

# Children Bring Park Back to Life with a Homemade Touch

## Community Safety Bureau Tokyo Metropolitan Police Department

### I. Summary

Parks are essentially meant for the local community, and are also important public facilities for providing greenery and evacuation areas in case of natural disasters. In recent years, however, they have become the source of anxiety for local residents due to problems such as graffiti on park facilities, homeless people taking over space, and delinquent youth trespassing and loitering.

According to survey results, blind spots in public facilities and breach of manners are factors that cause concern for local citizens.

As an example of how such a situation was amended, I would like to introduce the environmental improvement project, implemented since 2008, at Kirigaoka Central Park in Kita City, Tokyo.

Kirigaoka Central Park suffered from problems such as the following:

- Unkept and overgrown trees, poor lighting, trash and litter scattered everywhere, and many blind spots preferred by criminals.
- Drunken people singing karaoke in the middle of the day.
- Delinquent youth using the park as a hangout at night.

The park conditions were so poor that the nearby Kirigaokasato Elementary School prohibited their students from entering the park property. Not only was it considered a dangerous area to play in, but also forbidden to pass through on the way to and from school. It was a park at the center of the residential area, yet children could not play there and women were too afraid to pass through there alone. Nevertheless, this restricted park was equipped with a variety of play equipment on ample space, which are conditions perfect for children to play in, and residents of the neighborhood wished for the park to return to a playground which children can safely play in, worry-free.

The Crime Prevention Activity Advisors\*<sup>1</sup> and School Supporter\*<sup>2</sup> were assigned in April

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\*<sup>1</sup> Retired police officers involved in facilitation of voluntary crime prevention activities by the local citizens, as well as in maintenance and improvement of the conditions of the community's crime prevention environment.

\*<sup>2</sup> Retired police officers involved in juvenile delinquency prevention and security countermeasures for children at schools and within the community.

2008 to the Akabane Police Station based on the desperate wishes of the local citizens. Their facilitation as coordinators of the smooth collaboration between local citizens, schools, Kita City and the Tokyo Metropolitan Government led to the revitalization of management activities by the local residents, as well as the rebirth of a park into a site where people mingle, with communication and interaction between children and the elderly alike.

This activity has since caused much impact through media attention, and its effects have also spread to the nearby elementary school.

Currently, environmental clean-up projects, beginning with graffiti removal and garden making, have been started at many elementary schools in Tokyo, including the obvious Akabane Police Station precinct. For each of these projects, “awareness of social norms” is further developed, and “bonds within the community” are formed. The number of times the activities associated with these projects took place rose up to 7,468 times by the end of 2011.

## II. Description

### A. Scanning

#### 1. Identification of park-related problems (Sampling of complaints)

Parks are meant for the local community. They are also significant from the aspect of taking action to reduce carbon dioxide through afforestation, and in providing disaster-prevention facilities as evacuation areas in case of natural disasters. In recent years, however, there are many issues that contribute to anxiety and concern of local citizens. These issues include incidence of crime taking advantage of blind spots on park property, graffiti and vandalism of park facilities, and even though they may not result in criminal activity, young people hanging out.

The number of complaints made concerning Kirigaoka Central Park, and the number of cases of juvenile guidance in police custody were therefore sampled for examination.

##### a. Sampling of number of complaints made concerning Kirigaoka Central Park

In 2007, there were as many as 34 cases\*<sup>3</sup> of complaints made to Kita City. The contents of those complaints were regarding:

“Trees and other greenery” ..... 9 cases

“Public restrooms and other water supply systems”; “Request for pest insect extermination”; “Other equipment and facilities” ..... 6 cases each

“Play equipment”; “Damage by crows” ..... 3 cases each

“Homeless people” ..... 1 case.

The complaints regarding trees and other greenery were the highest, accounting for approximately 27 % of the total number of complaints. Among them the request for pruning of the trees was as many as 7 cases. From these results it can be seen that citizens desire the alleviation of their anxiety regarding blind spots. Moreover, there was also an opinion that not enough trash cans are available to handle the problem of littering. Overall, there are many voices demanding improvement in aesthetics of the park.

b. Sampling of number of cases of juvenile guidance in police custody

Among those that fall under crime-inducing public nuisances are incidents of juvenile guidance in police custody.

It is not a serious crime for juveniles to be taken into police custody for guidance. Still, if left alone, it may escalate and has the risk of leading to a serious crime someday. Moreover, young people hanging out is itself pointed out as a source of anxiety and concern for residents in Kita City. Within the year in 2007, there were 34 cases of late night prowls\*<sup>4</sup> and 9 cases of smoking reported by police officers.

Of course, these are only numbers of incidents discovered by police officers, and there is no doubt that latent delinquency is far more than the numbers indicate.

Overall, upon consideration of the requests for improvement of park aesthetics voiced toward Kita City and the number of cases of juvenile guidance, one can see that Kirigaoka Central Park is a park with more than enough aspects which contribute to the anxiety and

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\*<sup>3</sup> Manual tabulation of archived resources, Kita City.

\*<sup>4</sup> Act of loitering on the streets after 11 pm without a legitimate reason.

concern of citizens.

As is often the case with these common types of situations, problems that often exist are those which everyone wants improvement, although the problems stem into various fields for which each is handled by a different section. Nevertheless, a coordinator acting as a go-between is absent, requiring much time and effort in order to resolve the roots of the problems. It means that there is no one who volunteers for this role.

## 2. Historical background

The number of recognized criminal cases within Tokyo has declined since its peak of 310,000 cases in 2002, and recovery is expected index-wise; however, when it comes to the perception of community safety, it cannot be clearly said that it is improving.

The decreased “awareness of social norms” and weakened “bonds within the community” are cited as causes of this uncertainty in perception of community safety.

At the Ministerial Meeting concerning Measures against Crime, chaired by the Prime Minister of Japan, “Action Plan for the Realization of a Society Resistant to Crime 2008” was established. This prompted law enforcement to work on “improvement in awareness of social norms” which would have people deal with even the slightest breach of discipline, and “rejuvenation of the bond of the local community” which fosters a sense of community.

## 3. Why the Crime Prevention Activity Advisors and the School Supporter became coordinators

The Tokyo Metropolitan Government selected 5 locations in 2007 and 5 locations in 2008 for a total of 10 locations to implement the “Community Crime Prevention Model Project.” This was an effort to fund projects that were aimed at improving crime prevention in the community and decreasing the amount of crime. These crime prevention and environmental improvement projects were carried out by each city and neighborhood association. Kita City, where Kirigaoka Central Park is located, was selected as a case study district in 2008. In order to support this model project, the Tokyo Metropolitan

Police Department (TMPD) assigned two Crime Prevention Activity Advisors and one School Supporter, all of whom were formerly police officers, to the Akabane Police Station.

While they examined the conditions of the community, they realized the existence of a desolate park and the desperate wishes of local citizens. They set out to discuss the matter with Kita City, and that is how this project began. Since then, as the coordinators, they worked on the project collaboratively.

Currently, the TMPD assigns Crime Prevention Activity Advisors to all of its police stations. Through the support of environmental clean-up activities and others, with local citizens acting as the main body, the TMPD is working on activities that encourage “improvement in awareness of social norms” and “rejuvenation of the bond of the local community.” This project was indeed a model case which triggered these efforts.

## B. Analysis

Analysis concerning safety of the park is extremely difficult. This is because immediate results cannot be expected of crime prevention countermeasures; they require years of effort leading up to positive results. Even if some results can be seen at one point, those are not permanent effects, and it must be maintained through consistent and persistent efforts.

Prior to carrying out this project, local citizens as well as representatives from Kirigaokasato Elementary School, Crisis Management of the Kita City Hall, Public Safety Bureau of the Tokyo Metropolitan Government, and two Crime Prevention Activity Advisors and one School Supporter of the Akabane Police Station had a discussion. After a thorough discussion in order to restore the safety of this park, the effort began once a unanimous consensus was reached for all of the relative organizations to participate in the activities to completely turn the park around into a born-again facility.

First, they decided on improving watchfulness through preparation of flowerbeds in the open space which was formerly covered in weed.

There are many people who think of flowers as something to look at for enjoyment. If that were true, then where there are beautiful flowers, people's attention can be focused as well. Moreover, due to the need for care such as watering of these flowers, heightened watchfulness can also be expected. In Nerima City, Tokyo, as a result of giving away 10,000 pots of flowers and increasing crime prevention patrols since 2005, the number of recognized cases of burglary, such as theft while residents are absent, decreased in 2008 to a third of the number of cases in 2003. Another example is in Kita Town of Nigata City, Nigata Prefecture, illegal dumping of waste is prevented by placement of surveillance cameras, signs, and flowerbeds in areas where dumping of industrial waste used to be a problem. According to the staff of the aforementioned town, "Flowerbeds and surveillance cameras were equally effective."

### C. Response

#### 1. Contents of the effort

Pruning of trees, graffiti clean-up, mural painting, maintenance of the garden and others were carried out, and its fees were to be covered by funds from the Tokyo Metropolitan Government in order to continue the aesthetic improvements.

#### 2. Work outline

All four bodies – the police, the community, the school, and the Kita City Hall – worked as one for this project.

- The police
  - Liaison and coordination by the Crime Prevention Activity Advisors and the School Supporter
  - Patrol activity
- The community
  - Solidarity of the neighborhood association and senior citizens club
  - Organization of the Kirigaoka 1-chome Flower Appreciation Club and its activity

- The school
  - Graffiti clean-up and mural painting
  - Flowerbed planting
  - Organization of a team within the PTA
- The Kita City Hall
  - Pruning of trees
  - Park maintenance
- Work timeline
  - May 2008: Pruning of trees
  - November – December 2008: Clean-up of graffiti on benches, and mural painting (by third- and fourth-grade elementary school students) as part of a class lesson

With graffiti clean-up and mural painting, chemicals used for the removal of graffiti, and type of paint used for mural painting must be selected depending on the condition of the graffiti and the wall surface material. Furthermore, in order to deal with the issue of toxic substance in paints, the work was overseen by a painting contractor. The site was inspected by the painting contractor, and the clean-up and painting was done under supervision and guidance of the professionals.

- March and May 2009: Maintenance of the flowerbeds (by local citizens and elementary school students)

The newspapers picked up this project in their articles<sup>\*5,\*6</sup>, catching a lot of attention, thus further spurring the enthusiasm of the project.

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\*5 “Makeover for Graffiti Park” [*Rakugaki-koen, Kesho-naoshi*], Asahi Shimbun (11/28/2008)

\*6 “‘Scary’ Park Clears Name – Restored by Murals” [“*Kowai*” *Koen Henjo Hekiga de Saisei*], Tokyo Shimbun (12/16/2008)

#### D. Assessment

In this case study, by acting on the issues arising from complaints made regarding the park, with Crime Prevention Activity Advisors and School Supporter working as coordinators, and each organization concerned collaboratively fulfilling their roles, Kirigaoka Central Park was born again into a park where people can actually relax. The once-lost park aesthetics was restored by maintenance of the park such as pruning of trees, graffiti clean-up, mural painting, maintenance of the garden and others, and safety was ensured through implementation of patrols and neighborhood watch by the police, the community, the school, and the city hall working as one. Numbers in cases of crime and juvenile guidance dropped drastically, the elderly and children gathered, and a sense of unity and community bonds emerged, indicating a marked improvement in the previously lacking “regional identity and watchfulness”.

##### 1. Incidence of crime

“Transition in the number of cases of designated major crimes and juvenile guidance in police custody for each region within the Kirigaoka District”

- Designated major crimes\*<sup>7</sup>

Compared to 14 cases in 2007:

8 cases in 2008, 2 cases in 2009, 5 cases in 2010, 6 cases in 2011

- Number of cases of juvenile guidance in police custody

Compared to 43 cases in 2007:

3 cases in 2008, 6 cases in 2009, 15 cases in 2010, 12 cases in 2011

For each result, the number of cases has declined significantly compared to the year 2007.

##### 2. Changes in awareness and attitude of the participants

The project developed into one involving the entire community. Synergistic effects presented themselves, such as the organization of a Kirigaoka 1-chome Flower Appreciation Club by a group of volunteer citizens. The community was pulled into the

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\*<sup>7</sup> Number of cases of robbery, purse snatching, burglary theft, motor vehicle theft, vehicle load theft, sex crimes (rape, indecent assault), and crimes against children.

movement by watching the children working hard. On this project surpassing the generations, in collaboration with the children, the citizens have stated, “The never-before experienced interaction with the children lifted our spirits, and we were able to actively work on this project.”

a. Awareness of the local residents

The chairman of the neighborhood association, who acted as a leader on this project, stated: “About this park, not worthy of any attention up until recently, the residents started to let me know information such as, ‘There is a suspicious person in the park.’ I, myself, have become more concerned and began checking for graffiti every morning.” This demonstrates how the level of awareness has dramatically changed for the residents and others who have participated in this project, as well as how the overall awareness in crime prevention has risen within the community.

Furthermore, I would like to share the words spoken by the Town Chairman at a round-table discussion of the police station which carried out the building of a beautiful community preventing the occurrence of crime.

“At first, I was doubtful whether it can really be done, but due to the sympathetic effort and dedicated support of the Crime Prevention Activity Advisors and the School Supporter, I felt, ‘If we do not work hard on our own home town, then who will?’ By working on this project with that feeling in our hearts, the park has turned around into a haven for everyone, and I am grateful. Thank you so much.”

b. Awareness of the children

The principal of the elementary school said, “Through this project, it seems that love of one’s homeland, love of one’s community have emerged among the children, prompting them to clean up the city that they live in. Things have changed dramatically.” After the project was launched, a child who had participated in the project immediately notified the principal when there was a small graffiti, and they were able to take care of it right away. According to the principal, “There was nothing like this before. I have realized that the

children, through the activities with the local people, have apparently grown so much as a person.” Through the project, the principal feels that the children have grown up. Recently, there are various youth problems reported, but since this countermeasure is led by law enforcement, it has also become an opportunity for redirection of delinquent juveniles through participation of those youth who have gone in the wrong direction of delinquency such as “shoplifting,” and those youth who have vandalized property with graffiti. Thus, from the perspective of juvenile delinquency prevention and sound development, it can also be said that it is a project with a grand purpose.

3. Further development of the awareness of social norms and rejuvenation of the bond

An excerpt from the introduction of “Action Plan for the Realization of a Society Resistant to Crime 2008” states:

“In order to realize a society where people can live safely and securely, it is not enough to just reduce the total number of crimes. It is time to step forward to build a society where people can live in mutual trust. In local communities, occasional gatherings where the members work together are good opportunities to think about mutual relations. Social ties in local communities would be strengthened, and mutual confidence would be fostered. We believe comprehensive promotion of the various measures mentioned above will move us forward to this kind of mutual confidence and will largely improve the safety and security of our society.”

It can be assessed that the effort mentioned in this quote has successfully been implemented.

III. Agency and Officer Information:

• Key Project Team Members:

Crime Prevention Activity Advisors, Akabane Police Station

Police Officer, retired      Kazumi ABE

Police Officer, retired      Yasuo IMADA

School Supporter, Akabane Police Station

Police Officer, retired Mitsuo WATANABE

- Project Contact Person:

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Appendix I. Types of Complaints

Data collected by Kita City Crisis Management Section  
Number of cases from April 2007 to the end of the year; counting and tabulation by hand

Classification	Number of Cases	Specific examples
Trees & other greenery	9	Please prune the cedar trees on the north side of the park, near the Tokyo public housing complex, Building N25.
Public restrooms and other water supply systems	6	Clogging of the men's public restroom in the North A welfare building.
Request for pest insect extermination	6	There are tea tussock moths (poisonous moths whose larvae prefer leaves of camellias) on the <i>Camellia japonica</i> and <i>Camellia sasanqua</i> . Please get rid of them.
Other equipment and facilities	6	The back of the storage on the east side of the public restroom is getting old, so please repair it.
Play equipment	3	Two swings at the north end of the park are broken.
Damage by crows	3	Please remove the crow's nest on the tree on the south side of the pool.
Homeless people	1	There is a man in his 50s to 60s lying down on the south bench. (Later found to be a homeless person in the park.)

Appendix II. Transition in the number of cases of designated major crimes and juvenile guidance in police custody for each region within the Kirigaoka District

A. Designated major crimes: Transitions over recent years

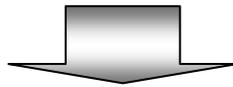
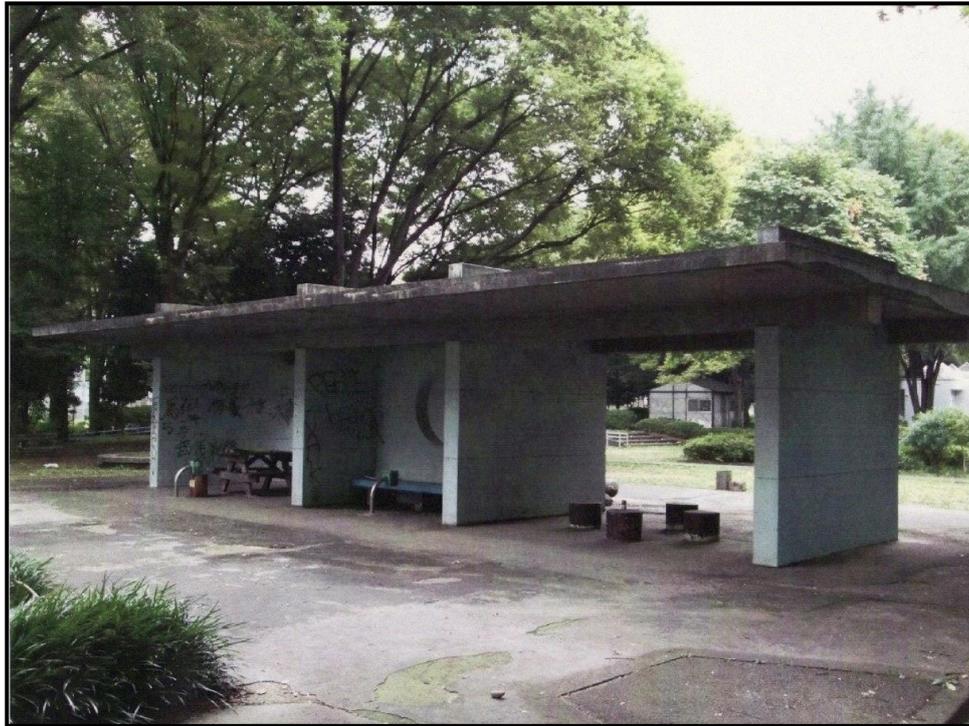
Before the project (2007)	After the project →	2008	2009	2010	2011
14		8	2	5	6

B. Number of cases of juvenile guidance in police custody: Transitions over recent years

Before the project (2007)	After the project →	2008	2009	2010	2011
43		3	6	15	12

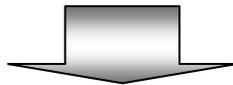
Appendix III.

Before and after images of Kirigaoka Central Park



Appendix IV.

Before and after images of Kirigaoka Central Park



Appendix V.

Before and after images of Kirigaoka Central Park

