



THE Guardian

SPD Officers Lead The Country In Innovative Policing Approach

By Lisa Daugaard

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Communities all over the country are struggling to define what exactly they want from police officers when it comes to issues like drug activity, untreated mental illness and chronic unemployment. There is growing consensus that these are public health and economic opportunity issues that don't belong in the justice system. But the fact remains that, for the time being, police officers are still going to be called on to respond to these problems. In many cities, as for example in the arrest of Eric Garner in Staten Island for selling "loosies," this is a source of strife, tension and criticism of officers.

Seattle, in contrast, is the birthplace of Law Enforcement Assisted Diversion (LEAD), a hopeful new approach to these issues that encourages police-community reconciliation and partnership, and is being looked to around the country as the way forward in "public order" policing.

LEAD was launched in fall 2011 in Belltown with the West Precinct bike squads, the Anti-Crime Team, and the West Precinct Neighborhood Corrections Initiative (NCI) team. (Starting in Spring 2014, LEAD squads have been able to make referrals from the rest of downtown.) LEAD is a pre-booking, pre-filing, community-based, police diversion program, which SPD embarked on in an unprecedented partnership with the King County Prosecutor, the City Attorney, the King County Sheriff, the Defender Association, the ACLU of Washington, and Belltown neighborhood and business leaders.

How it works: in lieu of jail booking and referring to the prosecutor for criminal charges, officers can directly divert someone under arrest for drug or prostitution activity to a skilled case manager, who responds to the precinct immediately. (Case management is provided by the REACH project of Evergreen Treatment Services.) So long as the individual completes a two hour intake assessment process, the diverted case will not be filed. Officers can also refer social contacts who are known to engage in drug or prostitution activity downtown - they don't have to wait until

they have probable cause to make an arrest. The participant agrees to allow information about her case to be discussed by all the operational partners. The agreed goal is the reduction of the participant's criminal activity through coordinated, focused individual attention. Prosecutors, officers and sergeants and case managers strategize continuously to find ways to encourage and motivate the individual to shift to healthier behavior patterns.

Sometimes those techniques include classic, formal enforcement. LEAD is not a "get out of jail free" card. A LEAD participant can be arrested for a new crime just like anyone else. However, officers working with LEAD exercise their discretion to do what makes sense under all the circumstances - and have the information needed to make smart choices. For example, officers may know that a woman who's lived on the streets for a decade has an apartment opening up in a week, and so they may refrain from booking her on a new drug case, because that booking would cost her the apartment and therefore not actually improve community order and safety. Moreover, if a LEAD participant is arrested, booked and prosecuted, the Prosecutor's Office and City Attorney coordinate their approach to the new case to provide an incentive for changed behavior. LEAD-involved officers still use the jail and the court system - but only when doing so is the most effective step to take.

LEAD is a pioneering example of police doing harm reduction work, and as such, it has attracted national and international attention. Harm reduction strategies -- which recognize that not everyone can move immediately to sobriety and mental health -- have consistently achieved healthier outcomes over time than zero-tolerance approaches, by providing support for highly compromised, often traumatized, people to make more healthy choices over time. The SPD officers and supervisors involved with LEAD have become experts in harm reduction: using a new set of tools to reduce harm to the individual as well as to the community, and in so doing, setting a national example of a new paradigm of policing.

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Just before Christmas, LEAD coordinators got an email from a Thurston County Superior Court employee whose daughter had been referred to LEAD by an SPD officer. The mother wrote: *Thanks to LEAD I am receiving communication from my 33 year old heroin addicted daughter D. I cannot put into words how wonderful it is to hear from her. Thank you. You are not only helping addicts, you are providing much-needed reassurance to the family members who love them.*

My beautiful D has been on the streets for 18 months. At one time she was a member of the National Honor Society and bound for college. She got into drugs, sought treatment and was successful. She held a good job with a prominent law firm, she had a home and a daughter she loved so much. She had some health problems that required surgery and the pain medication led her to relapse. Her world crumbled. She lost everything and I have been raising my granddaughter since D began living on the streets, in July of 2013.

In the last six months I haven't known if D was alive or dead, every month I might be lucky to get a one line message. When I received some coherent messages from D last week it was a dream come true. She is worth saving. She is intelligent, kind, loving and thoughtful. Drugs changed her personality and ruined her life. For anyone who thinks drug addiction isn't a disease, they are dead wrong. My D would never have chosen the life she has been living. She was a good mother and a wonderful daughter, she did kind things for others and was a good

citizen, she was an amazing mother. Drugs changed that, drugs got a grip on her and wouldn't let go.

For all of you who have a part in this life changing program, you have my sincere gratitude. Through my tears I am telling you that you have given me the best Christmas present I could have ever imagined; my oldest child is alive and is getting some assistance to beat her addiction. May God bless each one of you who has a part in LEAD.

Like over 250 other people who have been referred to LEAD by SPD and DOC officers since October 2011, "D" had a very different encounter with police officers than she might have in the past. An unforeseen but exciting result after 3 ½ years of LEAD operations is a markedly improved relationship between officers and the addicted, homeless street population. People who used to run from officers on the LEAD squads now seek them out, because officers are increasingly viewed as helping them to make needed changes – and have tools to actually provide the needed help.

As a result of this positive word on the street, an East Precinct officer contacted LEAD coordinators last month to ask how he could make referrals into the program, saying he is being approached about it by street addicts who know they need help. This dynamic is a compelling and encouraging contrast to the tensions playing out with other police departments using Broken Windows-style enforcement strategies.

Not only that ... LEAD works! It turns out we can improve police-community relationships while also reducing recidivism more than traditional approaches. A rigorous independent evaluation by University of Washington scientists to be released later this month shows

that LEAD participants' recidivism, measured by new arrests, was 34%-58% lower than a highly comparable control group who were arrested in sectors or on shifts when LEAD was not available.

It's no exaggeration to say that the officers and sergeants who launched LEAD for SPD are changing the world. Jurisdictions all over the U.S., including New York City, Houston, Atlanta, Pittsburgh, Philadelphia, Portland (Maine) and San Francisco are now considering implementing LEAD. Santa Fe already has done so, and Albany, New York has committed to a LEAD launch later this year. SPD officers and sergeants involved with LEAD have been featured in national news stories in the Huffington Post and the Wall Street Journal as an example of the way forward in American policing. And LEAD has been featured in policing conferences in the Netherlands, Lithuania, Malaysia and Australia.

In the end, the best thing that can be said for LEAD is that it has led to outcomes many officers involved had previously considered impossible to achieve. A great example is an older man who literally had lived for well over a decade in a parking garage at 2nd and Lenora. Many years of trespass, theft and drug prosecutions had changed nothing. Officers expected this man to die in his "home" in the parking

garage. After an arrest diversion to LEAD and months of sustained engagement by a tenacious case manager, along with tight coordination with the City Attorney's Office managing (and ultimately dismissing) his other pending cases, however, he is now living in supportive housing in West Seattle. He rarely visits the garage. His room is immaculate and he is contributing toward his own rent. It seems that the answer to the question "what do people want the police to do about addiction issues?" is: this.

LEAD has succeeded only due to the vision, commitment and effort of the West ACT, bike squads and the West Precinct NCI team, particularly:

Officers: Terry Bailey, Bob Besaw, Tom Burns, Wes Collier, Jason Diamond, Jason Drummond, Don Johnson, Kevin C. Jones, John Kallis, Forrest Lednicki, Ponha Lim, Vic Maes, Aaron McAuley, Matt Pasquan, Felix Reyes, Dave Terry, Tad Willoughby, Raul Vaca, Drew West, Shane Yama, Kerry Zieger and Andy Zwaschka (now Acting Sergeant)

Sergeants: Jim Dymont, Bill Edwards, Brian Kraus, Ryan Long, Scott Moss, Ashley Price and Tom Yoon

Department of Corrections/NCI: Christina Lacy, Chad Winfrey (CCOs); Leslie Mills (Field Supervisor)