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RONALD P. CORBETT JR.

Reinventing Probation and Reducing Youth Violence

IN THE EARLY 1990s, two crises converged, leading to historic changes in the criminal justice system. The first was the dramatically escalating rate of youth violence, particularly homicide, in American cities. The second was the crisis of legitimacy that beset the practice of probation across the country. During the ensuing decade, remarkable progress was made on both fronts. Their stories are intertwined.

It takes a crisis to change a bureaucracy. Overwhelmed by dramatically rising rates of youth homicide in the early 1990s, Boston probation and police officials threw out existing blueprints in a desperate search for more effective strategies. A fearsome necessity became the mother of reinvention. In 1993, a wholly new approach to combating youth violence emerged: Operation Night Light, a police-probation partnership involving intensive home and street contact with high-risk offenders during evening hours. Night Light rested on the stunningly simple premise that "you can't fight fires from the station house." At the time, desk-bound probation officers worked primarily out of their offices, with little visible presence in the community, in an anemic form of corrections disparagingly referred to as "fortress probation." Operation Night Light was designed to reverse that practice.

Night Light worked, particularly because it was combined with several other imaginative policing, prosecutorial, and community outreach

strategies. Youth homicides dropped steeply, and the city grew hopeful again. The partnership's success provided momentum for a thorough rethinking of probation strategies throughout Massachusetts, which led to a new model that placed increased emphasis on tighter supervision and stricter enforcement coupled with the heightened presence of probation officers in the community. Those officers subsequently felt a new confidence in their efforts and gained greater respectability in the public eye.

A similar sense of reform and renewal emerged in a number of states around the country, notably Washington, Wisconsin, Arizona, and Virginia. Probation executives from those and a few other states networked through the American Probation and Parole Association (APPA) to share information and experiences, publicize their still-nascent efforts, and enlist converts to the cause of a reinvented philosophy of probation.[1]

This chapter focuses on Boston's Operation Night Light, presenting some of the context, operations, early experiences, and eventual results of the initiative. The chapter identifies the six major lessons learned about the nature of youth violence, the strategies that seem to avail against it, and the dynamics that such partnerships unleash. It then offers some tips on replication, combining possibly helpful hints with cautionary notes. The chapter concludes with observations on school-probation partnerships, the next frontier in redefining conventional roles and relationships.

The Genesis of Operation Night Light

In the early 1990s, communities across the country were experiencing a surge in serious juvenile violence, reflected in the increasing numbers of homicides committed by teenagers.[2] Communities' sense of urgency in the face of the problem increased following predictions by James Fox of Northeastern University, among others, that demographic changes would lead to a major increase in juvenile violence by the end of the decade.[3]

In the late winter and early spring of 1988, Boston began to experience the first effects of an emerging network of violent rival gangs. Boston public school security personnel, who witnessed the development of the gangs within the schools, compiled the first list of gangs and individual gang members and the schools they attended. The list described loosely federated groups organized around specific territories; these groups started the custom of gangs naming themselves for the street or public housing development in which their members lived.

As the police department struggled for a strategy to deal with the problem, gang activity and its effects grew more serious. That summer brought horrific incidents on the street during daylight hours, with rival gang members gunning each other down in drive-by shootings. In August 1988, the city's attention was riveted to "ground zero" in the gang violence explosion, the intersection of Humboldt Avenue and Homestead Street in Roxbury, where twelve-year-old Darlene Tiffany Moore was shot in the head and killed by crossfire as she sat atop a mailbox, talking with friends. Rival gangs transformed her into a "mushroom" (gang jargon for an innocent victim), and she became a symbol of the horror.

A city that experienced seventy-five homicides and 5,920 aggravated assaults in 1987 would see ninety-five homicides and 6,291 aggravated assaults by year-end 1988. Homicides reached an all-time annual high of 152 and aggravated assaults reached the decade-high peak of 6,960 in 1990. Eighteen of the homicide victims in 1990 were age seventeen or younger.[4] Crack cocaine arrived on the scene around that time, and the developing gangs fought each other to become distributors of this highly profitable product. In addition, traffickers in semi-automatic handguns identified a potential market for their goods and began running guns to the emerging gangs.

During this period, gang behavior in the courthouses grew bolder. Court officials described regular disruptions in the courtrooms and corridors, intimidation of witnesses, and attempted intimidation of staff. One justice in the Dorchester district court made headlines with a call to bring in the National Guard to secure the courthouse. Probation officers began to identify and catalogue gang colors and individual gang members and their affiliations. Led by Paul Evans, then patrol chief and now police commissioner, the department searched for ways to stem the bloody tide of shootings and homicides. By spring 1990, the department had developed a new strategy, the anti-gang violence unit, and it was ready to take back the streets.

To understand Operation Night Light and its unique contribution to the criminal justice arsenal requires an understanding of the traditional role of the probation office and its practices. The conventional duties of probation officers include conducting background investigations on defendants who may be placed on probation; supervising probationers, usually in accordance with a classification scheme; and initiating violation hearings against noncompliant probationers. It is clear from conversations

with a range of probation executives that over the last two decades of the twentieth century those fundamental duties were carried out primarily from a desk in an office, a marked and much regretted departure from earlier practice.[5]

Probation is both a sentence and a status. As a sentence, it constitutes far and away the most popular option in use: nationwide, 60 percent of all offenders under correctional supervision are on probation,[6] and the corresponding percentage in Massachusetts is 69 percent.[7] Offenders placed on probation are on conditional liberty, free to remain in the community provided that they comply with any conditions of their probation. Common conditions include avoiding subsequent arrest, reporting to a probation officer, not leaving the state without permission, and, often, paying restitution and obtaining substance abuse counseling or other appropriate treatment. Traditionally, some judges imposed curfews for younger offenders, but the practice waned during the 1980s and early 1990s because of difficulties in enforcing compliance. Parents were not as cooperative as they once were, and probation officers, who were weary of returning to high-crime areas in the evening, had become comfortable with nine-to-five schedules.

The building blocks of what would become Operation Night Light were laid when the new gang unit was created within the Boston police department. Probation officers Bill Stewart and Rick Skinner and gang unit detective Bob Merner put the first block in place in a court corridor conversation in the summer of 1990. Realizing that they were watching the same youthful offenders from two different vantage points on the perimeter of a "revolving door," they and others from both agencies began to brainstorm to develop new forms of collaboration. As Dorchester chief probation officer Bernard Fitzgerald reported, "We began seeing the same gang unit guys in the courthouse every single day for four months."[8]

Using information from their contacts with the gang unit and from their interactions with gang members, which provided them with insight into when and where probationers were violating the conditions of their release, probation officers began to ask judges to include curfews and area restrictions in the conditions of probation. Compliance with those conditions was expected to improve as the level of supervision was increased, leading to a reduction in the number of new arrests of juveniles on probation. The deterrent effect of curfews depended on strict enforcement, and officers realized that high-risk offenders, who would take advantage of any laxity, required a tight rein.

On their own, Fitzgerald, Stewart, and Skinner began to move away from the existing model of probation by getting away from their desks in the courthouse. They began approaching probationers on the street, who all but rubbed their eyes in disbelief at the sight of their probation officers on their turf. In August 1991, Stewart wrote a memo to district court judge James Dolan, recounting the open drug dealing that he witnessed by one of his clients at 2:00 p.m. on a residential street in the district. Judge Dolan, an early supporter of the collaboration, became an even more determined backer of efforts to ensure that the terms of probation had teeth.

Police officers began to see probation as a powerful deterrent—and to carve out a new role in deterrence for themselves. Informal contacts continued to grow and yield results. On November 12, 1992, Stewart and Skinner got in the back seat of a police car with Merner and partner Bob Fratalia, and Operation Night Light began. Boston began to work toward a strategy of community corrections. One Boston police detective later remarked:

> Well, when I used to watch people walk out of court with probation as the end result, I said "That's b————!" But I can see now what good, supervised probation can do—it sounds corny—for the community. I've seen gangs from a particular neighborhood decimated only because of supervised curfews and area restrictions. So again, as I touched on before, I know so much more about probation as a tool.

Operations

On a typical evening with Operation Night Light, a one- or two-person probation team is matched with a similar team from the gang unit, and they meet at gang unit headquarters to prepare for the evening's work. The probation officers will have identified some ten to fifteen probationers that they want to see that evening, concentrating on those thought to be "active" on the street or those whose compliance with probation conditions has been slipping. Operating in an unmarked car and in plain clothes, the team proceeds to the first scheduled curfew check. The police team, which is responsible for safety issues, approaches the probationer's home with sensitivity to the surroundings and keeps an eye on exit areas in case the probationer should try to evade contact. Once the security issues, which are not monumental in most cases, are addressed, the probation officer approaches the door. Once the officers are inside the home, the contact

proceeds as would any typical probationary home visit. Every effort is made to ensure that parents and other family members are not alarmed, and the visit is conducted in a courteous and friendly manner.

The purpose of the visit is to determine whether the probationer is at home, as required by his or her curfew; to reinforce the importance of strict observance of all probation conditions; and talk with any parents present about the behavior of the probationer, both at home and in the community. After those basic objectives are met and any issues of concern to any parties are addressed, the team thanks all present for their cooperation and goes on to the next scheduled contact.

It is not uncommon for a team to stop at a park or street corner where youth congregate to determine whether any probationers are present. Stopping by also demonstrates that the probation and police departments are working together and that both are interested in the whereabouts and activities of young people on probation. The teams learned that word spread fast that there was a new mode of operation in probation—and a new level of jeopardy for those who were inclined to ignore their probationary obligations.

The partnership between the probation and police departments has been sustained because both sides are reaping tangible and significant benefits. Probation officers, who are not armed or equipped with telecommunications capacity, can enter the most crime-ridden areas of the city into the late evening because the police provide a high degree of security for them. Also, because of the familiarity between the departments that has grown out of Night Light, they now routinely share information regarding the identity of those on probation; any knowledge that any police officer has concerning the activities of a probationer (whether the subject of Night Light or not) can be passed on to probation. While it may seem to be an obvious strategy, in most jurisdictions the two departments do not seem to exchange information routinely. That failure robs probation of access to the contacts and observations made by police, who work the community twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, and therefore have more "eyes and ears" on the streets than even the most proactive probation department can muster. The increased flow of information regarding probationers' activities has been one of the greatest outcomes of Night Light.

In sum, from probation officers' point of view, their supervision of probationers and enforcement of curfews and area restrictions have a new credibility that did not exist when they conducted their probation activities from nine to five. Feedback from offenders, police, parents, and com-

munity members alike indicates that the kids are aware that things have changed and that they have become more cautious, if not to say more compliant, in their behavior. That is a breakthrough.

The police, for their part, now have a tool available to them that significantly increases their power. Many police officers speak of the frustration that comes with knowing that certain offenders are active in the community but being unable to control them because of the difficulties involved in detecting crime and apprehending criminals. While not all offenders being targeted by the police are on probation, both common sense and the available data suggest that probationers account for upward of 20 percent of all serious crime.[9] Any strategy that legally targets this group through closer surveillance and supervision can have a deterrent effect. Deterrence is achieved by requiring probationers to avoid certain areas and also to be in their homes at a reasonable hour each evening, not on the streets at times when gang-related violence flourishes. While most often probationers will not be detected undertaking criminal activity, their failure to abide by court orders can put them at risk of being incarcerated as certainly as being arrested for a new offense, and the point is not lost on them. Unlike nonprobationers, they can be removed from the street for a variety of noncriminal behaviors.

The police marvel at and appreciate the power of probation officers in this respect. Members of the gang unit have often commented on how the kids fear their "P.O." more than they fear a uniformed police officer. Provided that this broader power is used fairly and judiciously, it puts a formidable crime-fighting technique on the street to supplement conventional police strategies. In the words of another Boston police officer:

> We can use Night Light to target community concerns. If we have a rash of shootings, drive-bys, drug dealing, community complaints, we can call the court, be it Roxbury or Dorchester court, and make all our area checks down here. So besides the added uniform presence, drug unit, detectives, and everybody else from here, we have probation officers down there to start shaking everybody's tree too. If nothing else, it just defuses it.

Bernard L. Fitzgerald, chief probation officer, Dorchester district court, had this to say regarding the benefits of a strong probation enforcement policy:

> One of the most striking examples [of those benefits] is that of a young man who, along with his brothers, was the leader of a very

violent drug-involved gang in the Dorchester area. His mother made a plea for him in court to prevent him from being incarcerated. She said that if the court allowed him to continue on probation she would keep him at her new home in Plymouth.

The young man's terms of probation were written so that he couldn't be in Dorchester at any time other than to go to court. Within the next two days, while riding with the gang unit, the defendant's probation officer spotted the defendant in the back of a taxi. The police stopped the taxi, and when they approached it they observed the probationer trying to hide an object, which turned out to be a nine-millimeter handgun. He was arrested for violation of his probation and possession of a firearm. He was found in violation of probation and committed to prison. By virtue of this action, we were able to put a bit of a block on the activities of this gang.

Another example of the. benefit of the Night Light program is evidenced by the young man who said that his probation officer saved his life. The young man came to his probation officer on a Monday morning and said that, had it not been for fear of being caught, he would have been with three friends who were arrested for a double murder. He said that he had been asked to go with his friends to a party on Friday evening. He declined the invitation, citing the fact that he had curfew and his P.O. periodically checked him at his home and if he were out he would be found in violation and sent to jail. The probationer stayed home, and his friends tried to rob two young men of their jewelry at a party and when they resisted they shot and killed them. The probationer said that he had no doubt that he would have been part of that had he not been afraid of violating his curfew.

A Balanced Approach

It was understood by all participants in this new approach that increased enforcement had to be leavened by a commitment to provide appropriate services to youth who frequently needed help and support in finding a new, prosocial direction as they abandoned gang life. The help came in three forms: job assistance, faith-based counseling, and personal advocacy.

Employment was at the top of everyone's list. Getting jobs for kids served multiple purposes. Work kept youth busy and therefore unavailable for gang activities; it provided spending money and, in other instances,

basic provisions for neglected younger siblings; and it was a way to instill the habits of punctuality, following direction, and interacting appropriately with peers and the public, all sorely needed by the targeted youth.

In the early 1990s, the city of Boston greatly expanded its summer jobs program, so all youth who were interested had a good chance of finding summer employment. Key officers in the gang unit contributed their personal time and effort to the cause and, with corporate support, developed a program that came to be known as the Summer of Opportunity. The program provided youth referred by gang unit officers with a combination of work experience and life skills training; those who successfully completed the program (which an average of 90 percent were able to do) were provided part-time jobs during the school year.[10]

At-risk youth in Boston found a second stream of support coming from an entirely new direction. In May 1992, a local Baptist church had experienced the unspeakable—a gang-related stabbing and shooting occurred during a church service. In the wake of that event, inner-city clergy mobilized to address the church's role in combating youthful violence, and a group of ministers who were committed to taking their message to the streets in the hardest-hit areas formed the Ten Point Coalition.[11] The coalition's initial forays into gang territory led to the slow but steady development of relationships between kids and clergy that evolved into court advocacy as well as church-based programs such as Gangs Anonymous meetings, sponsored and attended by church leaders.

The involvement of clergy and other church folk created a special cast to the ongoing efforts. The Ten Point Coalition sponsored prayer meetings and special liturgies where blessings were bestowed on the new strategy and those active in it. To many of those involved, this new and decidedly spiritual dimension was deeply felt. It was as if the Almighty was smiling on Boston's efforts, bestowing a welcome and amazing grace on the undertaking.

These efforts were rounded out by those of a growing corps of "streetworkers," hired by the mayor, whose charge was to hit the streets and work with young people in crisis wherever and whenever they could be found. The streetworkers were hired for their skill in developing rapport with young people and mobilizing community resources. Although they were initially greeted with suspicion by the police, in time a close, mutually respectful relationship evolved that allowed the police to get their message out to gang leaders without the static that came with direct communication. The streetworkers helped head off trouble when alerted to emerging

"beefs," worked with kids whom police or probation officers might identify as being on the cusp of serious trouble, and connected youth with services that gave them healthy options to pursue.[12]

The emphasis on services, outreach, and advocacy gave needed balance to the Boston strategy and gave moral authority to the efforts of police and probation officers. Both clergy and streetworkers identified with the interests of community members and would not have supported a strategy that relied on stepped-up enforcement while neglecting services and support. This commitment to a balanced approach, which had the manifest support and involvement of Boston's most aggressive police officers, made unconventional alliances possible. The youth saw a new seriousness about stemming youth violence coupled with a genuine, consistent campaign to identify and increase the help available to them. In the service of saving Bostons children, stereotypes and rigid role definitions broke down.

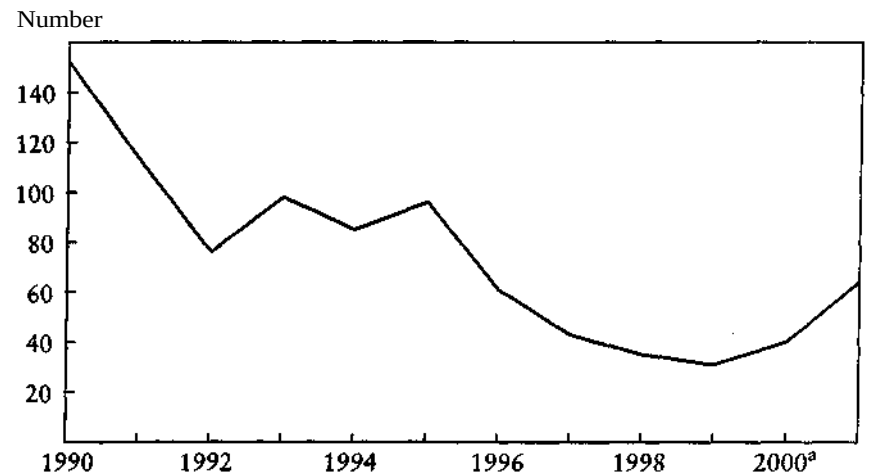
A case study *of* the Boston strategy put the matter this way:

> The outreach programs established by the Gang Unit had a two-fold effect: they benefitted kids and gave the police the credibility it needed to build close ties to the Ten-Point Coalition and other service organizations. The presence of these relationships in turn created a reservoir of good will that allowed the police and other law enforcement agencies to intensify their policing efforts without alienating large segments of the black community.
>
> If we [the Ten-Point Coalition] had not played a role in the intervention and prevention process in Boston, what you would have had was something akin to apartheid," says [Reverend Jeffrey] Brown. "You'd have had the police versus the youth. It would have been Dodge City."[13]

Program Impact

What difference have the more than 7,000 Operation Night Light contacts (home visits, street contacts, and so forth) made in the last ten years? While direct impact is notoriously difficult to prove, the lower numbers of homicide and other violent crimes in the areas involved are encouraging. There was one juvenile homicide during 1996, one in 1997. six in 1998, two in 1999, two in 2000, and four in 2001; in comparison, there were sixteen in 1993.[14] The data presented in figures 6-1 through 6-6 document the homicides during the period in which Night Light has operated.

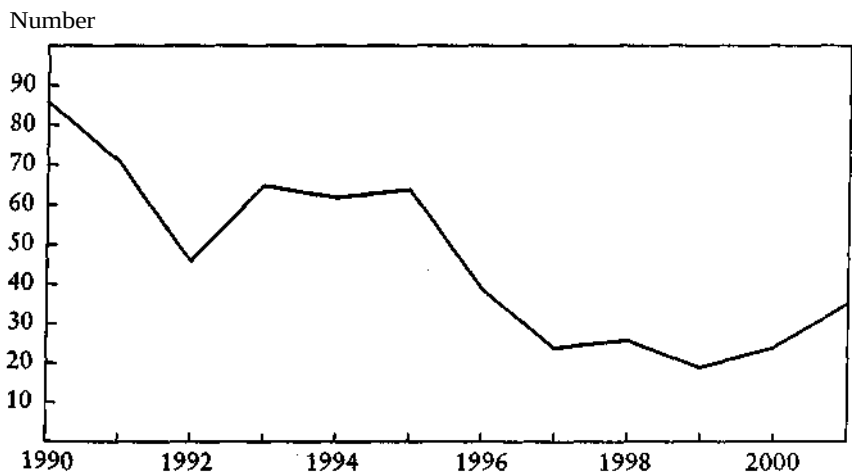
Figure 6-1. *Homicides, All Ages*



Source: Boston Police Department, Office of Police Commissioner, Office of Research and Evaluation (2002).

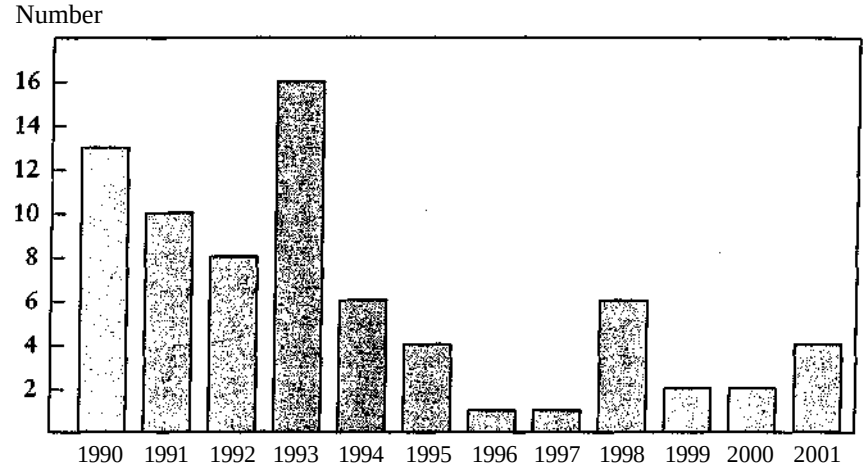
a. 2000 statistics include three gangland victims murdered in the 1980s whose bodies were recovered in 2000.

Figure 6-2. *Firearm Homicides, All Ages*



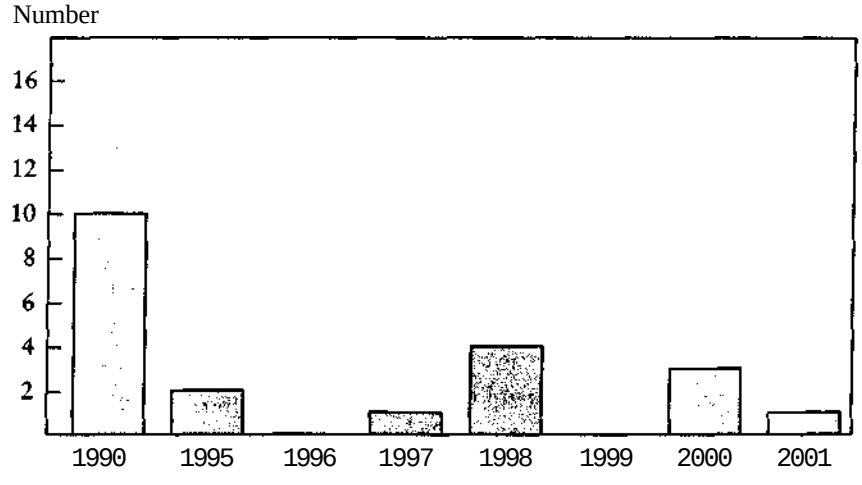
Source: Boston Police Department, Office of Police Commissioner, Office of Research and Evaluation (2002).

Figure 6-3. *Total Homicides, 16and Under*



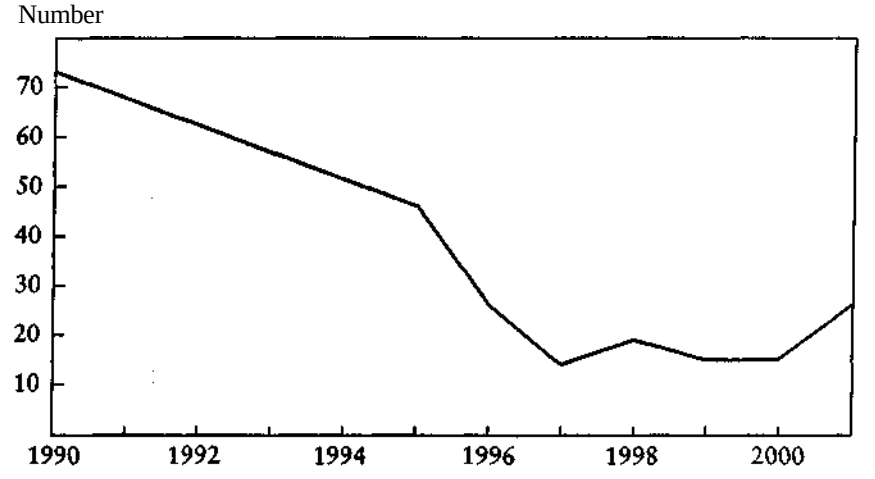
Source: Boston Police Department, Office of Police Commissioner, Office of Research and Evaluation (2002).

Figure 6-4. *Firearm Homicides, 16and Under*



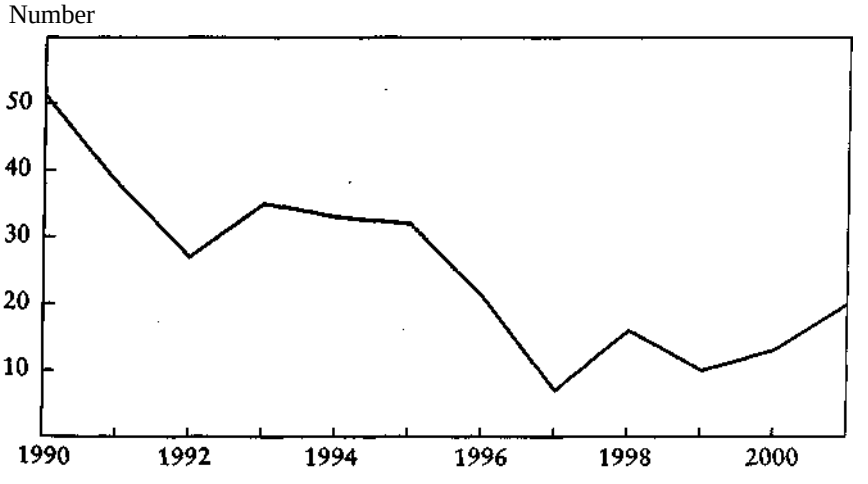
Source: Boston Police Department, Office of Police Commissioner, Office of Research and Evaluation (2002).

Figure 6-5. *All Homicides, 24 and Under*



Source: Boston Police Department, Office of Police Commissioner, Office of Research and Evaluation (2002).

Figure 6-6. *Firearm Homicides, 24 and Under*



Source: Boston Police Department, Office of Police Commissioner, Office of Research and Evaluation (2002).

While no one involved in Operation Night Light claims primary credit for this positive trend, everyone believes that the partnership is at least partially responsible for the reduced levels of gang-related violence as well as increased compliance with terms of probation. Members of the network of clergy, streetworkers, community leaders, and researchers as well as criminal justice personnel that grew out of this innovation kept in regular contact with offenders in the affected neighborhoods and were unanimous in their perception that probationary sentences and those that enforce them were seen in an entirely new light. David Kennedy of Harvard University's Kennedy School of Government commented on how the gang members that he spoke to felt restrained by the curfew checks, area restrictions, and more frequent and unannounced home visits that came with the Night Light regimen.[15]

In addition, court personnel believe that probationary sentences have gained more credibility because of the stricter enforcement that Operation Night Light provides. Although it has not always been in the past, it is clear now—the word is on the street, so to speak—that those on probation must take their obligations seriously. They know now that if they do not, they will be caught and they will pay the consequences.

There is also the hard-to-measure but real reassurance felt in the neighborhoods where Night Light operates. The knowledge that probation and police officers are around to ensure that probationers are off the streets in the evening brings a measure of relief to communities hard hit by crime. It also is very clear that the parents of these young people, who often are in a losing battle to keep their sons from succumbing to the lure of the streets, genuinely appreciate the support they receive through curfew enforcement. While the program is designed primarily to prevent young offenders from committing new crimes, their parents recognize that it also serves to keep them from being victimized themselves in the mortal combat that engulfs their streets.

Promises and Perils of Partnership

As with any new public initiative, the accumulation of experiences from multiple sites and findings from sound evaluations eventually will form the basis for a reliable assessment of Operation Night Light. Though such partnerships are still in their infancy, some observations nevertheless can be offered on how they can help to address the real crisis facing contemporary probation.

First, on a practical level, the simple but consistent exchange of information between probation and police departments can serve the goals of both. If they share the surveillance task, probationers will sense the greater risk of discovery of any crime and as a result may be deterred from criminal activity. Compliance with court orders also is enhanced through police-probation department cooperation. For example, when a convicted batterer is prohibited from approaching the residence of his victim and police who patrol the area are familiar with the offender and the restriction, their chances of discovering any violation are greatly increased. The police also may be aided in investigating criminal incidents by knowing local probationers and their criminal history and by having the assistance of probation officers in identifying potential suspects. In addition, having a working relationship with the police can help probation officers apprehend absconders, who traditionally have been neglected by many probation departments due to staff shortages, insufficient staff training, or lack of appropriate equipment. Locating and arresting fugitives is second nature to law enforcement personnel, and their expertise can be shared with probation officers.

Beyond these tangible gains is the harder-to-measure but nonetheless real public relations benefit that the probation department may receive from being identified with law enforcement. The same national and local polls that reflect so poorly on probation departments give the police very high ratings.[16] There is an opportunity to ride the "coattails" of the police here, with some of the same positive sentiment that is felt for them accruing to probation officers who take on functions more akin to law enforcement and who are seen in the company of the police. To some, this may appear to be pandering, and there are attendant dangers. However, when the partnership serves legitimate correctional ends, no wise probation executive should fail to capitalize on the improved perception of probation officers that so many of the initial sites have reported.[17]

However, all the effects of partnership may not be positive. Sociologist Robert Merton was the first to introduce the concept of "unintended consequences" into policy and program analysis, and most administrators are only too familiar with its validity.[18] Initiatives undertaken with only positive intentions can perversely result in negative consequences that overshadow any gains. While it is still early in the development of these models, some potential trade-offs already have caused concern among those involved. In general, the dangers have at least the following three manifestations: mission creep, mission distortion, and organizational lag.

Mission creep. Many of these partnerships are born of or eventually connected with community policing efforts, and the demands on staff time and agency resources escalate as probation officers' role expands. Where partnerships flourish, participating probation officers engage in a variety of new collateral activities under the rubric of community building that extend well beyond the scope of normal duties. Acting as a broker for many human services, attending community functions, and responding to complaints unrelated to probation are a few common examples. For police officers who are relieved of other responsibilities or who otherwise would be conducting general patrol, that may not be burdensome. For probation officers still carrying traditional caseloads, the time conflicts are obvious, and they could easily compromise officers' effectiveness. With the right organizational and structural changes, those problems can be avoided, but often such changes are not forthcoming.

Mission distortion. Despite the best efforts of administrators who anticipate the problem and try to counteract it, there is still the real threat that partnerships with law enforcement will be perceived, particularly within probation agencies, as an abandonment of the treatment mission in favor of a nearly exclusive emphasis on enforcement. Probation has always been seen as a philosophical battleground, where the "cop" and the "social worker" types fight it out for ascendancy. A move to work with the police will almost inevitably be seen as a victory for the "cops," and that has implications for agency morale and the perceived emphasis, based on rewards, given to the different functions. In other words, the social worker types may go into a funk and wonder what's become of the agency they loved. Through Operation Night Light, the probation agency reaped a degree of positive publicity unparalleled in its 120-year history. It would be very tempting for any manager, seeing such a public relations coup, to immediately make a police partnership an overriding priority. In the meantime, attention to those functions identified with rehabilitative services could suffer, and observant staff would draw the obvious inferences.

The Greeks were right—in life, balance is everything. But in the face of rapid change, it is devilishly difficult to handle shifting priorities and new trends. It is important for administrators to remember to put only some of their eggs into each new basket and to ensure that new strategies yield to rather than obscure the agency's preexisting and, one hopes, well-thought-out mission. Furthermore, if the research in community corrections for the last fifteen years has taught us anything, it is that in the field of probation an exclusive or even primary emphasis on enforcement, surveillance,

and control strategies will not succeed. Without the array of services available through the city of Boston, the business community, and the court system—including camp scholarships, summer jobs, employment training, and substance abuse treatment—the Night Light officers would have been severely hampered in their work. Whenever a high-risk probationer showed signs of wanting to get out of the "life," the supervising probation officer had referral options that enhanced the probationers chances for success.

What was unique about Operation Night Light was not the services provided—although they were surely critical—but the fact that, for the first time in recent memory in Boston, the offenders felt that they were truly being supervised. Probation officers and the police were pooling their intelligence, and offenders knew that one or the other knew about their activities, which greatly reduced their margin for error. It is clear that because of this deterrence strategy, many more probationers than usual were amenable to "going straight."[19]

Organizational lag. Unlike the first two, the last peril is not a byproduct of police-probation partnerships but a threat to them. The correctional landscape is littered with the remains of once-promising programs that perished from lack of full institutional support. Petersilia remarks that the problem with intermediate sanctions, which she sees as having great but unfulfilled promise, is that they were never adequately supported and therefore never received a fair trial.[20] Such has been the fate of many correctional innovations.

For probation-police partnerships to take root and flourish, they cannot simply be grafted onto the existing organizational structure. Work assignment, for example, will require rethinking. Perhaps probation officers should be assigned neighborhoods instead of caseloads. Perhaps contact standards and other commonplace bureaucratic requirements should be replaced by broader, more flexible standards of practice crediting a range of actions in the community that could deter reoffending. Management information systems may need dramatic change to reward individuals who have the qualities necessary for success in this new environment.

What is more predictable is that new practices will be superimposed on existing customs, many of which have long since become obsolete. Undertaking a new approach while maintaining a traditional system of accountability will create real disincentives for interested staff, demoralize those who otherwise want the partnerships to succeed, and ultimately threaten the future of the program. To create incentives for adopting new

approaches, recruitment and promotion practices must be designed so that it is clear that candidates who are committed to field-based practice are given priority. In Massachusetts, for example, the most recently negotiated union contract provides financial incentives for officers who work during nontraditional hours—evening and weekends.

As with so much else in public administration, even the best ideas cannot survive uninspired, timid management. True leadership, on the other hand, can make even flawed models work wonders.

Six Lessons Learned

Remember the importance of balance. Correctional interventions must be two-fisted. Because the problems we address never yield to one-dimensional approaches, any attempt to make real progress by using law enforcement or treatment strategies alone is doomed to failure. Nor will a one-theme approach garner critical political support. The investment in enforcement clears the path for a complementary investment in treatment. Average Americans want to see a measure of both, shifting in proportions to the realities confronted. This may be common sense, but few policymakers seem to recognize it. As Albert Camus observed, quoting the mathematician and philosopher Blaise Pascal, "'A man does not show his greatness by being at one extremity or another but rather by touching both at once.'"[21]

Publicity builds momentum and commitment. President Bill Clinton's visit to Boston in February 1997 was the culmination of an extended series of media hits for the Boston strategy. Regular coverage by both local and national media (for example, ABC Evening News, in its "Solutions" series) drew popular and, more important, internal attention to the effort. Everyone wanted to be part of the effort—there was no lack of volunteers or resources to support it.

For any new initiative to flourish, it has to create a "buzz" that draws attention and elicits support. Both an internal strategy that creates organizational incentives for involvement and an external strategy that builds political support are critical. Accordingly, new programs must attract the best and brightest employees in an agency through strong internal support and marketing by the agency's leadership. Leaders also must catch the eye of key public figures whose support is crucial to the agency. Nothing will accomplish that faster than sustained, positive media coverage.

Nurture the relationship among the partners. Partnerships of any kind are fragile affairs and sustaining them requires work. Regular communication

and an honest effort to honor all partners' role and requirements are the key to longevity. In the early years of the Boston strategy, all participating agencies, including administrative and line staff, were invited to biweekly meetings. The meetings, which were well attended, served multiple functions. The frequency of the meetings allowed participants to get to know and trust each other. The opportunity to get up-to-date intelligence and to share success stories sustained interest and commitment.[22] The open forum approach, in which anyone, regardless of rank, could speak to the group, made for lively meetings where the key issues surfaced.

Use an objective outsider. Groups, particularly if they are highly charged and successful, can develop a blindness to potential mistakes and opportunities. In the flush of enthusiasm and fellow-feeling engendered by a new and exciting venture, "groupthink" can take over and reality can get lost. One antidote is to involve an outsider whose job, whether by design or happenstance, is to keep the project honest. That person stays on top of all developments, corrects flaws of logic, and points out the errors of omission and possibilities for enhancement that only a disinterested party will easily notice.

In Boston, the Boston Gun Project, led by David Kennedy and colleagues at Harvard University's Kennedy School of Government, played just such a role. Kennedy worked from a great respect for the wisdom of the participants and looked first to leverage their abilities and insights by feeding back to them in refined form the raw material of his many long and patient discussions with key players.[23]

Get good data. Although experience and familiarity with a problem may lull us into thinking that we understand its nature and dimensions, gathering hard data before undertaking a new project can still bring some surprises. At the least, it can impose needed discipline on the process. The Boston Gun Project provided an essential service by helping participants gather reliable data on the phenomenon of youth violence and on the offenders. An examination of the particulars of 155 youth homicides in Boston revealed a high correlation with gang membership and gang-related activities; it also demonstrated that both perpetrators and victims were concentrated among the relatively slim ranks of well-known chronic offenders. That information was critical to the development of the strategy.[24] In addition, tracking the results provided the documentation required by the outside world while also helping to shape and refine the emerging strategy.

Be experimental. Corrections is awash in failed strategies; the only recourse for the prudent manager is to keep trying. Moreover, trying to

find entirely new ways that break from conventional approaches is especially critical. Breakthroughs in science sometimes come from exploring new avenues on the basis of nothing more than a hunch. We must be similarly foolhardy in corrections. We must adopt the long-shot, the odd-ball, the "what if" frame of mind. It is this spirit that animated the architects of the Boston strategy and accounts for much of their success. Flexibility in design and implementation is equally important. If the ideal model does not work, modify it, tweak it until it starts showing some results. Again, this is precisely how the most accomplished scientists work. They follow an iterative process, constantly testing, changing, and testing again. On the other hand, sticking with something after its shown fatal flaws is not determination but stubborn pridefulness. As Franklin D. Roosevelt remarked in an address at Oglethorpe University in May 1932, "The country needs and, unless I mistake its temper, the country demands bold, persistent experimentation. It is common sense to take a method and try it. If it fails, admit it frankly and try another. But above all, try something."

Finally, look for proof that you are attaining the desired outcome. Have a bottom line and stay with it. In Boston, the goal always was to stop the killing. The participants never looked up until the numbers began to drop dramatically. Fewer funerals was the goal, and they kept close score.

Thoughts on Replication

Principles travel, programs don't. Too often, a certain model gains popularity and becomes the darling of the correctional field. Boot camps are a good recent example; everyone has to have one. The trouble with adopting programs wholesale because they are in fashion and appear to work is that it ignores the fact that people, places, conditions, and resources vary significantly, in ways that can foster or impede success. What works for me will work for you only if you are just like me; usually, you aren't. Principles can transfer, however. Looking at the essence or core properties of a program is helpful, because they can be embodied differently depending on the key variables in the adopting jurisdiction. Custom tailor the general approach to local realities. Steal ideas, not programs.

It takes a crisis. I was part of a delegation from Boston that recently visited another state that was interested in adopting the Boston strategy. In a meeting with state officials, someone asked, "What does it take to get a program like yours started?" After a pause, I responded: "It helps if one of your churches is shot up." The tragedy at the Morning Star Baptist Church was

clearly the catalyst for much of the change that began to occur in Boston. No one hopes for such an event, but the hard truth is that often it takes something of that caliber to jump-start reform efforts. Without a shared sense of urgency, the mandate for change is a weak and uncertain thing.

You cannot plan for or instigate a crisis, but you can reveal one. Sometimes, seeing that attention is drawn to otherwise little known and ominous conditions and trends can create a critical mass of concern and coverage. And having a flair for the dramatic is a well-known attribute of agents of change.

Look for natural leaders. Peter Drucker, a management guru, has observed that wherever something really great is happening, there is a monomaniac with a mission.[25] Big results require extraordinary leaders. The best ideas in corrections are never self-executing; uninspired management can undermine the best models and real leadership can breathe life into the most rudimentary ideas. New projects need champions. Agencies and jurisdictions committed to radical improvements must identify and enlist talented administrators with a passion for the enterprise and a hunger to succeed. They are few in number, but every system has them. Find one.

Start small. Don't launch the Normandy invasion if all you have to do is take a beachhead. Over-reaching squanders resources, divides attention, strains logistics, and makes retreat difficult. Learn first what it takes to succeed. Look at your most favorable circumstances and start there. To make an early victory nearly inevitable, concentrate your forces and use a small success to build momentum. By moving slowly but consistently, you can increase the scope and intensity of your impact.

Take stock of existing relationships. Citywide interventions require the support of a diverse group of public and private officials. War historians tell us that soldiers risk their lives more for their comrades than for a cause. Social action is no different. Only hard-earned mutual trust based on personal regard will get a coalition through the inevitable setbacks. The best working relationships do not come cheap. They are built around a lot of coffee cups, in the back rooms of station houses, in drafty church basements, in courthouse corridors, and at the scenes of shootings. It takes a while to learn who you can rely on, whose back you are willing to cover.

To take the lead in a new strategy, agencies must have a sufficient number of allies. If more work needs to be done on cultivating key relationships, hold off on the new initiatives and build those relationships. Your potential partners will want to know that you are a dependable, honest, and courageous team player. Show them.

School-Probation Partnerships: The Next Frontier

Traditionally, a fire wall has existed between probation and law enforcement agencies, impeding information sharing and collaboration. The experiences described earlier in this chapter reflect the progress that has been made in Boston (and, increasingly, elsewhere) in tearing down that fire wall by redefining conventional roles and relationships.

Attention should now be turned to the relationship between schools and probation agencies. Some of the same radical rethinking is needed to maximize the potential of both institutions in combating youth violence. Some reports have pointed to the need for experimentation and creativity with respect to school-based crime prevention activities.[26] Other accounts lament the fact that school officials and other adult authority figures in the community, including probation and police officers, cooperate too infrequently in supervising and supporting at-risk youth, doing a disservice to the young person, the institutions represented, and the community alike.[27]

There are some bright spots, and they offer valuable lessons.[28] Jeremy Travis, former director of the National Institute of Justice, the research arm of the U.S. Department of Justice, has reported on successful efforts to use problem-solving strategies developed first in law enforcement to address school safety issues.[29] Evaluations conducted by the Police Executive Research Forum documented strikingly positive results. For the last several years, Middlesex County in Massachusetts has experimented with creative alliances, and, in the process, recast traditional roles and ways of doing business. Three particular strategies warrant mention:

Community-based justice meetings. On the basis of a program developed originally by Tom Reilly, former district attorney and now Massachusetts attorney general, each high school in Middlesex County hosts a weekly meeting involving prosecutors, police officers, probation officers, and school officials to discuss the ongoing response to at-risk youth.[30] These meetings include the exchange of information and intelligence regarding such matters as the juveniles' school and community behavior as well as the status of any legal proceedings. In addition, participants engage in problem solving and planning to try to design a coordinated response to contain the youth while also providing needed services—a kind of carrot-and-stick approach. All participants laud the program, which already has several years of experience, and the model has been exported to all other counties in Massachusetts.

Project Firm. In Framingham, one of the largest cities in the county, the school system and the local probation office have collaborated for several years in Project Firm, a diversionary program for school offenders.[31] When students are charged with infractions of school rules that might lead to a delinquency complaint, local juvenile probation officers act as hearings officers at the schools to determine whether the infraction occurred and the nature of any appropriate sanctions and services. This process gets probation officers and school officials collaborating early on so that offending juveniles will both understand the concerns of the community and be able to access social services if indicated. The bridge established between schools and probation agencies carries over into the handling of formal delinquency complaints and has generated partnerships such as Project NIRC.

Project NIRC. Building on the success of Project Firm, school, probation, and police officials joined in a new initiative that the police dubbed NIRC (non-incident-related contact).[32] NIRC involves joint evening visits to the homes of students who are creating problems in school or in the community by three representatives, one from each partner in the initiative, to advise youth and parents of the likely consequences of further difficulty and to offer services if the family is open to them. Here again, the image portrayed to the youth and the community is that of responsible authorities working together to hold young people accountable and to offer assistance before a problem worsens.

Each of these three initiatives calls on officials to act in new and unfamiliar ways, to adopt an expanded role in which they act almost interchangeably with other officials. They eliminate the fire walls referred to earlier and replace them with bridges that facilitate communication and cooperation. Each relies on the key public institutions involved to mount a coordinated response to youthful misbehavior, leveraging and multiplying the controls and solutions that each can bring to the table in the service of community safety and individual well-being.

Albert Einstein reportedly said that insanity is doing the same old thing but expecting different results. Middlesex County is doing different things and getting different results, and its success story ranks with that of Operation Night Light in Boston.

Notes

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