



*ST. LOUIS METROPOLITAN POLICE
BUREAU OF PATROL SUPPORT
MOBILE RESERVE SECTION*

FIREARM SUPPRESSION PROGRAM

SUBMITTED BY

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From 1988 -1993, the number of homicides in St. Louis increased from 140 to 267, an increase of 91%. When you take into consideration that the population has actually declined at same period, the rate of homicides jumped 110%. During the same period, the number of juvenile court referrals for homicide and firearm_jelled offenses increased fivefold.

In 1993, St. Louis experienced its highest homicide rate since 1970, with a recorded 274 murders. Of these homicides recorded in 1993, 227 were committed with a firearm, with 79 of them committed by juvenile offenders.

During 1993, juvenile offenders accounted for 79 murders, 316 aggravated assaults, 353 assaults (other), and 324 arrests for carrying concealed weapons.

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Based on these figures and acting on a directive from the Chief of Police to develop ways to combat the ever increasing violent crime, the Mobile Reserve Section, of the St. Louis Metropolitan Police Department, initiated a Firearm Suppression Program.

The main focus of the program would be to locate and recover firearms, with the emphasis being on recovery, and not on arrest. We believed that simply arresting juveniles for weapons violations and processing them through the juvenile court system would do nothing to alleviate the problems associated with juvenile violence.

We interviewed juveniles and parents and found that in most cases, first time offenders carried a gun more as a status symbol than for protection. Handguns were readily accessible on the streets and in the schools, and could be easily hidden on their person or at home.

Some parents were aware that their child may be in possession of a handgun, but for a variety of reasons ranging from denial to fear of their own children, they were afraid to confront them with their concerns.

We knew that before we began any type of program, it would be imperative that we received community support. We were currently working in several neighborhoods and had developed good relationships with community leaders. Their support would be very important if the program was to succeed.

Last, but equally important, we knew that support from the media would be critical. If the program was given negative press, the chances of success would be slim.

The primary goals were to;

- ① Reduce the number of firearms on St. Louis streets, hence reduce the number of violent crimes committed.
- ②- Make the program community oriented, thus making the community a key factor in determining the success or failure of the program.
- ③ Solicit support from the media to ensure that the majority of the public was made aware of the program.

As in most major police departments, the St. Louis Metropolitan Police Department has a standard Consent to Search form. The form states, in general, that the owner/resident of the premises, by signing the form, waives his right to deny police officers access without a search warrant. It further states that any contraband located in the residence would be seized and person or persons responsible for the premises could be charged with possession of said contraband.

The original plan was that whenever a juvenile suspect was taken into custody for possession of a firearm, officers would respond to his residence, explain to the parents that their child had been arrested, and request that they sign the standard Consent to Search form and give the officers permission to search the child's room for additional firearms.

During the initial stages of the program, we responded to an offender's residence and requested permission to conduct a search of the youth's room. Since there was no consideration given to not charging the youth with additional charges, we met with limited success. It was obvious that there was no incentive to let police officers in.

Almost immediately, we elected to waive any further charges should we locate any additional weapons. Again we achieved limited success, due primarily to the fact the element of trust was not there. It was easy to say no one would be charged, but would we keep our word if additional weapons were located.

We re-thought the program and sought input from the police officers in the Mobile Reserve Section. The general consensus was that a written agreement specifically stating that if permission was given to search the youth's room, no additional charges would be filed against him. Additionally, the form would state that no other persons inside the residence would be charged with possession of an illegal or unregistered firearm.

After agreement on this point, a standard Consent to Search form was used, with one additional paragraph added which stated that no additional charges would be filed and no other resident of the home would be charged with possession of an illegal or unregistered firearm. This form was used with greater success. Whenever a youthful offender was arrested on a weapons violation charge, officers responded to the residence and requested the parent sign the consent to search.

We achieved a 40% success rate in getting permission to conduct the consent to search with this version of the form, but we still believed we could do better. One of the problems which began to surface was there was no uniformity in how the program was presented to the parents of the youths charged with weapons violations.

It was also determined that too many officers were responding to the residence. We did not want to intimidate people into signing the consent to search form.

After further evaluation of the program, it was determined that in order to achieve better results, we would have a sergeant respond on all consents to search and explain the program. In addition, unless extreme circumstances dictated otherwise, the sergeant, along with two additional police officers, would respond to the residence to avoid the intimidation factor. With the implementation of these modifications to the program, our success rate for obtaining permission to enter residences climbed to 90%.

As the program reached the first year, several minor modifications were instituted. In previous versions of the consent to search form, the first few paragraphs were written in legal terminology. In some cases where consent was denied, it was determined that possibly people either did not understand the terminology, or quit reading the form, never getting to the paragraph that stated no one would be charged.

Up to P.W.W. —> This submission explains the modification process to a ^{consent} form used to search juv offenders in residence for a firearm.

Because of this, the consent to search form was completely revised and written in plain english, explaining the purpose of the program and that no one would be charged if permission was granted. With this minor and final modification, we have now achieved a 98% success rate for getting permission to conduct consent to search.

With the success of this portion of the No Prosecution/Consent to Search Program, we began to explore the possibilities of expanding the program into areas where there were gang problems. We were specifically interested in the St. Louis Metropolitan area.

The St. Louis Metropolitan Police Department maintains a computer file on all known gang members. Each gang is cataloged by gang name, and individual gang member's name, address, etc.. Gang Packets were prepared and assigned to each Mobile Reserve crew. The officers, along with a sergeant, then responded to each gang member's residence, where several things were accomplished. First, the gang members parents were made aware of the child's gang affiliation. We then explained our No Prosecution/Consent to Search Program and requested permission to conduct a Firearm Suppression check of the youth's room.

It should be noted that as the majority of these gang members were juveniles, we felt it was necessary to offer counseling to the youth and the parent. As a result, a program was developed where the Police Chaplains accompanied us on the gang notifications. The chaplains who had received gang intervention counseling training, offered counseling and referral programs geared to combating gang affiliation.

While we were experiencing major success in recovering firearms as a result of the Consent to Search Program, we felt that something could be done to stem the flow of guns that were getting, into the, hands of juveniles. A check with the St. Louis Sheriffs Department, which is responsible for issuing firearm permits, revealed that approximately 11,000 handgun permits have been issued in the City of St. Louis since 1989. It was also learned that while the Sheriff and St. Louis Police Department have a regulatory program in place, there was no active criminal enforcement program in effect that tracked illegal weapons dealers.

It was learned that the Sheriffs Department had just recently computerized their gun permit files. A request was made, and granted, for us to be given access to these files. A plan was then formulated to track any handgun that was recovered by an officer.

Our intention was to determine how these handguns were getting into the hands of these juveniles.

Almost immediately after initiating this portion of the Firearm Suppression Program, we began to recover high quality handguns which, after tracking them through the gun computer, revealed that they were all coming from the same Federal Firearms Dealer. It was also learned that in each case, the handgun had been reported stolen shortly after its purchase.

An investigation over a 6 month period resulted in the Federal Indictment of a Federal Firearms Dealer who was paying individuals to obtain firearm permits for supposed vwafMnstheyv^ ld be buying and then ^{re P or f} them stolen. The dealer would then sell the handgun to juveniles or other persons prohibited by law from owning a handgun. The dealer was subsequently charged with 229 counts of Violation of the Federal Firearms Act.

With the cooperation of the local and national media, the Firearm Suppression Program has been positively portrayed to the public. The Mobile Reserve Section's Firearm Suppression Program has been seen not only on every local news station, but also has been shown on the ABC Evening News, Inside Edition, and just recently on the CBS Morning Show. With the assistance of an Associated Press reporter, the Firearm Suppression Program was featured in over 8000 newspapers across the country. The program has been approved by the President of the St. Louis Chapter of the NAACP, and while the American Civil Liberties Union has not officially endorsed the program, they have no major concerns as long as the original guidelines are kept in place.

→ When the Firearm Suppression Program was first conceived, our goals were to try and reduce the number of firearm-related crimes in the city, we also concerned ourselves with the fear that has gripped almost every major city, causing ordinary citizens to be afraid to walk in their own neighborhoods. By implementing this program we feel that we have accomplished these goals. The number of firearm-related offenses during the first 5 months of 1995 are lower than during the same period in 1994.

The number of firearms seized not only by the Mobile Reserve Section, but the entire police department, has increased. The community has not only endorsed this program, but have contributed greatly to its success. While the problems associated with juveniles and guns has not been erased from our city, we believe that we are on the right track in regards to curbing this problem and making St. Louis a better place to live and work.

Attachments:

***Standard Consent to Search Form
Modified Consent to Search Form (1)
Modified Consent to Search Form (2)
Modified Consent to Search From (3)
Newspaper articles***

CONSENT TO SEARCH AND SEIZE

I, _____ having authority to authorize a search of these premises, and having been informed of my constitutional right not to have a search made of the premises hereinafter mentioned without a search warrant and of my right to refuse to consent to such a search, hereby authorize

officers of the Metropolitan Police Department, City of Saint Louis, to conduct a complete search of the building located at _____

IN THE CITY OF SAINT LOUIS, MISSOURI.

This written permission is being given by me to the above named officers voluntarily and without threats, or promises of any kind.

Signed: _____

Of: _____
(Address)

(1) _____

(2) _____

Police Officers
Metropolitan Police Department
City of Saint Louis, Missouri

As a result of the search conducted pursuant to the aforementioned consent, the officers whose signatures appear below are taking from these premises the following property:

Signed: _____

Of: _____
(Address)

**ST. LOUIS METROPOLITAN POLICE DEPARTMENT
CONSENT TO SEARCH AND SEIZE**

I, _____ having authority to authorize a search of these premises, and having been informed of my constitutional right not to have a search made of the premises hereinafter mentioned without a search warrant and of my right to refuse to consent to such a search, hereby authorize officers of the Metropolitan Police Department, City of Saint Louis, to conduct a complete search of the building located at

in the City of Saint Louis, Missouri.

This written permission is being given by me voluntarily with the stipulation that only the person authorizing the search of the premises will not be charged with illegal possession of a firearm

POLICE OFFICERS

SIGNED _____

1. _____

OF _____
(ADDRESS)

2. _____

PROPERTY SEIZED

**ST. LOUIS METROPOLITAN POLICE DEPARTMENT
MOBILE RESERVE SECTION
FIREARMS SUPPRESSION PROGRAM**

CONSENT TO SEARCH AND SEIZE

Police Officers of the Mobile Reserve Section are currently engaged in a Firearms Suppression Program. The purpose of this Firearms Suppression Program is to locate and recover illegal and/or unregistered firearms. As part of this program said officers agree that should any illegal or unregistered firearms be located in the residence the person authorizing the search of the premises will not be charged with illegal possession of a firearm.

Having authority to authorize a search of the premises, do here by grant officers of the St. Louis Metropolitan Police Department permission to search and remove any illegal and/or unregistered firearms.

POLICE OFFICER

SIGNATURE _____

_____ OF _____

(ADDRESS)

FIREARMS SEIZED
