

CASE STUDY

CLEAR® investigation software: Providing community support

When Sergeant Shana Oberle responded to an anonymous complaint about an abandoned vehicle with an expired tag, she was concerned by what she found. As a supervisor in the Code Enforcement Department of Pinellas County, Florida, Sgt. Oberle's team of only 6 area officers service the southern region of Florida's most densely populated county per-square-foot.

Much of her team's concentrated efforts focus on a specific area of Pinellas County where there is a greater need for community outreach and cooperation between citizens and their governing partners to foster economic growth.

The vehicle had been abandoned on a right of way and was clearly in bad shape. More concerning was the evidence Sgt. Oberle found which suggested someone had been living in the vehicle—a pillow and blanket, food containers, clothing, and children's toys. She recognized seeing the car at various places in the area but did not know who owned it. Identifying and contacting the registered owner is almost always the greatest challenge with an abandoned vehicle.

“CLEAR colors in the details we otherwise wouldn't have access to,” Sgt. Oberle says. “We know who we're talking to and in the interest of safety, who we're dealing with.”

The sergeant turns to CLEAR

Sgt. Oberle returned to the office and ran the expired tag through Thomson Reuters CLEAR. Within minutes, she had the name and phone number of the last known registrant. These details would turn out to be the most important pieces of information in this case.

“This is just the tip of the iceberg on how CLEAR has assisted our team in reaching out to the less fortunate citizens of our communities,” she notes.

CLEAR also provided records indicating that this family had been facing challenging times. Sgt. Oberle considers the expansive information CLEAR provides to be one of its main advantages. “It colors in the details we otherwise wouldn't have access to,” she says. “We know who we're talking to and in the interest of safety, who we're dealing with.”

Providing community support is a core part of the department's mission

When Sgt. Oberle called the phone number, she found herself talking not to the owner of the vehicle but to the owner's grandmother. Sgt. Oberle learned that the woman's granddaughter was indeed homeless. She didn't have a cell phone and often listed her grandparents' number as her contact. Not long before this, the granddaughter and her family had stayed with the grandparents for a period of time, but they had since moved on.

The grandmother didn't know where she was living now, or whether she and her husband were still together. Sometimes her granddaughter lived in cheap motels; other times she was out on the streets.

Sgt. Oberle understood that an expired vehicle tag was the least of this young woman's troubles. Through a partnership with a local non-profit organization, her code enforcement team eventually found the homeless family. The Pinellas County team reached out to the family in a friendly, personal way and provided resources the family wasn't aware of—including housing, food, and clothing.

“We're trying to change the way the community perceives our department,” says Sgt. Oberle. “We're code enforcement officers who also provide community support.”

In the following weeks, a member of the homeless family attended an event hosted by Farm Share, in partnership with other non-profit organizations: the Florida Dream Center and Showered & Empowered. These events provide the community with everything from groceries and vaccines to healthcare, bus passes, showers, laundry, and resources for jobs. The family member left with 7 bags of groceries and medical supplies.

“She had a big smile on her face and interacted with some of the other non-profits that provide additional resources to improve their quality of life,” says Sgt. Oberle.

In addition to providing education to residents regarding their code violations and how to comply with county ordinances, the Pinellas County Code Enforcement Department handles cases directly resulting from human trafficking, prostitution, drug addiction, and alcohol abuse. One community is a food desert that is lacking a grocery store—creating a hunger challenge.

“Without CLEAR, our department would rely on a very limited local public records database. CLEAR is much more advanced, expansive and detailed; something that all enforcement agencies can appreciate.”

The department uses CLEAR for a wide range of activities. CLEAR provides the required information such as the date of birth, address, height, weight, and driver license number. It also provides a criminal history report that includes information related to recent engagements with law enforcement.

Sgt. Oberle considers CLEAR to be very beneficial. “I'm not sure what I would do without it,” she says. “It's a valuable tool, not just for me, but also for our entire department. Without CLEAR, our department would rely on a very limited local public records database. CLEAR is much more advanced, expansive and detailed; something that all enforcement agencies can appreciate.”

Ready to make a change?

For analysts and investigators who need to quickly locate, identify, and connect critical facts, [Thomson Reuters CLEAR](#) is powered by billions of data points and leverages innovative public records technology to bring all key content together in a customizable dashboard, allowing you to search data and view results in a layout that complements your workflow.

Unlike other public record platforms, all levels of government agencies trust CLEAR to provide robust, real-time data that closes gaps in investigations and gives you an edge over traditional information delays.



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