

Anti-Panhandling Strategy

Evanston, Illinois

*Submitted by the Evanston, Illinois, Police Department
to the Police Research Executive Research Forum for the
1995 Herman Goldstein Excellence in Problem-Solving Award.*

*Nominees: Officer John Mulholland, Foot Patrol
Officer Janice Sowa, Motor Patrol
Officer Edward Steinhoff, Motor Patrol*

During 1994, Deputy Chief Frank Kaminski, motor patrol officers Edward Steinhoff and Janice Sowa, and foot patrol officer John Mulholland played key roles in a successful community problem-solving project in Evanston, Illinois. City officials and business owners were struggling with the problem of a significant increase in aggressive panhandlers that threatened the vitality of the downtown business district. The investigative and problem-solving skills of these officers, coupled with their experience-based knowledge of disorderly and criminal activity on the city's streets, provided the data and guidance to develop and implement strategies that successfully contained the aggressive panhandling.

Evanston, Illinois

The City of Evanston is located in north suburban Cook County, Illinois, along the shores of Lake Michigan. It shares a common border with the north boundary of the City of Chicago. Evanston, with a population of 74,188 (1992) covering 8.1 square miles, is a socially, racially and economically diverse community. As in many cities, Evanston maintains an older core downtown area that has been struggling with revitalization as it tries to compete with shopping malls. In recent years, panhandling has been the major public safety concern in the downtown business district. As a result, the entire community has had to come to grips with this issue, necessitating a strategic response.

Development of the Panhandling Problem

Panhandling had existed in Evanston for many years without creating a serious problem. Most people had only casually thought about it, because it has had little or no effect on them personally. Evanston panhandlers were concentrated in the core downtown shopping area where pedestrians were most

prevalent. Few in number, they only occasionally asked someone for a dime for a cup of coffee. However, beginning in 1992, the nature and extent of panhandling in the Evanston downtown area dramatically changed. Panhandlers became "aggressive." That is, panhandlers would "verbally strong-arm" people as they walked in the downtown area. In fact, the aggressiveness escalated to threats, physical assaults, and, in some cases, attacks upon citizens. Panhandling also became more prevalent. It is not clear why panhandling changed so dramatically, but many people blamed the economy or lack of services for the indigent. Whatever the cause, the impact of this change was significant on citizens, business, and local government.

Impact on the Community and the Police

As panhandling changed, so to did the public's response. Evanston shoppers felt uncomfortable walking through a gauntlet of panhandlers as they shopped Evanston. People became less tolerant of the panhandlers, especially the business owners. They realized that the aggressive panhandlers were giving shoppers a negative image of Evanston, which in turn impacted on their businesses. The Evanston Chamber of Commerce and Evmark (a privately funded organization established to revitalize the core downtown Evanston) received many complaints from its constituents demanding a solution. The police department also was receiving many complaints, both formal and informal. However, police were frustrated in their attempts to respond, because panhandling itself was not illegal and many citizens were reluctant to sign complaints on other charges. As the problem continued to magnify, aggressive panhandling became the number one priority for the Evanston business community and shoppers. These groups looked to the city council for solutions.

The Beginning of Problem Solving

As discussions and complaints continued, the community needed to rethink what it could do to solve the problem. A public dialogue began between the city's officials, the chamber of commerce, and Evmark. Addressing this issue, however, was very difficult for Evanstonians, and, in many respects, the community was polarized. Some people felt that shoppers should be free from harassment; others felt that panhandlers had a constitutionally protected right to ask others for money. Some demanded a law

enforcement response while others a social service response. To add to the confusion, many people lumped the homeless, legitimate street vendors and panhandlers all into the same category. Debate over solutions often became heated and lacked clear direction.

Struggling to find a solution, several strategies were proposed and attempted during 1992 and 1993. Homeless shelters were opened along with soup kitchens. (There were enough soup kitchens available for a person to get food six out of seven days of the week.) The police continued to respond to calls about panhandlers, but were ineffective at reducing the problem through traditional law enforcement activities. In an effort to give police a law enforcement tool, the city council proposed various ordinances that would make panhandling illegal. One proposed ordinance would have allowed the city to fine aggressive panhandlers up to \$500! Unfortunately, this strategy made comedian Jay Leno's headline segment on the Tonight Show. After this embarrassment, city officials were totally frustrated, but the problem continued, with Evanston becoming a magnet for panhandlers.

The problem was clear. Panhandling in downtown Evanston had become more frequent and aggressive, and shoppers, workers, and business owners were very unhappy about it. However, finding a solution was made difficult by a variety of factors and limitations:

- Panhandling cannot be prevented or eliminated. Its roots in broad social and economic factors were beyond the scope of this project, and a legalistic approach was not practicable.
- Civil rights and free speech issues.
- Free, open society in America.
- Evanston is a compassionate community, with many social agencies, including homeless shelters and soup kitchens. Many people did not want to interfere with people in need.

Therefore, in order to protect shoppers and businesses, yet not harm (and preferably help) people in need, a creative and innovative solution was needed.

Community Problem Solving

As the controversy continued, Gerald A. Cooper was appointed Chief of Police in November, 1993. Clearly, one of his mandates as the new chief was to tackle the panhandling issue. Selected on a community problem-solving platform, Chief Cooper called for a communitywide problem-solving

approach to confront aggressive panhandling. This approach involved first scanning the problem and analyzing the data, then developing a response and conducting a follow-up assessment.

After the Chief explained the community problem-solving process and his vision to the city council, Mayor Lorraine Morton created the Evanston Citizens Panel on Panhandling. Based on Chief Cooper's recommendation, this blue ribbon committee consisted of twenty-one members from a cross-section of the community. By February, 1994, representatives had been appointed by Mayor Morton from the business, religious, and educational communities, as well as elected officials and, representing the police department, Deputy Chief Frank Kaminski.

In April, 1994, the panel began to work intensively on the problem. The first step the panel took was to establish its mission. As stated in the panel's final report: "The charge of the Panel was to have a diverse group of community representatives and City officials develop a coordinated program with specific strategies to address the issue of panhandling in Evanston." The panel's first objectives were to study the nature and extent of panhandling in Evanston and to survey the experience of other cities in addressing the same issue. They agreed (1) to focus on the challenges presented by panhandling and not attempt to solve its broader social-economic causes, and (2) to create a program which satisfied the disparate views in the community. In other words, the strategy must both reduce and contain the problem and help people who are truly in need. The city council gave the panel sixty days to complete its mission.

Data Collection

Being the most knowledgeable about the problem, the Evanston Police Department was commissioned to conduct the study of the nature and extent of the panhandling in the downtown business district. Motor patrol officers Ed Steinhoff and Jan Sowa, and foot patrol officer John Mulholland, were assigned to investigate panhandling in the core business district. The challenge was to determine the nature and extent of a behavior that was somewhat scattered and irregular without using standard law enforcement methods (such as detainment or interrogation). The officers investigated the identity of and background information on the panhandling population through observation and discussions with business owners and others familiar with the street scene. The research enabled the officers to distinguish between aggressive

panhandlers, who were generally able to care for themselves but chose to panhandler for easy money, from homeless individuals, who were less likely to be able to care for themselves and were genuinely in need of social assistance. A core group of 36 aggressive panhandlers was identified, most of whom were already known by the police and had alcohol or substance abuse problems. Their report included a general description of their purposes and motivations: "These individuals practice panhandling because it is a quick, easy way to get money. Panhandling offers a more cost effective way to get what they want as compared with availing themselves of social services." This study was an important step in the process because it provided the necessary information on which the panel could now act and the future success of the program would be evaluated.

Additional information was collected from individuals familiar with the panhandler group and activities on the business area streets. These reporters included a street vendor and representatives from social service agencies. Their testimony corroborated the findings of the police officers.

The panel collected and reviewed information about the experience of other cities attempting to deal with this same issue, including a video tape report from Portland, Oregon. The hope was to identify successful strategies that could be used in Evanston and to get an idea of what results they might expect for their efforts. The review generated many ideas for discussion, but no existing program seemed to fully meet Evanston's complex needs and goals.

Goal and Strategy Development

The dilemma was resolved by deciding to focus on changing the behavior of the givers and reduce the main attraction of the panhandlers, namely money. The innovation, however, was not to discourage people from giving to and helping the needy, but to rechannel the giving. Rather than give cash to panhandlers, people would be asked to give to the numerous local social assistance agencies. This would be accomplished through an extensive public information campaign and an "intervener" program. Designated individuals, called intervenes, would be authorized to identify givers on the street, discretely explain the problem, and provide them with alternative giving strategies. In addition, the police planned to increase their presence in the business district to help restore a feeling of safety.

Public Information Campaign

The focus of the public information campaign was to educate the "giver." As stated in the panel's report: "Giving pocket change to panhandlers encourages and supports panhandling and, in most cases, puts the panhandler more at risk by supporting one's addiction to alcohol or drugs." Thus, the goal of the information campaign was to rechannel the desire to help the needy away from giving directly to panhandlers toward giving to the agencies that serve and assist the truly needy. In other words, it was not a matter of giving versus not giving, but rather giving effectively and productively.

Each organizational member of the panel participated in the information campaign by passing out posters to businesses, conducting media presentations, and making presentations to community groups. Deputy Chief Kaminski served as a liaison with the Northwestern University Police in order to educate the Northwestern students, who, it was learned, were the largest group contributing to the panhandling problem. In addition, a brochure was developed, titled "Where to Find Assistance in Evanston," containing a complete listing of local charities and social services for people in need. The brochures were placed at points-of-purchase locations and distributed by the interveners and foot patrol officer Mulholland.

Intervener Program

The interveners, who would be talking directly to the cash givers on the street, were an important part of the public education campaign. Training was needed to maximize their effectiveness and to discuss safety issues. In coordination with Evmark and other participating agencies, Officers Steinhoff and Mulholland developed and conducted a one-day classroom training for the interveners, followed by a three-day field training. The connection between the interveners and the officers was essential to the strategy's success, so foot patrol officer Mulholland worked closely with the interveners on a day-to-day basis.

Increased Police Presence

Police presence played a key role in making shoppers feel safe. In order to achieve this, an increased level of cooperation and ownership was instilled between the permanent, motorized downtown beat officers, Steinhoff and Sowa, and the foot patrol officer, Mulholland. They were clearly allowed to be the experts in this problem and they rallied to the occasion. They worked truly well as a team, and the goal of increased police presence was achieved without additional deployment or cost.

Program Monitoring

Throughout the project, it was essential to keep the program on track. Once the Mayor's Panel completed its final report in June, an implementation/monitoring committee was created between Evmark, the chamber of commerce, and the police department, represented by the deputy chief and the beat officers. Initially meeting semimonthly, then monthly, the committee's purpose was to make certain the strategies were implemented properly and to monitor the overall project.

This approach proved to be successful. Several problems were resolved that could have adversely affected the project. For example, a communication problem between the interveners and the officers was resolved through the adoption of cellular telephones, a series of roll-call presentations by the interveners, and a police request protocol. Also, when some threats were made against the interveners by panhandlers who were losing business, a special random-saturation patrol was brought in to stabilize the situation.

The ongoing feedback and communication that occurred through the mechanism of this committee was the key technique driving the process to completion. Since perception was the pivotal factor determining success, ongoing feedback from the business community was the most important data to track during this phase.

Program Evaluation

The three action strategies were successfully implemented and positive results soon followed. As people began noticing a reduction in aggressive panhandling, the strategies received local and national attention by the media. Evanston's approach to panhandling was highlighted on CNN news. Both the Chamber

of Commerce and Evmark received numerous calls from the businesses they represented about the success of the program. Even though everyone appeared to be pleased with the results of our efforts, quantitative measures were needed to document the effects of the strategies. Two separate instruments were used to measure these results.

This first instrument was a follow-up to the original police report. Using the same data-collection methods, Officers Mulholland, Steinhoff and Sowa, compared aggressive panhandling in the fall (post-program) with the spring (pre-program). The results of this report were encouraging. The initial identified group of panhandlers was reduced by 64 percent. In other words, 23 out of the 36 original panhandlers were no longer panhandling in the core area. Eight, or 22 percent, continued in this activity, but at a significantly reduced level.

Also, during the evaluation period, ten new panhandlers were identified by the beat officers. This increased the survey total to 46. Even including these individuals in the data, 55 percent no longer panhandled at the time of the follow-up survey.

The police report confirmed the reduction in panhandlers, but the program could not be considered successful unless the perception of Evanston's downtown area as a safe place to shop and work was restored. In other words, reducing the actual level of aggressive panhandling was a necessary, but not a sufficient measure of success; businesses and other users of the downtown area needed to see and feel a difference for the situation to return to normal. Therefore, the second instrument, sponsored by Evmark, was an opinion survey of the 250 downtown businesses. Business owners were given five statements and asked to rate their level of agreement or satisfaction with each. Forty-eight, or 19 percent, of the survey group responded.

The results from this survey were very positive and corroborated many of the independent comments received by both the Chamber of Commerce and Evmark. Seventy-five percent of the respondents stated that they strongly agree or somewhat agree with the statement "Aggressive panhandling has been reduced significantly in the downtown area." Seventy-five percent of the respondents also stated that they were either very or somewhat satisfied with the overall strategies to reduce panhandling.

Unexpected Benefits to the Program

In addition to reducing aggressive panhandling, the project produced some positive secondary results as well. The beat officers involved in the community problem-solving process took ownership for the problem and, thus, they felt their contributions were significant. The opportunity to be actively involved in a problem-solving project was a boost to the officers' morale and attitudes.

Second, the community problem-solving process brought various segments of the community together. The results clearly demonstrated to Evanstonians what can be accomplished when people work together and how effective the community problem-solving model can be.

Third, the process established a new long-term relationship and better communication between the police department and the business community via the chamber of commerce. As a result of this new relationship, other programs were jointly implemented by the police and the chamber, such as the Business Security Initiative. This program was designed to encourage businesses to increase their use of security measures and communication with the police department. This new relationship was institutionalized through the project monitoring committee.

Award Nomination

For their major contributions to the success of the anti-panhandling community problem-solving project, Officers Edward Steinhoff, Janice Sowa and John Mulholland are nominated for PERF's 1995 3rd Annual Herman Goldstein Excellence in Problem-Solving Award. The success of the effort can be attributed to the many roles they played in this project, including data collection and analysis; strategy development and implementation; resource development; project management, coordination and evaluation; plus community involvement and teamwork.

PANHAIYDLING IN EVANSTON

PRELIMINARY REPORT

Evanston Police Department
Gerald A. Cooper
Chief of Police

Introduction

The purpose of this report is to provide some preliminary information on panhandlers. Even though the data presented was not collected according to any scientific methodology, it still can provide some basis for understanding panhandling. This is the Department's first attempt at collecting data on panhandling, and is in no way a definitive work on this issue. Data collection efforts will continue and this data will be updated on a continual basis especially as the warm weather months approach.

Methodology

The data represents the collective efforts of the following officers:

- Officer Ed Steinhoff, Day Shift. Downtown, motorized beat officer (73)
- Officer Jan Sowa, Day Shift, Downtown, motorized beat officer (76)
- Officer John Mulholland, Foot Patrol, Downtown beat (601)
- Officer Robert Mayer, Evening Shift, Downtown motorized beat officer (73)

From the first part of this year and continuing until early April, 1994, the officers attempted to gather from personal knowledge the identity of each panhandler, current address, sex/race, approximate age, location of panhandling incidents, and criminal record. They also tried to ascertain whether the panhandlers identified are truly homeless, or just perpetuating a scam. Finally, a comment was made in reference to each individual. Initials were used in order to protect the identity of the panhandler. In reference to address, the current town of residence was used.

Background

Homelessness/Panhandling are complex social problems. Our analysis in no way attempts to minimize this issue with our rather basic data collection methodology. A distinction needs to be made between individuals who are homeless and those who primarily panhandle as it pertains to our experience. Homeless people generally are those individuals truly in need of basic necessities such as food, shelter, and clothing, and, in some cases, lack the basic abilities to provide for themselves. Many do, however, have a desire to better themselves with help. These individuals need our assistance. On the other hand, panhandlers generally are individuals motivated to gain money through the easiest way possible. They usually have the ability to care for themselves. However, they choose to panhandle because it's an easy source for quick money. Again, these are generalities and there are exceptions.

Discussion

Our officers have identified thirty-six individuals as panhandlers. See Appendix A. That is, they work the streets to obtain money from citizens. Of the thirty-six, the breakdown is as follows:

Male/Female

Males	35	97%
Females	1	3%
TOTAL	36	100%

Race

Black	33	92%
White	3	8%
TOTAL	36	100%

Age

20's	7	19%
30's	21	58%
40's	6	17%
50's	2	6%
TOTAL	36	100%

Currently Residing

Chicago	5	14%
Evanston	26	72%
Other	1	3%
Unknown	4	11%
TOTAL	36	100%

Criminal Record

Yes	29	81%
No	0	0
Unknown	7	19%
TOTAL	36	100%

From this data, an overall profile of an Evanston panhandler can be developed. Generally, a panhandler is a black male in his 30's. Most now reside somewhere in Evanston. Sixteen of the twenty-six have specific Evanston addresses. They panhandle as a trade in order to make quick money. Evanstonians are a lucrative source of income for these individuals. The funds they gain are then usually used for alcohol, drugs, or cigarettes. They are not particularly concerned about improving themselves through available social services. However, they do regularly use the agencies that provide free meals. The vast majority have criminal records. The panhandlers are not necessarily mentally deficient. They choose not to improve themselves or alter their life-style. Many have alcohol or substance abuse problems.

The panhandlers should not be generally associated with the Streetwise vendors. These individuals are trying to use a legitimate way to better themselves and change their life style. Streetwise vendors generally will not panhandle. Their activities are controlled and regulated through the Streetwise Supervisor. In fact, Officer Steinhoff has established a liaison with this program in order to control the conduct of these vendors. See attachments in Appendix B.

The vast majority of the panhandling is concentrated in the downtown area, specifically around the Sherman and Clark area as well as on Chicago Avenue.

Summary

The data presented identified a preliminary panhandler population of approximately thirty-six individuals. These individuals practice panhandling because it is a quick, easy way to get money. Panhandling offers a more cost effective way to get what they want as compared with availing themselves of social services.

APPENDIX A

PRELIMINARY

NAME	ADDRESS	SEX/RACE	AGE	LOCATION OF PANHANDLING	CRIMINAL RECORD	HOMELESS OR CON	Officer Perception
H.B.	Chicago	M/B	34	1700 Sherman	Yes	Con	Aggressive
R.B.	Evanston	M/B	50	Downtown	Yes	Con	Mental Subject
A.B.	Evanston	M/B	33	800 Clark/1700 Sherman	Yes	Con	Very Aggressive
A.C.	Evanston	M/B	41	Downtown	Yes	Homeless	
D.C.	Unknown	M/B	33	OSCO	Yes	Con	Streetwise Vendor
M.C.	Unknown	M/B	36	STARBUCKS	Yes	Con	Drug User-Alcohol
C.C.	Evanston	M/B	31	STARBUCKS-1700 Sherman	Yes	Con	Alcohol
M.C.	Evanston	M/B	29	El Tracks	Yes	Con	Drug User-Alcohol
F.C.	Evanston	M/Cau	30	BurgerKing, Main & Chicago	Yes	Homeless	Mental Subject
M.E.	Evanston	M/B	45	Chicago Avenue	Unknown	Homeless	Pushes cart
A.F.	Unknown	M/B	34	Fountain Square	Yes	Con	Drugs-Aggressive
R.F.	Unknown	M/B	34	700 Clark	Yes	Con	Street wise Mental
J.G.	Evanston	M/B	30's	800 Church	Yes	Con	Alcohol, drugs
L.G.	Evanston	M/B	34	Downtown	Yes	Con	Gang
A.H.	Evanston	M/B	30's	1700 Sherman	Yes	Con	Drugs
N.H.	Evanston	M/Cau	30's	Church/Sherman El	Yes	Con	Alcoholic
T.H.	Evanston	M/B	20's	Downtown	Yes	Con	Gangs, Drugs
R.H.	Evanston	M/B	30's	Downtown	Yes	Con	Alcohol/Drugs
H.H.	Evanston	M/B	30's	Downtown	Yes	Con	Drugs
J.H.	Evanston	M/B	20's	1700 Sherman	Yes	Con	Very Aggressive

L.J.	Evanston	M/B	46	Burger King	Unknown	Con	
D.K.	Evanston	M/B	30	McDonalds- Church Street	Yes	Con	Drugs/Alcohol
R.M.	Evanston	M/B	30's	Northwestern	Yes	Homeless	Mental
J.M.	Evanston	F/B	26	Downtown	Yes	Con	Drugs
J.M.	Evanston	M/B	24	Els, Banks, downtown	Yes	Con	Mental
J.M.	Dubuque	M/B	48	Downtown	Unknown	Homeless	
C.N.	Chicago	M/B	47	Downtown	Unknown	Homeless	
A.P.	Chicago	M/B	33	Downtown	Unknown	Homeless	
K.R.	Unknown	M/B	34	Downtown	Yes	Con	Aggressive
M.R.	Evanston	M/B	46	Church/Sherman	Yes	Con	Drugs, Alcohol Aggressive
P.R.	Evanston	M/B	50's	Downtown	Yes	Con	Alcohol
R.R.	Evanston	M/B	25	Church/Sherman	Unknown	Con	Handicapped Hand
C.S.	Evanston	M/B	34	Downtown	Yes	Con	Aggressive
R.S.	Evanston	M/Cau	39	Chicago Avenue	Yes	Con	Alcoholic
R.T.	Chicago	M/B	38	500 Main	Unknown	Con	
D.W.	Evanston	M/B	25	Church/Sherman	Yes	Con	Gang