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How do SROs spend their time? Activities undertaken by Peel Regional Police SROs

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Summary from chapter 3 of the report
“Assigning Value to Peel Regional Police’s
School Resource Officer Program”

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SROI (Social Return on Investment) is an outcomes-based measurement tool that helps organizations to understand and quantify the social, environmental, and economic value they are creating. In 2015-2016, we undertook a major research project with the Peel Regional Police and the two Peel District School Boards, which used SROI techniques to determine the value of assigning a police officer (referred to as a School Resource Officer or SRO) to work on a full-time basis in every high school in Peel Region. SROs seek to create a safe learning environment by forming positive partnerships with students, school administrators, and staff; by working to prevent crime and victimization within the school and the school's catchment area; and by enforcing the law.

Five high schools located in Peel Region participated in this study. These five schools were selected in such a manner to ensure that we had schools from both school boards operating in the region. The schools were located in a diversity of neighborhoods: two were designated "urban-grant" schools and were located in socio-economically challenged areas in Peel Region; two schools were situated in "middle class" communities; and one school was in an affluent community. Four of these five schools had student populations that were ethnically diverse.

The SROI methodology requires the researcher to identify key inputs to the system being evaluated. This meant that before we could calculate the value of Peel Police's SRO program we had to identify the various activities undertaken by the SROs (i.e., inputs to the SROI process), and measure the amount of time each of the SROs operating in the five schools spent in each of these activities. This summary presents key findings from this stage of our analysis.

Identification of Activities

To inform this process we began by reviewing the academic and practitioner literatures in the area. Our review uncovered lists of job duties SROs carry out when assigned to schools, lists of the different roles they are required to play, descriptions of the relationships that they are expected to create and maintain, and a catalogue of key job functions that they are expected to deliver. We also scanned several job descriptions that services across Canada and the US have used to recruit people to the SRO position and identified a diverse range of duties that were incorporated into the SRO role. We concluded from this review that the SRO is expected to be "everything to everyone" as most job descriptions are seeking someone who is familiar with the law, but can also function as a public safety specialist, liaise with the community, solve unique problems on-the-fly, educate students on the law, and act as a positive role model. Job descriptions also typically discussed the desired characteristics of an SRO officer (e.g., good public speaker, self-disciplined, self-motivated, etc.). Unfortunately, at the end of the day, we were unable to unearth a comprehensive list of the specific day-to-day activities executed by SROs to meet the role responsibilities listed above. In other words, we could not identify what SROs actually did to "create a school setting that is safe and secure and promotes learning." This type of information is critical to our ability to evaluate the SRO program and quantify the value provided by

having SROs in schools. As such, we devoted considerable time and effort to identifying the activities undertaken by these officers, classifying these activities into major categories, and measuring the frequency with which the officers engaged in each of these key activities. In this study, the main activities performed by Peel Police SROs were obtained through consultations with three stakeholder groups: school administrators, the SROs themselves, and the steering committee guiding this research.

Measurement of Activities

Prior to the beginning of the school term, the research team worked with Peel Regional Police's analytics team to develop a method of tracking the amount of time each of the SROs working in the five schools that had agreed to participate in this research initiative spent on each of the activities identified. This tool was developed and tested prior to the beginning of the school semester. The researchers would like to acknowledge the help and support of Peel Police employee Oscar Castaneda, GIS Analyst, Intelligence Services, in developing and testing this tool. This phase of the study would not have gone as smoothly as it did without his help.

The design of the tool was critical as we were asking the officers to contribute their time to this research initiative for the duration of the project (5 + months). While several approaches were considered for the collection of the activity data, in the end Peel Police created a web form on their intranet that was used for data collection. This data collection tool was self-explanatory, extremely easy for the officers to use, required a minimal amount of training, allowed fast data entry, required little of the officers' time, and included safeguards to ensure data accuracy. The tool also provided the officers with a high amount of flexibility and freedom with respect to when they could use the application to enter the data.

SROs are required to use notepads to keep track of what they do during the course of their day. The researchers asked them not only to write down what they did each day, but to also note when they began and ended each task. Then, when they had time available during the day/week, we asked them to launch the webpage for the data collection tool and enter their data. Data entry could typically be completed in a matter of minutes. The web form was connected to a SQL server database and after the officer entered the data the information became available immediately for analysis. The design included a program running behind the scenes to calculate the time spent per officer per day on the different activities. This solution proved to be easy to use, quick, and very inexpensive.

Asking busy SROs to track all of their activities for almost half a year was no minor request. The research team was very lucky to have had complete co-operation from a group of such dedicated officers, all of whom diligently tracked their activities on a daily basis. We would like to take this opportunity to thank them for their dedication to this project and for their contributions to its success.

What do SROs do?

The role of the SRO involves participation in 20 different activities, as shown in Figure 1 below. These various activities can be classified in two different ways:

- the activities are either reactive and involve enforcement (n = 9) or proactive and relate to prevention (n = 11), and
- the activities require that information/intelligence either be gathered (n = 9) or used (n = 11).

Figure 1: Typology Classifying the Different Activities Performed by SROs

	Gather Information → Relationship Building	Use Information and Expertise → Credibility Building
Proactive (prevention)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SROs walk around the school with school administrators • SROs walk around other targeted areas where students congregate • Police monitor social media • SROs patrol the neighborhood around the school • SROs conduct patrol work not related to NPU • SROs engage in extra-curricular activities with students (e.g., sports, charity events) and in the community 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SROs respond to requests from members of the school's broader community • SROs play an educational role in their school • SROs act as a liaison between Peel Police and administrators in the school • SROs use information they have gathered to prevent criminal activity from occurring (in the school and in the school's catchment area) • SROs engage in emergency preparedness exercises within the school
Reactive (enforcement)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SROs participate in POP projects within their community • SROs pass on relevant information to other members of Peel Police, as appropriate • SROs assist other bureaus with NPU-related investigations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SROs respond to criminal (e.g., drugs, robberies) and non-criminal (e.g., trespassing, liquor, fighting, suicide attempts) calls for service at the school and in the school's catchment area. In other words, they use their training and information they have gathered to enforce the law. • SROs deal with non-criminal critical incidents in the school (e.g., trespass, suicide attempts, criminal activity) • SROs spend time dealing with critical incidents at the school and in the school's catchment area (behavioural and mental health issues) • SROs enforce federal/provincial/ municipal laws in the school and in the school's catchment area • SROs attend court • SROs write reports and complete administrative duties

Oxford Bibliographies¹ provides an excellent discussion of the reactive/proactive concepts. The following definition is taken from this website:

“Proactive policing [sometimes referred to as community policing, problem oriented policing, or intelligence lead policing] can take on a variety of meanings. In the most general sense, it is the polar opposite of reactive policing, which is characterized by randomized patrol, rapid response to calls for service, and retrospective investigations. Instead of waiting for a crime to transpire, proactive policing entails striving to prevent crime before it ever comes to fruition.... On the whole, proactive policing is the antithesis of traditional policing methods. Rather than reacting to crime as it comes to their attention, the proactive movement calls for the police to do everything they can to try to prevent crime from occurring in the first place.”

Officers engage in reactive activities as a response to something that has already happened at the school or the school’s catchment area. In all reactive situations, the SROs undertook a variety of actions to resolve the matter effectively and re-establish a safe school learning environment. All the activities in the proactive grouping are taken by the SROs to either prevent a crime, avert the victimization of other students, or forestall antisocial activity. Such activities can be considered to foster a safe learning environment. Information and intelligence gathering activities contribute to the development of positive relationships with key stakeholders, while the activities that involve the use of information, skills, and training enhance the credibility of these officers within a variety of stakeholder groups.

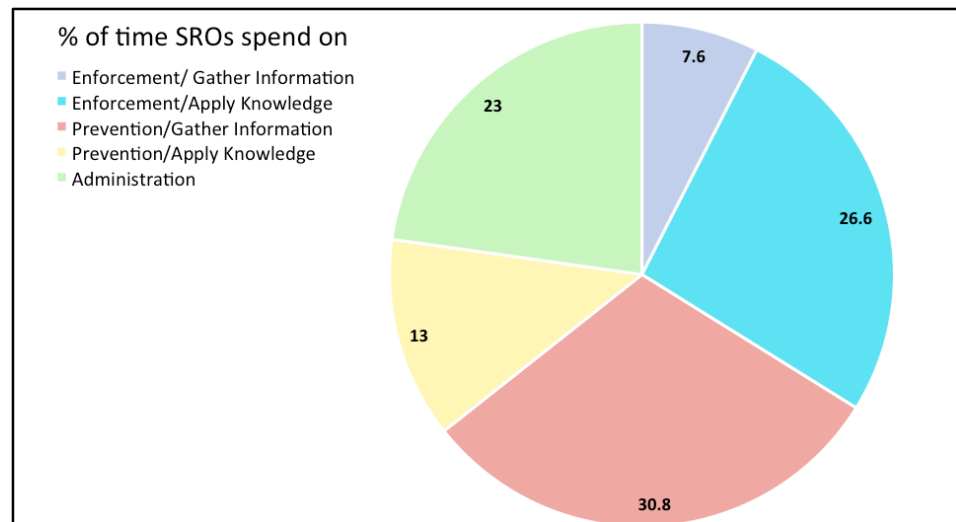
Information from this study on how SROs spend their time is summarized in Figure 2 below. Analysis of the activity data resulted in the following important observations and conclusions:

- SROs spend almost a quarter of their time on administrative work.
- SROs spend approximately 10% of their work time on each of the following four activities: criminal calls for service at or around the school, general patrol in the neighborhood around the school, acting as a liaison between school administrators and Peel Regional Police, and engaged in patrol work.
- SROs spend approximately 5% of their time on each of the following three activities: foot patrol with school administrators, Problem Oriented Policing (POP) projects, and appearing in court.
- The 11 other activities that are part of the SRO role appear to be performed on an “as needs” basis and consume relatively small amounts of the officer’s time over the course of a semester.
- SROs spend more of their time on activities associated with proactive policing/ crime prevention (44% of their time) than they do on reactive activities involving enforcement of the law and/or calls for service (34% of their time).
- A substantial amount of the SROs’ time (30%) is spent on information gathering activities to help prevent crime. These activities also serve to enhance relationships with key stakeholders.

¹ <http://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/view/document/obo-9780195396607/obo-9780195396607-0183.xml>

- Officers spend a substantial amount of their time either using the knowledge they have gained to enforce the law and/or respond to a call for service (27% of their time) or on follow-up administrative activities (23% of their time).
- SROs spend less of their time applying their skills in a proactive way within the schools (i.e., 13% of their time is spent on educational activities or emergency preparedness training) or on enforcement activities that involve reactive knowledge gathering (8% of their time).
- While the amount of time spent by the SROs each month on the different types of activities is relatively constant over time, the activity pattern is somewhat different in November and December than the other months of the semester.
- SROs spent substantially more of their time in November on activities where they were required to use their knowledge and expertise to enforce the law. They spent less of their time involved on proactive information gathering activities and report writing.
- SROs spent considerably more of their time in December on reactive intelligence gathering policing activities (18% of their time). The amount of time spent on administrative activities was also lower in December.

Figure 2: Percent of Time SROs Spend on Key Activities: Sept. 2015-Feb. 2016



Report Writing

We were surprised to discover that SROs spent almost a quarter of their time at work writing reports and engaging in administrative activities. Follow-up analysis helped us better understand why this was the case. One officer explained it as follows:

"If we go by the calculation that a simple report takes around 1 hour to complete, then we are spending about three hours minimum a week on simple reports – all of which can be considered reactive in nature as we are required

to do them after we have handled an incident at the school. So then we are dedicating at least 12 hours a month to reactive report writing for simple issues.... Then of course there are the more complex reports, which are typically triggered by a critical incident at the school [an arrest, a mental health call]... In these cases the time dedicated to reports may take as much as 4 hours...meaning that if we deal with a critical incident approximately three times a week, that is 12 hours a week and 48 hours a month of report writing.”

Another concurred and provided additional information as follows:

“It’s not only report writing, but everything that accompanies it. Filling out property tags, lodging property, informing supervisors of cases, writing notes, assisting other officers with their packages, court package preparation, disclosure requests from Crown/Defense, email correspondence with co-workers/Crowns/other police services, reading alerts that have been distributed, etc. You could to summarize this as ‘administration’ or ‘paper work’”.