



## **Tough Guys Don't Care!**

**By Mitch Brown**

As I sit here at the end of a 37 year law enforcement career, I wonder why many law enforcement officers don't seem to care about the children of drug users, sellers, manufacturers and cultivators.

Many times officers don't see the children as victims but as an impediment to completing their job of arresting the parents, seizing drugs, money and weapons.

Many years ago when I was a Narcotics Task Force Commander, I too saw the children as an obstacle to me completing my primary job of drug enforcement. They stood in my way of making a quick arrest and seizure and moving on to the next case. I thought my job was to arrest as many of the bad guys (drug dealers) as I could. The more people I arrested, drugs seized, assets taken and guns confiscated the more praise I received from my bosses. My task force, per capita and per man, was one of the most successful in the state. I was rewarded throughout my 21 year career in narcotic enforcement with letters of commendation and promotions. I advanced from one step to another, from Special Agent Trainee to Assistant Chief of the Bureau of Narcotic Enforcement at the California Department of Justice. I was a task master and the people that I led were hard chargers.

A young District Attorney Investigator named Sue Webber, who also happened to be a reserve police officer, managed to get assigned to my task force on a part-time basis, against my strong opposition. After she had been on several dozen raids, she approached me and asked why I didn't do something for the kids. My response was, "For the rug rats, I'll be arresting them soon enough". That's all I said but I could tell from the rookie narc's reaction that she didn't care for my response or me. That was fine with me. In fact, I told her FTO to keep the rookie narc out of my way or she would be history. Little did I know, the crew liked her more than me.

In November 1990, I was promoted to Special Agent In-Charge of the Sacramento Office with the responsibility over several field office operational crews and a number of task forces, including my old unit. Somehow, somehow, the new task force commander allowed the rookie narc and a Child Protective Services (CPS) worker to help children who lived in drug environments that task force personnel raided. To say the least, I was not happy about the rookie's ability to sway the new task force commander into caring for the kids. However, I was not about to micro-manage his unit. I felt that they would come around to my way of thinking after I reamed them a good one when the unit's stats began to fall. I also felt that dealing with the rug rats would change their "do good" behavior back to the old way.

As the Rookie and the social worker continued working together they thought it was a good idea to formalize their working relationship. This was their way of obtaining their department heads approval and deal with issues of policy, procedures, duties, roles and responsibilities. This had gone well beyond the control of the task force commander and the department heads from the agencies participating in the narcotics task force were about to become involved. Feeling that I might lose control to these do-gooders, I decided to drop in on the task force commander and rookie to examine the unit's statistics. I was sure the unit's productivity would be down thus giving me ammunition to halt the Drug Endangered Children Program.



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Soon thereafter, I had an awakening, an awareness of the horrible things I had done, or failed to do. Not caring enough, or at all, to protect those who could not protect themselves, the children. I'm not sure of the date but sometime in 1993 I watched the DEC Program in action and saw the faces of the children reacting positively to the rookie and social worker. In fact, it was the first time I viewed the children as innocent victims and not rug rats that I would or should be arresting in the future. The defining moment came when I went into a drug house with the task force personnel and the DEC team members. On the raid a small 7 or 8 year old girl grabbed onto my leg, squeezing tightly and crying, asked me to get the cockroaches off of her. I did so immediately and looked at the parents with a great deal of contempt. As the girl continued to cry she asked me if she had to sleep in her bed. I asked her to show it to me. She showed me the bed by pointing, but would not go near it. The bed consisted of a filthy urine-stained mattress lying on the floor next to dog shit with cockroaches covering everything in the room. The only bedding in the room was a disgustingly dirty blanket that looked and smelled like it hadn't been cleaned in years. When I told the girl that she would not have to sleep in the bed she stopped crying and asked me where she would be sleeping. I told her she would be going with the social worker to stay with some nice people. The little girl gave me an upbeat "OK" and asked if it would be possible to get something to eat because she was hungry. By this time, the little girl had me holding her in my arms and I said, "Of course dear". She squeezed me around the neck and asked if it would be okay if her brothers came with us. Once again it was a "yes" from me. Out of curiosity, I walked into the kitchen with the girl still clinging to my neck. I asked the social worker how much food was in the house. She replied not much, showing me empty cabinets and a refrigerator with a little amount of rotten food.

As I continued to hold the girl, the rookie asked me, "What's more important; arrests, money, drugs, guns, or the safety of the child?" I looked around the room as thoughts raced through my head about my job as a police officer and/or narcotic officer. At first I wanted it all, the arrests, guns, money, drugs and the child. I thought to myself I'm making progress as I had never considered the children in the past. With a large smile on her face, the rookie looked at me and said, "If you can only walk out of here with one thing, what will it be?" With complete clarity and awareness I said, "The child." Hopefully, you would make the same decision. Now that you know the children who live in drug environments should be our first priority as law enforcement officer, let me show you how we can get it all by using the DEC strategy.

Oh, by the way, when I looked at the task force statistics for arrests, seizures, drugs and guns seized over a fifteen year period, every category was at its highest point when drug endangered children were rescued. The task force was at its lowest points when children were not made a priority.

Note: Mitch Brown is currently the Director of Training for the Drug Endangered Children Training and Advocacy Center (DEC-TAC), a Counseling Solution Program, funded by a BSCC Grant. DEC-TAC is contracted to provide free mandatory Drug Endangered Children training to all recipients of BSCC funding (MJDTF, ADA, MSP and Crackdown). For more information call DEC-TAC at (530) 533-2260 and ask to speak with Mitch, Sue Webber-Brown or Margie Hensley.