JSS   **Justice & Security Strategies, Inc.**   *Moving Organizations Forward*

Smart Policing in the Los Angeles Police Department
Los Angeles' Strategic Extraction and Restoration Program
(LASER)

By
Dr. Craig D. Uchida
Deputy Chief Sean Malinowski
Deputy Chief Dennis Kato

January 2018

Justice & Security Strategies, Inc.
PO Box 6188
Silver Spring, MD 20916

Email cduchida@jssinc.org
Web www.jssinc.org

Smart Policing in the Los Angeles Police Department
Los Angeles' Strategic Extraction and Restoration Program (LASER)

By
Dr. Craig D. Uchida[1]
Deputy Chief Sean Malinowski[2]
Deputy Chief Dennis Kato[3]

January 2018

Introduction

In 2009 the Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD) applied for and was awarded a grant from the Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA) under the Smart Policing Initiative (SPI)[4] for $499,959 (Grant #2009-DG-BX-0118). In August 2014, BJA provided a supplement for $400,000. Since 2009 the LAPD has successfully implemented Los Angeles' Strategic Extraction and Restoration Program (LASER), first in Newton Division and now in 15 additional patrol areas.

The original grant and supplement included Justice & Security Strategies, Inc. (JSS) as the Research Partner.[5] The role of JSS has been to evaluate the project and to facilitate the implementation of the initiative.

This document provides an overview of LASER and includes the stages of expansion that have occurred over the last three years.

Operation LASER

The Smart Policing Initiative stresses a data-driven, evidence-based approach to crime control, with a particular emphasis on gun violence. In Los Angeles we first focused on reducing gun violence in Newton Division. Then-Captain Robert Lopez (now Commander of the Force Investigations Division or FID) oversaw patrol operations and wanted to take a specific, laser-like approach to violence reduction. He indicated that he did not want officers or special units engaged in task force operations as they disrupted the communities and angered residents. Instead, he wanted a non-invasive and focused approach. Thus, LASER was born.

---

[1] President, Justice & Security Strategies, Inc.
[2] Chief of Staff, Los Angeles Police Department
[3] Commanding Officer, Operations-West Bureau, Los Angeles Police Department
[4] The program is now called Strategies for Police Innovation (SPI)
[5] The Research Partner was a requirement of the grant and JSS assisted in writing the grant with the LAPD.

LASER involves both location- and offender-based strategies using LAPD data from incident reports, field interview cards, arrests, and other information. Using ArcGIS, analysts created LASER Zones – corridors where violence and gun-related crime persisted for at least ten years. Operation LASER also makes use of a Crime Intelligence Detail (CID), civilian and police analysts working side-by-side to determine crime patterns and identify chronic offenders. Analysts are trained to use Palantir, CAMS, and other software programs. Newton's CID developed proactive, real-time intelligence briefs called Chronic Offender Bulletins that identify active, violent offenders in specific neighborhoods.

Officers engaged in a variety of proactive missions in Newton. Foot and bike patrols were used extensively in the LASER Zones. Similarly, patrol and special units focused on chronic offenders.

To evaluate LASER, JSS used two social science research methods -- Interrupted Time-Series Analysis and Panel Analysis.[6] In particular, the research team analyzed monthly crime data for Newton Division and 18 other divisions from January 2006–June 2012. Results showed that Part I violent crimes, homicide, and robbery all decreased significantly in Newton after Operation LASER began. Part I violent crimes in Newton dropped by an average of 5.4 crimes per month, and homicides dropped by 22.6 percent per month. Importantly, the crime declines did not occur in the other LAPD divisions, which provide strong evidence that Operation LASER caused the declines in Newton.

---
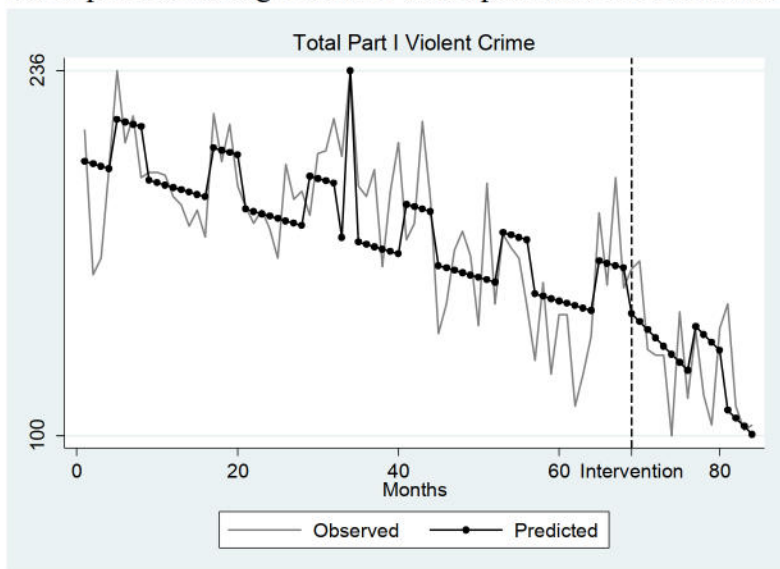
[6] See, Uchida, Craig D., Swatt, M., Gamero, D., Lopez, J., Salazar, E., King, E., Maxey, R., Ong, N., Wagner, D., & White, M. D. Los Angeles, California Smart Policing Initiative: Reducing gun-related violence through Operation LASER. Smart Policing Initiative: Site Spotlight. Bureau of Justice Assistance. U.S. Department of Justice. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Press, 2012 and also, Uchida, Craig D.and Marc Swatt. "Operation LASER and the Effectiveness of Hotspot Patrol: A Panel Analysis," *Police Quarterly*. 16, 287-304, 2013.

Simply put, Operation LASER succeeded in reducing homicides in Newton by 56% compared to 2011 (36 v 16) and 59% compared to 2010 (39 v. 16). Newton ended 2012 with an all-time low of 16 homicides. In addition, overall violent crime dropped 19% in Newton (from 2011 to 2012) and Newton ranked number one in violent crime reduction in the entire LAPD for 2012.

These results resonated in the LAPD as it was another striking example of how data and analytics coupled with appropriate tactics and operations could lead to crime reduction. But adoption and acceptance of the concept throughout the patrol areas took three more years.

The Community Operations Safety Center (CSOC)

In August 2015, 39 people were killed citywide, making it the 'deadliest August' since 2007 when 41 people were killed. More than half of the 39 homicides were in South Los Angeles (77th Street, Southeast, Southwest, and Newton Divisions; Figure 1). During the first week in September that trend continued. In 77th, Newton, and Southeast gangs engaged in feuds that led to drive-by shootings at a funeral home and residence and resulted in at least two homicides. At this point 'something had to be done' and Chief Beck and the LAPD decided to resurrect the Community Safety Operations Center (CSOC), a campaign that stressed inter-Bureau and inter-Divisional collaboration using LASER-like methods.
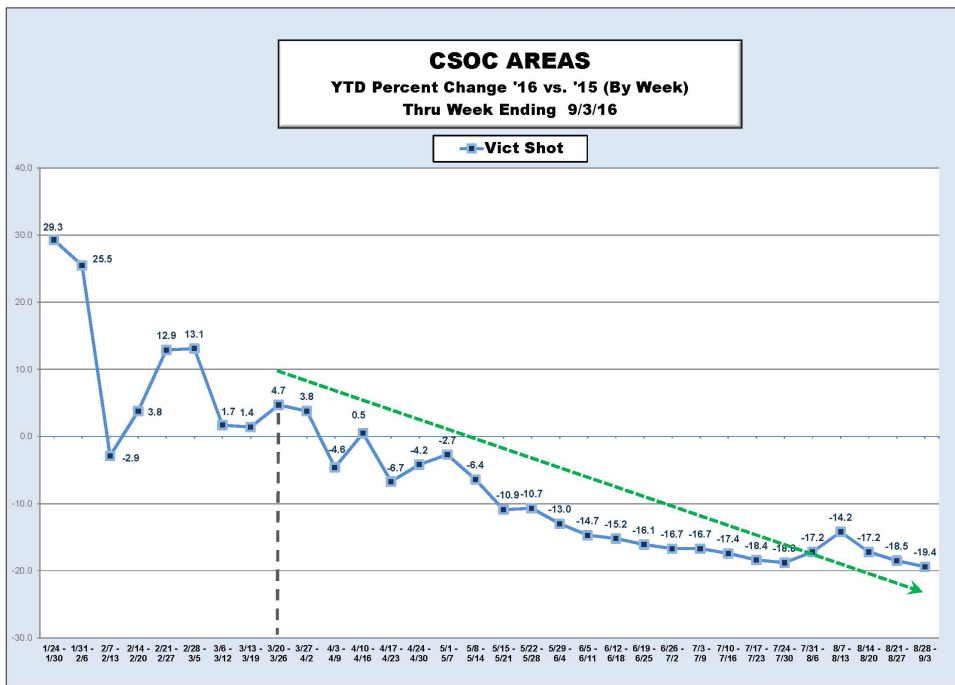
Figure 1. CSOC Divisions
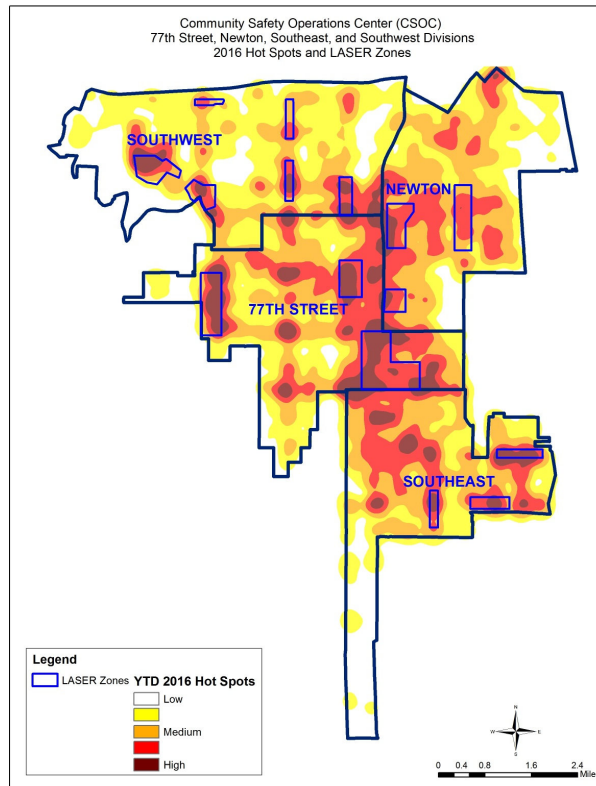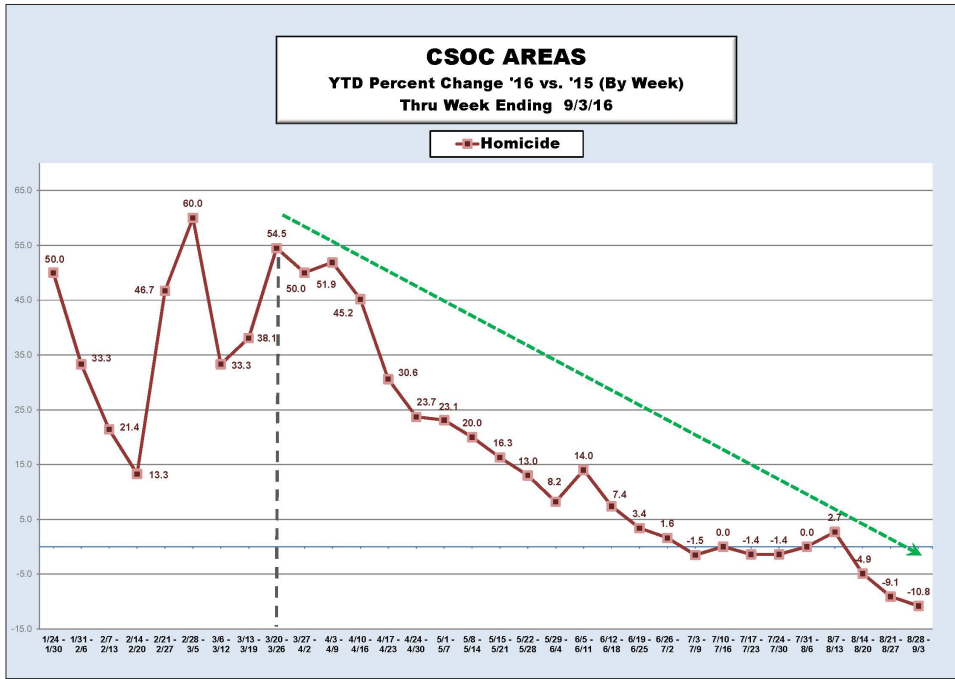
Figure 2. Change in homicides in CSOC areas (March to September 2015 and 2016)

Figure 3. Change in victims shot in CSOC areas (March to September 2015 and 2016)

By 2016 CSOC was fully operational, working on the third floor of the Police Administration Bureau. A Commander, Lieutenant, supervisors, officers, investigators, and analysts focused on gang and gun crime in 77th Street, Southeast, Southwest, and Newton Divisions. Every day at 1000 hours a conference call took place with CSOC, the four Divisions (Captains, gang detectives, others), Deputy Chiefs, and on occasion the Director of the Office of Operations. Discussions focused on violent activities in each area with the central theme being 'what are the missions that will curb violence?' By communicating and placing the right resources in the right place at the right time the homicides and shootings that occurred in 2015 and early 2016 started to decrease by the summer and fall of 2016 (Figures 2 and 3 above). These decreases were attributable to the focus on missions, using data and analysis daily, targeting chronic offenders, and using additional resources effectively (Metropolitan, Community Relationships, and Traffic Divisions were placed in specific areas based on need and the problems within LASER Zones).

Changes and Innovations

The success of CSOC has led to a number of changes and innovations. First and foremost, CSOC continues in South Bureau and will spread to the other three bureaus in 2018 and 2019. Second, innovations occurred both because of necessity and a willingness to make use of data and technology within the Department. A chronic offender and 'anchor point' database was created by a CSOC officer. This allows all divisions to enter their chronic offenders and problem locations into a centralized system. Tracking and monitoring activities of offenders are now tallied monthly.

The use of Palantir has increased as officers and analysts use the platform daily to create chronic offender bulletins, search for vehicles using ALPR data, and search for persons in LASER Zones who have outstanding warrants, are on probation, and have committed recent crimes.

Engineers at Palantir developed a dashboard for command staff to assist them in assessing the effects of their operations. Algorithms capture 'dosage' in the LASER Zones and across divisions by using Automated Vehicle Locator (AVL) data. This assists Captains in determining how much time was spent in LASER zones by patrol officers, another innovative measure that has been adopted by the Department.

Conclusion

BJA's Smart Policing Initiative/Strategies for Police Innovation is being institutionalized within the LAPD. The use of data and analytics by civilians and cops occurs every day. LASER has been adopted in 16 of 21 divisions, with the rest to follow by 2019. All four Bureaus will create operations centers by the end of 2018 to track and monitor their violent crime problems across divisions.

The main issue for LASER and CSOC, however, is one of long-term sustainability. These initiatives rely on having key personnel available to work on the violent crime problem

and on the technological infrastructure to analyze data and use software programs. Supervisors, officers, and analysts are essential to day-to-day operations. The Department is committed to hiring more civilian analysts, and Captains understand the importance of having officers assigned to Crime Intelligence Details and CSOC. Grant funds are used for computers, monitors, and software upgrades and a new records management system is being developed. Plans are being made to train recruits on LASER concepts. These are positive signs of sustainability and with the decreases in homicides and shootings of victims in 2017 the outlook for LASER and operations centers is extremely encouraging.