

2016

## Solutions to Maine's Drug Problem: One State's Story

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### Repository Citation

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# **Solutions to Maine's Drug Problem**

## **One States Story**

**By**

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One sincerely trusts that providers of treatment, education, enforcement, prevention and other drug related programs are not residing in separate camps. The addiction problem is not going to be solved with each town, city, county or state, public and private providers, dividing up a bundle of money and then going it alone. Addressing social problems works best by adopting a comprehensive approach. Programs carried out in isolation of others, who deal with similar concerns, frequently results in fragmentation. A statewide Maine problem requires coordination across all public and private services to ensure collaboration and efficient use of resources. Current efforts appear problematic as evidenced by the increasing addiction, violence, arrests, deaths, and the number of people who deem illegal drug sales as an occupation.



Planning of any type requires a comprehensive database dedicated specifically, in this instance, to drug related issues that extend across all jurisdictions. A complete picture of the demographics of substance abuse (where and what is available in Maine), related crime, and consistent treatment, prevention, education and enforcement services allows analysis to determine what

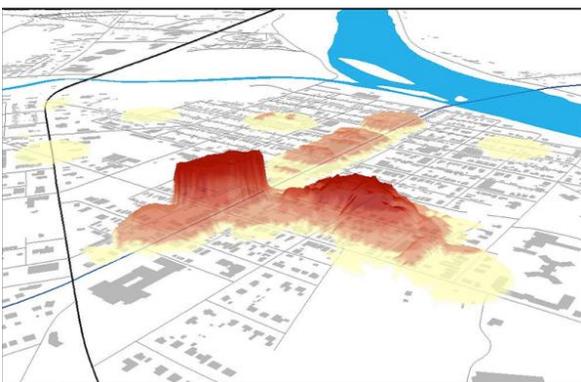
works and what does not. Knowing the people factor, location, time and other requisite factors can identify trends, the extent of the problem, common links of supply and demand and other factors that provide comprehensive information.

There are many interrelated factors related to the movement of suppliers, local sources of sales, who is purchasing illicit drugs, and what befalls them. The data combines information from multiple sources and allows police, medical, psychological treatment providers and relevant others with activities, crime data, reports of violence and other related incidents which complete the link assessment of the actual extent of this social problem. At the center of each person engaged in illegal activity are multiple involvements, each a challenge to society carries a cost and adds to social dysfunction. This multi-faceted record of events has to be addressed comprehensively, or we chase our tails at a higher cost.

If services and public resources are being used, which they are, knowing who and what is involved, through analysis, identifies where duplication is taking place, where various agency involvements are occurring, and where a lack of sufficient attention exists. A comprehensive and multi-faceted approach to reducing the identified problem begins with the development of extensive information database, followed by analysis and using

that information with agencies involved in eradication. Inclusiveness is critical, and the issues of confidentiality must be addressed.

For example, the Morganton Department of Public Safety, North Carolina, confronted a similar drug epidemic for that city that extended into Burke County and beyond. A collaboration of several counties, state and federal agencies resulted in numerous arrests and convictions, acquisition of forfeiture money and property, equipment, and vehicles. The investigative reach of this collaboration extended from North Carolina into Texas and Florida. Among the most active agencies in the partnership were U.S. Customs and the Drug Enforcement Agency. The F.B.I. assisted with wire taps (telephone tracking), the U.S. Attorney prosecuting at a federal level which increased penalties, especially when guns were involved, and the money awarded from seizure



<http://mapsof.net>

benefited police, schools and other city programs.

The key is the implementation of a skilled Geographic Information System Unit (GIS) to assist with database development, tracking and providing geographic maps showing spatial and temporal analysis (place and time), the location of sites of concern, linkages such as importation tracking of known and suspected dealers and their inter-connectedness. The

the information allows for responsible decision-making and sustainable reductions in the problems currently overwhelming government and public services.

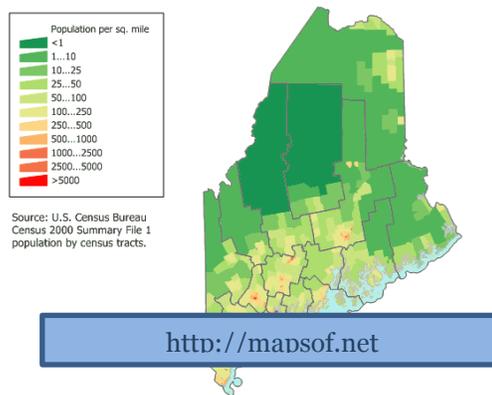
A GIS Unit located within an agency such as the State Police serves as a central database collection, analysis and support unit to those engaged in the task force and a repository of data germane to all. The GIS Unit addresses specific problems by drilling down into existing data to retrieve all relevant information, which is used in the analysis and in developing sustainable solutions. Right decisions, based on solid facts, allow “what if” questions as planning evolve. People, places, arrest information, electronic devices, photographs, identifying tattoos, vehicles, arrest and conviction data, relationships, and dozens of data points create the database and are used to link them to a comprehensive place-based, person and associated links and other analysis.

We face a crisis of drug abuse and corresponding violence that is seemingly not improving. Single agencies and groups are pursuing for "their share" of taxpayer funding, is not the approach needed if the pieces of the puzzle are not connected. A coordinated, well-shared data collection, analysis, and collaboration model assists in locating and linking suspects, users, and others connected to illegal drug abuse. It examines what has taken place, strengthening outcomes and planning from an informed perspective.

Some years back, the Rochester New York Police Department sought assistance to address “100 out-of-control drug markets across the city”; a problem that was internally destroying the city. The police chaotically chased calls for service with little effect. There was all manner of treatment providers who did not share data, work together or seem to accomplish much. Law enforcement was not well coordinated and the occasional task force consisting of Rochester Police, Office of the Sheriff and the New York State Police was not very successful, as the street sellers only waited for the one or two-week saturation of police to stop. The dealers then resumed business as usual. In short, there was considerable activity, but the effectiveness and efficiency of those efforts achieved little.

The first step was to develop criteria (variables) that would identify each location, type of drugs sold, creating a rank ordered list of type and extent of violence, along with people and addresses relevant to the overall criminal enterprise. Establishing the most violent and dangerous locations allowed the identification of where in the city the dealers were based. Then overlaying crime data and enlarging accurate distances (concentric circles) to examine calls for service, crime, injury, and deaths. Where the circles of dealers crossed, there was often an inter-gang activity that was dangerous to citizens. The database of reported crimes (although a significant number of crimes are not reported), violence, murders, arrests, gunshot incidents, known dealers, suppliers, injury and harm associated with drugs, addiction levels, medical emergencies, fear by citizens, and other variables.

This data was analyzed, and the worst most violent, and problematic places of the 100 sites in Rochester emerged. The rank ordering included all 100 locations. Police and other agency focus on the number one most dangerous place, with accompanying fear and citizen concerns, was all part of the analysis. The police, with the guidance of robust data, was able to implement effective strategies. With the elimination of the target drug market, police then moved to the second most dangerous place. It was not long before there was self-removal by dealers who thought they were about to be arrested.



Maine is the least densely populated state east of the Mississippi River with 83% of the land area forested. Much of Maine is a desolate area. The Northwest Aroostook, Maine unorganized territory in the northern part of the state, for example, has an area of 2,668 square miles and a population of 10, or one person for every 267 square miles. Maine has almost 230 miles of coastline and 3,500 miles of tidal coastline. In effect distance, remoteness and sparse population in some places can accommodate illegal activity with a slight chance of detection. Hiding in plain sight is all too easy to occur.

This distance and fragmentation are one reason for a dedicated unit, as described above. Detailed and accessible data would prove useful in keeping the multitude of fact

“relatedness” available. The need for reliable information analysis, a trained unit that can assist in reducing identified problems, is necessary as it crosses both public and private services. Utilization of data to increase effectiveness and efficiency is the current state of the art among police. We have reached that point in society where “taxpayer rights” and harm to society are critical considerations. The cost to taxpayers goes far beyond the government costs. Lost jobs, drug dependence, resulting crime, access to services that are never ending, loss of property, disruption of families, medical and mental health care, and the list goes on and on. We are no longer dealing with a small number of dealers and users from among a few misguided individuals; the drug dependence problems are consuming significant public and private resources and results in great social harm. Funding law enforcement, treatment, education, and prevention programs, is necessary, but not without coordination and data sharing.

In Charlotte, NC the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Police Department embarked on a new model of policing going from a law enforcement focus to a community problem-oriented policing (CPOP) model. Law enforcement remained a central responsibility as that role is exclusive to police. However, with wide-ranging training police at all levels of the agency, both civilian and sworn, learned how to work together to reduce those issues negatively affecting the quality of life of citizens. This new change also included the formation of Geographic Information Systems Analysis (GIS) Unit. This group increased database development, data analysis and utilized a sustainable problem-solving model effort that included police, citizens, other city departments, and a healthy mix of stakeholders from other public and private organizations – a collaboration that addressed problems from the neighborhood level and wherever it led.

That unit of analysis was appropriate for a city the size of Charlotte. It was a bottom-up model with patrol officers and Sergeants working closely with citizens, neighborhood leadership and supported by command staff and other stakeholder agencies and services. The traditional pyramid of top-down would not function efficiently, and at the end of the day, the success of this model was beyond expectation. Engagement by individuals who deal directly with the problems and issues being addressed, may result in empowerment that is not allowed. Trust in the application of new skills and supported in many positive ways, worked! Developing sustainable solutions is now the order of the day. However, throwing unproven and wasteful programs at the problem, without a unified approach, is not the answer.

The police were partners with the community, individual victims of crime and other related harmful events, striving to empower them, support programs, and bring in others to assist with a turnaround that improved monthly. This concept did not happen overnight, but at the end of the day, the successful outcomes were impressive. Crime and fear of the offense reduced, citizen quality of life improved and a more engaged citizen with public and private services took hold.

Somehow, legislative action must come together. Tough talk cannot achieve full engagement without sustainable community capacity building. Until a focused effort, coordinated, staffed with people who can conduct the analysis and then work with field units in enforcement, treatment, and others to have a direct and focused effort; more

money is wasted. The lack of an organized approach is not a concept, nor is it right to put dedicated units into the field to address these problems and not provide them sufficient support.

The problem is worsening with nearly a death a day, not to mention lost wages, contribution to - versus taking from society, medical costs, crime and all manner of adverse outcomes.