Dallas Police Department

Southwest Operations Division Interactive Community Policing Unit

Application for the 1997 Herman Goldstein Award for Excellence in Problem Oriented Policing

Abstract

A Look at Graffiti Abatement in Southwest Dallas

A. Scanning

1. <u>What was the nature of the problem</u>? Gangs and Graffiti in the Oak Cliff community of Dallas, Texas.

2. <u>How was the problem identified</u>? Graffiti by its very nature is very visible to the community. Citizen calls to report graffiti locations reinforced the existence of the problem. Patrol and ICP Officers, due to their day to day presence in the community, became well aware of the growing graffiti problem.

3. <u>Who identified the problem</u>? Citizen and neighborhood groups became increasingly concerned with the rapidly escalating appearance of graffiti on neighborhood walls, fences, buildings and even vehicles.

4. <u>How and why was this problem selected from among other problems</u>? The appearance of graffiti affects the entire community environment It affects community perceptions, economic growth and development along with decreasing neighborhood property values and tax base. The presence of graffiti encourages deviant behavior and increased criminal gang activity.

5. <u>What was the initial level of diagnosis</u>? The community began to see a proliferation of the graffiti in a particular section of the Oak Cliff community. The Northern Oak Cliff area began to see a rise in the number and activity of "geographic gangs". These gangs are more interested in acquiring and holding onto a specific area. They engage in crimes such as auto theft, vandalism and burglaries.

B. Analysis:

1. <u>What methods, data and information sources were used to analyze the problem</u>?

   - Community Meetings
   - Neighborhood Surveys
   - Meetings with Other Agencies
   - Statistical Crime Analysis

- Elected Officials
- Direct Observation

- Calls for Service
- Direct Citizen Complaints

2. <u>History: How often and for how long was this a problem</u>? Since the major onset or "revival" of juvenile gangs in the United States, in the middle to early 1980's, graffiti has been an ongoing problem for every major metropolitan city. Nationally, each year, we spend several billion dollars on graffiti abatement. Until Community Policing was established, Dallas viewed each graffiti location as a separate and individual incident and they were summarily handled as such.

3. <u>What harms resulted from the problem</u>? As with all graffiti, the initial loss occurs in the form of monetary damage done to the structure. These costs include but are not limited to those incurred by the necessity for painting, soda/sand blasting, structure replacement and worker-hours. The damage created by graffiti goes much deeper than actual monetary loss. Graffiti is a constant reminder of potential violence and fosters the loss of a communities' sense of security and tranquility. Graffiti causes an emotional loss in an affected area much greater than that which can be measured monetarily.

4. <u>Who was involved in the problem and what were their respective motivations, gains and losses</u>? Juvenile gangs, "taggers" and independent youth perpetrators are the sole cause of the graffiti. They have several motives including territorial claims, statements, general vandalism and impromptu murals.

5. <u>Assets: What resources were available to help solve the problem</u>? With ICP's close knit interaction with the community, officers were able to enlist not only the assistance of the various governmental agencies in the area, but also the numerous crime watches, neighborhood associations, community groups, corporate volunteers and court ordered restitution workers.

6. <u>Existing Procedures: What procedure or legislation existed to help address this problem</u>? The Texas Penal Code's Criminal Mischief statute provided the vehicle used to prosecute offenders, however no "Municipal Graffiti Abatement" procedures were in place.

7. <u>In what ways were citizens involved in the analysis of your problem</u>? Citizen observations were of paramount concern to the ICP Unit and provided much needed intelligence as to the gang activity and graffiti locations. At various community meetings citizens' opinions, suggestions and suspect information were gathered. This information was analyzed and used in the forthcoming abatement programs.

1. <u>What responses did you use to address your problem?</u>

    - Collaborating with Other Government Agencies

    - Collaborating with Private Agencies

    - Mobilizing the Community

    - Targeting problem Locations

    - Targeting Those Most Affected

    - Targeting Those Most Responsible

2. <u>What were you intending to accomplish with your response plan</u>? The intentions of the ICP Unit were multifaceted. The primary desire was to reduce the problem of graffiti in the Oak Cliff area. The second and possibly the most needed accomplishment was the mobilization of the community. Officers felt that if they were able to successfully mobilize the community for this cause, they would also be able to do the same in other situations of greater magnitude.

3. <u>What difficulties were encountered during response implementation</u>? Minor difficulties included allocation of the necessary materials, coordinating optimum work time with community volunteers and eliciting the participation of the homeowners. Problems were incurred with the amount of time invested in surveillance and apprehension of offenders. The time spent versus the number of arrests made this cost prohibitive.

4. <u>What resources were available to help solve the problem</u>? ICP Officers turned to various organizations to assist in the graffiti problem. For Example:

    - Dallas County
      Restitution Center

    - Keep Dallas Beautiful

    - Dallas Morning News

    - Northrop/Grumman
      Corp.

    - People Helping People

    - Neighborhood
      Associations

    - Area Residents

    - Area Businesses

5. <u>How were citizens involved in the response to your problem</u>? At the core of the community-policing concept is the desire for the involvement of the citizens of the community. The idea in this instance was to educate the community as to what they should do when they were victimized by graffiti. The Gang Unit and the ICP Unit worked together to establish a flyer to educate and inform citizens on what they should do when they observe suspects committing an offense.

The citizens played a crucial role in the graffiti abatement program. They assisted in the reporting of the graffiti locations, suspects and gang activity. The ICP Unit would then follow up on this information by recording graffiti locations in the Unifs database. This database is then used to coordinate abatement efforts in the form *of paint-outs.*

ICP Officers would also follow up on suspect information by visiting the suspect and their family. The officer would explain the importance of making "good decisions" and the consequences of "bad judgement". This direct contact usually had a major impact on reducing repeat offenders.

Extra patrols using the Dallas Police Department[1] s Gang Unit, Patrol Officers and ICP Officers were used to further investigate reported gang activity.

Citizens and community groups were also organized into bi-monthly graffiti paint-outs and neighborhood cleanup programs. Supplies and equipment for these programs were obtained from a newly formed City of Dallas "Keep Dallas Beautiful" Unit.

Keep Dallas Beautiful coordinated volunteer groups and donated abatement supplies along with the use of four City of Dallas soda blasters used to clean graffiti from unpainted surfaces.

Community Police Officers also utilized the Dallas County Restitution Center to assist with abatement The D.C.R.C. brought persons who had been ordered by a Dallas County Criminal Court to make restitution for various crimes into the community on a weekly basis. The D.C.R.C. assisted in painting over 700 graffiti locations.

D. Assessment:

1. <u>What were the results</u>? The results of this ongoing operation have been twofold. The ICP Unit has seen great success in the overall reduction of gang graffiti in Oak Cliff along with an increase in public support of the community-policing concept Volunteer organizations from every part of town have come to the area to assist in removing the graffiti and to build relationships across social, ethnic and religious boundaries. Graffiti has been removed from over 1500 buildings, walls, fences and residences to date.

2. <u>What response goals were accomplished</u>? The graffiti abatement program goals were to remove graffiti, reduce its reoccurrence, apprehend suspects and improve the environmental conditions of Oak Cliff neighborhoods. These goals were not only met but were in fact surpassed as graffiti was removed from over 1500 locations. The simple act of rapidly removing the graffiti greatly reduced the number of repeat offenses. ICP, Gang, and Patrol Officers made numerous arrests for Criminal Mischief thanks in a great part to the involvement of concerned citizens.

3. <u>How could you have made your response plan more effective</u>? Graffiti is a symptom of a larger problem. That problem is the existence of juvenile gangs in today's society. With a coordinated effort on the part of agencies accustomed to providing help for dysfunctional families and youth affairs, the gang issue could possibly be better addressed, however it was incumbent upon the citizens and the Police Department to work together to stop the destruction of property.

4. <u>Was there a concern about displacement</u>? Officers and citizens realized eariy on that despite continued attention and efforts to involve citizens in the upkeep of their own property, there were some citizens that would not or could not participate. For those who chose not to remove graffiti from their own structures, the City of Dallas adopted an ordinance making it a crime to allow graffiti to remain on a structure after having received sufficient notice to remove it. The penalty for this Misdemeanor offense starts at $250 plus the incurred court costs and continues to rise for subsequent violations. The ICP Unit, Keep Dallas Beautiful and various volunteer groups assist elderly or ailing citizens by removing the graffiti at no cost

5. <u>Will your response require continued monitoring, or a continuing effort to maintain your results</u>? This graffiti abatement effort is a continuing show of police and community involvement in Southwest Dallas. Until juvenile gangs can be redirected or reduced in our community, there will be a need to remove the unsightly markings of their late night activities.

E. Agency and Officer Information:

1. <u>At what level of the police organization was this problem-solving initiative adopted</u>? Dallas Police Chief Ben Click noted that graffiti was a citywide problem. To combat this, one of the community oriented policing responsibilities is a coordination of graffiti abatement responses. Community leaders from Mayor Ron Kirk to neighborhood Crime Watch participants to citizens living in affected neighborhoods joined forces to remove graffiti from our buildings, walls, fences.and residences.

2. <u>Did officers or management receive any training in problem-oriented policing and/or problem solving before this project began or during its execution</u>? Officers of the ICP Unit had received twenty-four hours of classroom training on problem-oriented policing and Standard Operating Procedures and use this training on a daily basis. The Dallas Police Department has sent officers

to other community-oriented police training forums on both a local and national level.

3. <u>What guidelines and resources were used</u>? Th& Dallas Police Department uses its General Orders and Standard Operating Procedures along with the basic S A R A format for problem resolution. Guidelines were established for graffiti abatement projects to ensure the most effective use of resources and supplies. Resources used include paint and materials, community, civic and business volunteer groups and other city departments and work groups to assist in the graffiti abatement effort.

4. <u>Project contact person</u>:

<u>Name</u>: Randy R. Hampton

<u>Rank</u>: Deputy Chief

<u>Address</u>: 4230 W. Illinois Ave.

<u>City/State</u>: Dallas, Texas 75211

<u>Phone</u>: (214) 670-7464

<u>Fax</u>: (214) 670-7520

<u>E-mail</u>: N/A