During the first half of 2004, attempts were made by the Roodepoort police to establish a SCF in Princess. A group of residents that had historically controlled the informal settlement by force – demanding protection money from shebeens, and claiming to be the settlement’s political leadership – insinuated itself into the emerging SCF and attempted to take it over. Some time in July, a sector patrol vehicle entered the settlement in response to a complaint at a shebeen controlled by the settlement’s local mafia. When the responding officer attempted to make an arrest, he was attacked and injured. The following week, the shebeen in question was raided. The police conducting the raid had their vehicles pelted with stones and had to retreat from the settlement. This cycle continued in the weeks that followed. Police officers who entered the settlement were routinely attacked and were forced to withdraw.

This sequence of events suggests that there was a deliberate attempt to make the area unpoliceable. And it has worked. In August, the Roodepoort precinct took a decision not to respond to complaints in Princess. Complaints were instructed to meet police officers at designated points outside the perimeter of the settlement. Nor is it a coincidence that the attempt to render policing impossible was made directly after efforts to introduce sector policing in the informal settlement. The SAPS has been reduced to policing the area with the only means left to it. Month after month, a large quasi-military contingent invades the area and casts a giant fishing net over it, hoping to find guns, stolen goods and people with outstanding warrants against them. Every shack is searched. Scores of residents are subjected to electronic fingerprint tests. Shebeens are raided, their owners arrested and their stock destroyed. Both sides regroup in preparation for the next confrontation.

The SAPS has in essence resigned itself to the fact that normal policing will not be possible in Princess for the foreseeable future. It cannot leave the area entirely unpoliced, as it is a haven for people who commit crimes in the Roodepoort area. It must enter the settlement in force to look for guns and stolen goods. Yet the SAPS is also aware that wave after wave of paramilitary operations will neither drive the criminal formations that control the area out nor pave the way for sector policing. It is not so much an endgame as a stalemate, one for which there is little prospect of resolution. All in all, the story is one of a successful sabotage campaign against the introduction of sector policing.
agencies at grassroots level. As we shall see below, the result is that sector managers have a range of problem-solving capacities at their disposal not available in the other two sectors studied.

Kagiso Sector 4
Kagiso’s Sector 4 is a large, densely populated section of Kagiso proper comprising six council wards and a population of at least 50,000. Kagiso Avenue, the township’s longest thoroughfare, forms the sector’s eastern boundary. Its southern boundary is Randfontein Road, a regional artery that runs across the width of the West Rand. A large swathe of mine property lies to the sector’s north, and a stretch of empty veld to its west.

Despite its population density, the social composition, and thus the crime patterns, of Sector 4 are fairly diverse. Father Gerald and Riverside are relatively affluent districts. Most residents are employed and thus vacate the township during the daylight hours of the week, leaving their appliance-filled homes vulnerable to burglary. Batswana, Extension Eight and Extension Six are far poorer, and carry the burden of high unemployment levels and high volumes of liquor consumption. Contact crimes, ranging from street robberies to a steady stream of domestic violence complaints, are high.

Targeted patrols
Kagiso’s Sector 4 was undoubtedly the most impressively policed of the West Rand policing sectors studied. There are several reasons for this, some regarding the nature of the sector’s social geography and crime patterns, others regarding the eagerness with which police officers have taken to problem-solving, and to the more intimate relationship with civilians that sector policing has brought in its wake.

The first indication of the sector’s level of competence is the character of its patrol patterns. The sector has entirely eliminated random patrolling. It is no exaggeration to say that each minute of every shift during the periods in which the patrol was not responding to a complaint was spent in carefully delineated hotspots, the tasks and activities of each member goal-oriented and planned. For instance, the most common crime committed on weekday mornings is residential burglary in the districts of Father Gerald and Riverview. Every week, the sector manager requests an updated burglary-plotting map from the SAPS’ Crime Information and Analysis Centre, and marks the addresses, streets and blocks most prone to repeat victimisation. Morning patrols concentrate on these identified hotspots, and they are policed aggressively. Idling cars are pulled over and searched. Pedestrians carrying bags are stopped and searched. Houses with inadequate security are noted and the sector manager allot a time in her diary to visit the owner. The addresses of houses that appear to be vacant are noted. Neighbours are questioned about whether anyone lives there. If the house has been repossessed by a bank, the bank is contacted and encouraged either to sell the property or to employ a security guard. Occasionally, the officers leave their vehicle and conduct foot patrols on vacant pieces of veld in the vicinity of hotspots. In the hotspots themselves, the officers open each municipal dustbin on the street to see whether it is being used as a temporary repository for stolen goods. The patrol repeats these procedures two or three times a morning.

Another example of a weekday morning crime: the sector manager is aware of three discrete spots in her sector used by vehicle thieves to deposit cars stolen from the CBD and suburbs of Krugersdorp. She is aware that stolen cars are never deposited there for longer than a couple of hours; the thieves leave the cars for a while in the event that they are fitted with trackers, and then come back to retrieve them. She is also aware that of the stolen cars found at these three points in the last year; more than 90% are Volkswagen Golfs and Polos. So, the three points are patrolled every couple of hours. All Golfs and Polos spotted in the sector have their licence plates radioed to the control room to check whether they are stolen. The sector’s informer network is asked why only two models of stolen vehicles are brought into the sector. Are these vehicles feeding a single market? Are they stripped somewhere inside the sector or taken elsewhere?

A third morning activity: SCF members have informed the sector manager that a house in Sector 4 is being used as a brothel and drug retail centre. The house is visited in the mid-morning, while its occupants are still asleep. It is searched for drugs and firearms, two teenaged girls are asked for the names and addresses of their parents. The sector manager makes a note to check out the title deed and contact the owner.

A new crime trend had recently been identified in Sector 4 – a spate of armed house robberies, conducted between seven and ten in the evenings, around Extension Eight. The modus operandi in each case is much the same. The perpetrators enter the sector on foot, hold the home owner up at gunpoint at his or her front door, load the victim’s car with household appliances, and make off in the direction of Kagiso Avenue. As with house burglary, the sector
manager requests a crime map from the Crime Information and Analysis Centre, and tries to identify hotspots. She then identifies routes between the hotspots and Kagiso Avenue, and patrols the requisite areas between 7 and 10 in the evenings. Groups of young men entering Sector 4 on foot are stopped and searched for firearms. Vehicles leaving the sector are stopped and searched for firearms and stolen goods.

Late at night and in the early hours of the morning, especially on weekends, the biggest crime problems on the sector's streets are assault, robbery and armed robbery. The policing strategy here is simple and blunt – it is about taking guns and drunken people off the streets. The blocks around shebeens are patrolled intensively. Pedestrians are stopped indiscriminately and searched for guns. (On a Friday night, for instance, the patrol searches up to 20 pedestrians in the space of an hour). Anybody on the streets who is demonstrably drunk is arrested and spends the night in the station's police cells.

Each problem shebeen in the sector is profiled and each is policed differently according to its character. For instance, the shebeen in the area most closely associated with gun-related crimes was watched and profiled. The sector manager noted that most patrons come from outside the sector and arrive in cars, not on foot. The manager believes that raiding the shebeen is not the most effective way of dealing with the problem: a raid will merely disrupt trade for a few days after which business will return to normal. Instead, she targets patrons, rather than the shebeen owners, in an attempt to make their visit to the shebeen as unpleasant and dangerous as possible. The traffic department has been contacted and has agreed to conduct a one-person operation outside the shebeen every weekend evening over a three-week period. The driver of every car leaving the shebeen will be stopped, forced to undergo a breathalyser test, and his car searched. Inside the shebeen itself, every patron will be searched for firearms and every inebriated patron arrested. The idea is to scare away the shebeen's clientele, particularly those who carry firearms.

**From targeted patrols to problem-solving**

While the targeted patrols described above are performed with admirable efficiency, they are seldom performed with enthusiasm, for two reasons. First, they are repetitive, routine and boring. Second, while they do net results, they nonetheless constitute a blunt and labour-intensive method of policing crimes. The Sector 4 patrol officers are acutely aware that there is a world of difference between the broad-brushstroke activity of identifying and patrolling geographic hotspots, and the far more nuanced and difficult endeavour of identifying the situational causes of micro crime patterns. The sector manager thus constantly attempts to dissolve her hotspots into smaller patterns, each attached to a situational cause. She is sometimes successful, sometimes not. In regard to residential burglary in Father Gerald, for instance, the sector has been unable to get beyond the routine task of identifying repeat victims. But in other instances, the sector has managed to transcend the mere mapping of hotspots, identified simple problems and executed simple solutions. Here are two examples.

In mid-2004, a street on the western boundary of Sector 4 experienced a spate of house burglaries. Sector patrol officers interviewed every home owner on the street, all those who used the street during the day, and the sector’s informers. They discovered that a single group was responsible for the spate of burglaries. Two men would spend several hours of each day concealed behind a wall at the end of the street and watch to see when residents left their houses. They would make a cell phone call, would be joined half an hour or so later by a red bakkie, break into an empty house and load the bakkie with stolen goods. Ownership of the bakkie was traced to a resident of Swanville, a settlement adjacent to Sector 4. The owner was found and questioned. The residents of the street were called to a meeting, informed of the group's modus operandi and formed into a street watch. Every time a resident planned to leave her house empty for longer than a couple of hours, she would contact the street watch and her house would be scouted intermittently. The street watch was also instructed to phone sector officers on their dedicated cell phone whenever strangers were seen lingering in the vicinity of the street. Since these measures were taken, house burglaries on the street have ceased.

In another example, the sector identified a pedestrian passageway on which people were repeatedly robbed. Sector patrol officers surmised that the perpetrators were among three groups that regularly held dice games in the streets around the passageway. They periodically broke up groups of gamblers and arrested them on petty offences, but they knew that this was more of a cat-and-mouse game than a lasting solution. They believed that the best course of action would be to link specific gamblers to specific crimes. They profiled four or five gamblers, collected all the dockets of robberies committed in the passageway and re-interviewed all complainants. Through this process, charges were laid against four of the people they had profiled and all were convicted.
These examples of problem-solving are neither complex nor demand a great deal of intellectual labour. They are the product, more than anything else, of perseverance and hard work. In the context of a one-year-old policing sector, though, they are impressive. Points on the sector map previously marked in red as hotspots, to be patrolled repetitively and aggressively, have been replaced by the identification of specific problems with specific causes. The more a sector can substitute problem-solving for targeted patrolling, the better its work.

The sector’s capacity to identify and solve problems is greatly assisted by the fact that its SCF is well attended, active, and voluble. More often than not, the SCF is adept at identifying environmental and situation causes of crimes to be attended to by state agencies other than the police. For instance, the SCF identified the fact that the maintenance of street lights in the sector was poor. The municipality’s infrastructure department was invited to attend the following SCF meeting. A cell phone number was distributed to all residents in the sector to report street lights out of order. The municipality undertook to respond to every complaint within a week.

SCF members argued persistently during the course of 2004 that the recurring problem of rapes and robberies in alleyways and pedestrian paths would be best resolved by environmental design rather than police patrols. The SCF drew up draft plans for the creation of small, enclosed municipal parks in the areas around alleyways, thus closing off crime-prone thoroughfares. The municipality was slow to respond to the plans. The problem was taken to SAPS Area office, which undertook to enter into negotiations with Mogale City.

The SCF has also undertaken to keep a register of unoccupied houses in the sector and to earmark those that have been vandalised for immediate attention. The register is delivered to the appropriate ward councillor, who is responsible for tracking and contacting the relevant title deed holders.

Qualitative changes in the nature of complaints and routine police activities

One of the most significant changes to have occurred as a result of the introduction of sector policing is perhaps best observed during downtime – quiet times when violent and predatory crime complaints are few and sector police are conducting routine patrols. Take, for instance, a one-hour period early on a Wednesday morning. At 7:30am, a call comes over the radio that a group of boys is vandalising a public phone on Kagiso Avenue. An old man is threatening to shoot them. The patrol van arrives on the scene two or three minutes later. In the event, no vandalism is taking place – just an ugly altercation. The youngsters are herded into the back of the van and driven to their primary school. The patrol officers phone their parents from the principal’s office to tell them what their kids have been up to instead of going to school.

At 8:15, the patrol gets a call on its sector cell phone from the principal at a local high school. The patrol is at his office six or seven minutes later. He says there is a sweets vendor operating from a caravan on the public road behind the school whom he suspects is selling drugs to his students. The patrol officers stroll across the school grounds, walk around the back of the caravan, and take the vendor by surprise. They search him, the caravan and his merchandise and find no drugs. They get him to sign a written undertaking to move his caravan into his front yard, several blocks away, within 48 hours.

Half an hour later, the patrol comes across a teenaged boy crossing the road with a large prefab wall strung across his shoulders. They stop him, ask where he got the sheet, make him accompany them to the site where he found it. Their concern is not merely that he stole it, but that there might be a vacant property in their sector which they are not aware of.

Kagiso police may have received these kinds of complaints before the introduction of sector policing. But with a single response vehicle covering the entire township, it is unlikely that they had the time or the inclination to respond to them. In other words, the better the police service gets, and the closer to their clients police officers become, the more they will be called upon to police quality of life complaints, emerging crises, micro conflicts, and risk factors identified by civilians.

Kagiso Sector 4 patrol officers took to this sort of work both with enthusiasm and with a great deal of emotion. Officers were quick to sense that their formal policing tools were too blunt to deal adequately with complex interpersonal problems; they became lay-counsellors, instructors in civil law, financial advisors, and, at times, disciplinarians. In other words, they defined their role as police officers broadly, rather than narrowly. Their conduct reflected their belief that crime reduction and law enforcement are just the beginning, rather than the whole of their vocation. They viewed complaints as problems to be solved, whether or not the complaint involved the commission of a crime.
Sector policing on the West Rand – Three Case Studies

Whether this sort of work leads to a reduction in crime, or just a style of policing too invasive of privacy, is a point that has been debated since the inception of criminology and is unlikely ever to be resolved. But there can be little doubt that it is new in a context like Kagiso. In the history of South African township policing, the simplest, most rudimentary function of police work has never been adequately present: the guaranteed presence of a force vested with the authority to provide solutions to emerging crises – all and any crises. As simple and mundane as this function is, it is also more or less new in townships like Kagiso. Its contribution to wellbeing can never be adequately measured, but its existence is surely invaluable.

Sector policing, it was noted in Chapter One, emerged in the early 1970s as one among a host of experiments to address a crisis in American policing. Police leaders and scholars had gone right back to basics and asked what it is that the police do to reduce crime. COP, POP, risk factor identification and targeted patrols were four answers. There is a fifth answer. It is, simply, that the primary functions police perform have very little to do with preventing crime or enforcing law, and never will.

This position has been eloquently stated by the sociologist Egon Bittner. He argues that the vocation of the police is neither to prevent crimes nor to apprehend those who have committed them. Rather, their vocation is to intervene in and provide provisional solutions to emergencies – any emergencies whatsoever, whether or not they involve lawbreaking. Whether it is to pull a drowning person out of the water, to prevent someone from jumping off the roof of a building, to save people in a burning structure, or, indeed, to respond to a robbery in progress, the role of the police is to respond immediately to any situation “as long as it could be said that it involved something that ought not to be happening about which someone had better do something now!”

Indeed, Bittner argues, to the extent that the police use their powers of law enforcement, such as making an arrest, they only do so tactically and instrumentally, to carry out their true vocation, which is “to handle the situation”:

While it does happen occasionally that patrolmen arrest some person merely because they have probable cause to believe that he has committed crimes, this is not the way all but a small fraction of arrests come about. In the typical case the formal charge justifies the arrest a patrolman makes but is not the reason for it. The actual reason is located in a domain of considerations ... referred as the need to 'handle the situation,' and invoking the law is merely a device whereby this is sometimes accomplished.