

INTRODUCTION

**\* POLICE-COMMUNITY RELATIONS  
TRAINING IN DETROIT**

**experience report 106**

COMMUNITY RELATIONS SERVICE  
U. S. CONFERENCE OF MAYORS



## INTRODUCTION

Of necessity, American cities are increasingly interested in effective police training in community relations. The need was indicated by the 1965 survey of 310 cities, jointly conducted by the U.S. Conference of Mayors and the International Association of Chiefs of Police. Less than a third of those cities had formalized police-community relations programs, and even in those having some community relations training, there was wide diversity of quality and type of programs.

Of the recently increased number of training programs, the most significant are those which can be adapted to the conditions and resources of other communities. Such an operation was undertaken in Detroit during the summer and fall of 1965 and is being reported here for the benefit of those Mayors seeking information on other cities' experience.

May, 1966



## BACKGROUND

In a four-month period, 1800 of Detroit's 4463 policemen participated in a 20-hour, four-week training course which covered all aspects of police-citizen problems. The program was voluntary and was held outside regular duty hours. The officer was paid \$3.50 per hour for attendance. The training involved virtually all officers of the inner-city precincts in which a majority of the city's low-income and Negro citizens live. These officers' work experience, feelings and frustrations presented both a challenge and an opportunity to the course planners and instructors.

Considering the difficulties, the program was unusually effective (in the opinion of close observers) because it *began* to change the police officers' perceptions — of themselves and their work, and of minority groups' problems and attitudes. And it gave them some increase in skill and confidence in handling daily problems.

If that judgment is accurate, credit should go to a course design which, in handling the most complex and emotional parts of police work, used real-life situations, enabled the men to talk and think freely about them, and kept the lecture portions of the program in a supporting rather than dominant role.

## HOW THE IDEA WAS BORN

The starting point was a 1964-65 study by Greenleigh Associates, a management research organization, of the social services that deal with poverty in Detroit. (The study, a major part of Detroit's Community Renewal Program, was approved and jointly financed by the federal Housing and Home Finance Agency and the City.) One of Greenleigh's recommendations was that police be given special training in understanding and working with persons in low income areas; that they should learn to handle the problems of minority groups and other culturally deprived residents with whom they come in contact with deeper insight and tolerance. It was stressed that average officers who have a good understanding of their job have a great potential for bringing to bear practical delinquency and crime prevention programs.

## FEDERAL AID SECURED

The Greenleigh recommendation moved Detroit police officials to seek a federal anti-poverty grant of \$213,222 for police training, to be jointly operated by the Police Department, the Commission on Community Relations (CCR), and the local anti-poverty agency, Total Action Against Poverty (TAAP). The grant was approved in June, 1965, and from July through October, 1965, the 8-session course was repeated four times.

In establishing the need for the program, it was emphasized that the summer months in the City of Detroit are marked by rising unemployment and increases in certain types of crime. Based upon data supplied by the Michigan Employment Security Commission and the Detroit Police Department, unemployment averages 21% higher during the summer months while the number of assaults and reported cases of larceny are 13% higher. In precincts where the majority of low income families and minority groups live unemployed, the number of street crimes and police contacts are over twice the rate elsewhere in the city.



## DESIGN AND CONTENT

Based upon an earlier manual developed in connection with a Philadelphia police training project (Arthur Siegel and Associates, *Professional Police-Human Relations Training*. Springfield, Illinois: Chas. C. Thomas Co., 1963) the project staff adopted both the format and the specific study materials to coincide with situations in Detroit.

The staff adapted new case material to local situations and to specific class needs as they emerged. Fundamental to the approach taken in the program was the belief that hostility to police is not caused so much by occasional incidents where excessive force may be involved, as by the chronic repetition of clumsy manners, insensitive and rude communications to citizens, and thoughtless indignities. This reminder ran throughout the materials.

In the Detroit course, each class period of 2½ hours was divided into (1) a specialist's presentation on a police-related subject, and (2) the role-playing of a real-life police case, followed by free discussion of it in small groups. Each group's ideas were then reported to the full class.

## LECTURES

Typical course lectures ran as follows:

- Challenges of Contemporary Law Enforcement
  - by a local judge
- Successful Police Work in the Light of Recent Court Decisions
  - by a lawyer
- Community Changes as It Affects Police-Community Relations
  - by the executive of the Citizens' Committee for Equal Opportunity
- Law Enforcement and Prejudices
  - by a psychologist
- The Police in Emergency Community Situations
  - by a police sergeant
- Professional Police Work in a Changing Society
  - by an Oak Park (Ill.) officer
- The Civil Rights Movement in Perspective
  - by an ex-director of the Michigan Civil Rights Commission
- Increasing Community Support for Police Work
  - by the Director of the Chicago Police Department's Police-Community Relations Bureau or by a staff member of the International Association of Chiefs of Police

A question period followed each lecture, then a coffee break, during which tables were set up for the group discussion to follow.

## DISCUSSING "REALITY"

With each class of 60 regrouped ten at a table, police 'actors' role-played a typical episode depicting the more frictional and difficult aspects of police dealings with citizens. Other cases were read aloud prior to discussion. After the case presentation each table group argued how the police could have handled it better, and all groups reported their ideas in a quick general session. This was repeated with stage 2 and 3. In mimeographed case materials, discussion questions challenged the men.

This part was the life and heart of the training process. It gave each man the chance to tap his experience, say what *he* would have done, and defend his idea against the next man's. A mark of the effectiveness of this material was the continuing debates back in the squadroom. This stimulated considerable interest among the officers awaiting training in later sessions.



## CASE SYNOPSES

Brief descriptions of the cases follow:

In "House Search" white and Negro vice squad officers, with search warrant, visit the Rossi's on a "numbers" tip. Mrs. Rossi's reaction, her reference to Negroes, the Negro officer's crack about Italians, the manner of the search, and the officers' apologetic departure — all this invited lively second-guessing.

"Argumentative Neighbors" involve police in two men's squabble about parking space; suddenly they must deal with an anti-Semitic insult, too.

"Molesting a Female" tests the officers' skill in dealing with an intoxicated white woman and a Negro man. Is she his common-law wife, as he claims?

"Crowd" begins with an illegally parked car, and police questioning its Muslim owner, but as a crowd forms and "brutality" remarks multiply, the situation becomes stickier.

"Street Loitering" involves Appalachian men at a corner on a hot night; ordered to move on, they return soon; when the police come by again, and frisk the men, resentment and blows result. How do you get along with hill folk?

"Fights and Riots" mixes liquor, a Mexican, three white men attacking him, police arriving, and a Negro in the crowd trying to tell an officer that the Mexican was blameless. Both minority men feel misunderstood and maltreated by the police reaction.

"Drunk" depicts an officer's urging a drunk to go home, then dealing with the man's collapse, and convincing the crowd that no "brutality" had occurred.

## A FIRST IN THE NATION — CITIZEN PARTICIPATION

Almost unheard of in police training was the invited presence of citizens during the lecture part of each session. It was done to give them more understanding of the difficulties and problems of police work. Then during the coffee break the guests (usually three in a session, and different ones each time), had their coffee in a nearby room with police coordinators and Community Relations Commission staff men. This gave the citizens a chance to comment on the lecture, air their views of police work, and to suggest how to improve police-citizen relations. They were invited and urged to help that process by reporting their experience back to their neighborhood groups and friends.

A number of the citizens were proposed by inner-city organizations, block leaders and neighborhood councils. Some were suggested by precinct commanders. An effort was made to find persons who could improve two-way communication. Before attending they were briefed by Community Relations Commission staff. They were paid \$3.50 an hour from OEO funds.

At first some police participants were dubious if not suspicious of such attendance. But the 'outsiders' did not attend the group discussions where they might have been a distracting or inhibiting factor. Superior officers were generally convinced that civilian participation was a strong asset and aid to future benefits from the training. Among the officer-participants themselves there was general acceptance of the value of this type of citizen participation as the course progressed. It was agreed by all those connected with the program that this aspect of the course design made an important contribution to its impact and success.



## SUMMARY OF KEY ELEMENTS IN DETROIT PROGRAM

1. The program was voluntary and was conducted on the officer's off-duty time with compensation.
2. The case approach and the real-life nature of the material was made as relevant to the working patrolman's experience as possible.
3. The experts' presentations, which provided timely information, were made less lecture-like when balanced with free discussion. Parts of each presentation could be related immediately to the case material.
4. Participation was built in, far beyond customary police training. Nearly half of the time the men were questioning the lecturers or discussing the cases in small groups. Following the role-played case or the reading of a case, the discussion groups compared ideas and reactions.
5. Identification of the case situations with the officers' own experience was given repeated emphasis.
6. The absence of 'right answers' in the case situations was deliberate: the officer was allowed maximum freedom of opinion — but then he had to defend it against comrades who disagreed. Group leaders stressed professional role of police.
7. The variety of ethnic and religious intergroup situations discussed conveyed the dimensions of low income status facing the policemen. Not just race.
8. Ventilation of police gripes against citizens was not prohibited. Recognition was given, however, to the necessity to uphold the law regardless of the attitudes involved.
9. Presence of civilians in the lecture section, though partly symbolic, was a healthy novelty, which the police accepted. The innovation was not lost upon neighborhood groups to whom the citizens reported.
10. "Saturation and contagion" effects were achieved giving this experience to nearly all policemen in the inner-city within four months. During that period the talk in squadrons reflected curiosity and questions among those who were taking or had completed the course. The talk indicated that new ideas were being stimulated and were getting attention.
11. The program cost \$213,222 (10% city; 90% federal). This works out to about \$118 per man. At \$3.50 an hour, each officer participant was paid \$70. Speakers fees, staff salaries, clerical services, and materials account for most of the remainder.
12. The program was coordinated by both the Police Department and the Commission on Community Relations, emphasizing community involvement. Key consultants were drawn from both academic and civic resources.

## SUMMARY

While this program was undertaken initially as a demonstration training project, it is expected that it will be further developed and will be funded again this year. Meanwhile, course outlines, discussion guides and case studies are available for those who may be interested from the Detroit Commission on Community Relations, Water Board Building, Detroit, Michigan.



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