyalty to their friend, rarely gave evidence. The presence of groups of the offender's friends at court reinforced the atmosphere of animosity towards the victim, adding to their reluctance to pursue a conviction.

Just as friends of the offender played a role during and after the incident, the same was true of the friends and family of the victim. The fear of reprisals increased during the course of the police investigation and particularly

during legal proceeding when victims were forced to confront their attackers. If the police could encourage friends and family to support the victim during the investigation and subsequent court case they believed there was a higher likelihood of conviction. Similarly, the actions of police officers and prosecutors were important in gaining the trust and co-operation of the victim, their family and witnesses.

Having analysed the characteristics, motivations and behaviour of the offenders, the victims and third-party individuals, the police team devised a three-pronged response strategy:

- Proactive enforcement targeting suspected offenders and crime hotspots;
- The creation of a single investigation commission to ensure all incidents were investigated as quickly and effectively as possible, and;
- The provision of information and support to victims and witnesses to encourage the reporting of incidents, improve the quality of evidence and reduce the risk that the crimes would generate racial hostility towards the local immigrant communities.

Several measures were implemented to target those youths with a record of committing street crime with the aim of disrupting their activities. These included zero tolerance to any criminal activity, including carrying weapons, narcotics offences and anti-social behaviour, and video and other surveillance. This programme was carried out by local and traffic police officers.

Coupled with the targeting of known offenders, the police also aimed to prevent other youths from becoming involved in street crime. Youths that congregated in known crime hotspots were identified and tracked with the assistance of parents and workers from a local recreation centre.

The crime hotspot information was used to target a visible police presence at peak crime times. Increased surveillance and supervision by rail workers also led to a reduction in incidents.

Previously, the investigation of street crimes was conducted on a case-by-case basis across several police stations and by a number of officers. The formation of a central investigation commission for the Sollentuna district ensured that each case received a consistently strong level of investigation, that victims gained the support that would guarantee their participation in legal proceedings and, most importantly, that the conviction rate would increase. The benefits included:

- The removal of repeat offenders from the streets (to youth custody or prison);
- Increased risk and reduced motivation for offenders; and
- Increased public confidence in the police.

In co-operation with the largest school in the area and the local newspaper, the police developed a multi-faceted information strategy. The newspaper was used to raise awareness about street crime in the local community. Letters were sent to all youths in the 13-20 age group with information on street crime. Similar information was sent to parents with details on what to do if their child was a victim of street crime and encouraging them to report attacks to the police.

To counter the risk that the rise in street crime would generate racial hostility, it was made clear that the victims would receive the full support of the police and other sections of the community. In this respect, the role of teachers was important as was increasing the conviction rate.

As the response strategy was implemented a number of additional measures were developed. Teachers and students at the largest school in the area were encouraged to support victims during a series of presentations by the police in a move to create a safe environment within the school and reduce the victim's fear of being attacked again. In conjunction with this, the level of support from the police and the victim's counsel was increased during legal proceedings.

Action was also taken in an effort to counter racist attitudes among victims, their family and friends. Mediation was also examined, but the basic precondition for this to succeed – an offender's acknowledgement of the offence and remorse – was rarely apparent.

The results of the project were measured through police statistics and at meetings with children, school personnel and social workers before, during and after the project.

Having climbed to 30 separate street crime incidents in one month in Sollentuna, the number of incidents fell to seven in the month following the implementation of the response initiatives – a reduction of 77 per cent. In the second month, there were just eight incidents.

The number of successful convictions increased with the creation of a single investigation commission. The proactive enforcement initiative successfully disrupted offenders' activities.

Because the local media campaign raised the community's awareness of street crime, the perception that street crime was a problem to be feared increased. However, the enforcement and revised investigation strategies, combined with a positive relationship with the local newspaper, ensured that police successes and the conviction of attackers were also publicised.