

# DAY LABOR PROJECT

## A COMMUNITY'S RESPONSE TO THE PROBLEMS OF CASUAL LABORERS

GLENDALE POLICE DEPARTMENT, CALIFORNIA, 1997

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- THE PROBLEM:** Glendale, California, is a community of nearly 200,000 that has experienced years of problems related to the activities of casual laborers. In their search for work, these day laborers congregated on sidewalks and street comers, often creating a nuisance for both business owners and residents alike. Repeated traditional policing attempts to resolve these problems failed.
- ANALYSIS:** Glendale's Community Police PartnerShip (COPPS) team conducted a comprehensive survey. Residents and business owners complained of blocked sidewalks and the harassment of pedestrians by laborers waiting for work. Laborers used nearby buildings and parking lots as public bathrooms and left trash on the sidewalks, streets, and gutters. COPPS officers and concerned community members developed an all-encompassing plan designed to address the issue.
- RESPONSE:** With minimal public funds, a managed site was developed where laborers could secure employment in a safe and orderly environment. To complement the site a "No Solicitation" ordinance was enacted which required both laborers and employers to utilize the facility. Finally, a public education plan promoted the program throughout the community.
- ASSESSMENT:** Local residents and business owners are no longer subjected to the problems associated with the congregation of day laborers. Additionally, there has been a significant reduction in the number of incidents requiring attention from various City divisions such as police, fire, etc. This has resulted in a dramatic savings to the community.
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### SCANNING

Chief James Anthony introduced the Community Police PartnerShip (COPPS) philosophy to the Glendale Police Department in 1994. The initial community-policing unit consisted of one sergeant, two sworn officers, one non-sworn officer and one volunteer. The targeted service area consisted of one square mile.

During the initial phase of COPPS implementation, officers held strategy meetings to discuss ways of expanding community policing citywide. This strategic planning also included dialogue related to the types of problems that Community Lead Officers would address.

It was determined that targeted COPPS problems needed to be long term and recurring, created blight in the community and negatively influenced the quality of life in a given area. The

day labor issue was given immediate consideration in this regard and a strategic plan was put into place. In July of 1995, Community Lead Officers Javier Ruiz and Ron Gillman focused their problem solving efforts on the "unsolvable problem" of day laborers in the City of Glendale.

Day laborers are individuals who solicit employment on a daily, temporary basis. Most often they wait for employment on streets and sidewalks in commercial areas or in parking lots adjoining building or painting supply stores.

The problems associated with the congregation of day laborers had plagued the city for almost 25 years. It was a genuine community problem involving blight and quality of life issues for all concerned - residents, business owners, and even the laborers themselves.

During scanning efforts, COPPS officers recognized that a variety of problems occurred in areas in which day laborers assembled. These problems included "swarming" of vehicles at intersections resulting in traffic hazards and congestion, street and sidewalk obstruction, harassment of pedestrians and fighting among the laborers themselves. Theft, property damage, trash, excessive noise, public intoxication, gambling, prostitution, drugs, urination and defecation were also prevalent.

## **ANALYSIS**

The COPPS team who originated this program conducted a comprehensive survey before formulating a response. Every year tens of thousands of tax dollars were spent dealing with issues concerning day laborers. Requests for service involved not only the police, but also a variety of other city divisions such as fire and paramedic services, code enforcement, and the sanitation department. The resources of several other county, state, and federal social and governmental agencies were also utilized.

Due to these repeated calls for service and the corresponding evidence gathered by the COPPS team, it was not difficult to document the incredible negative impact and blight caused by day laborers in the areas in which they congregated.

Residents and business owners complained about the impediment of traffic as workers swarmed and scrambled into waiting vehicles. Sidewalks were blocked and pedestrians were often harassed. Laborers used nearby buildings and parking lots as public bathrooms and left trash on the sidewalks, streets, and gutters.

Community members were directly affected by the blight caused by the congregation of day laborers and were extremely vocal in their complaints. Officers met with community members on a regular basis throughout the process of developing the Day Labor Project.

It is important to note that the interests and welfare of the laborers were also considered in developing a solution to the problem. COPPS officers were committed to designing a comprehensive response that included day laborer participation and "buy-in" of the project. The day laborers' acceptance of the program was considered a crucial component necessary to ensure a successful resolution of the problem. Officers met with the laborers routinely to learn more about their perspective and stay abreast of their needs and concerns.

A male, immigrant population, characterizes the growing casual work force, which is the focus of the Day Labor Program. The majority are recent immigrants and refugees from Central or South America and Mexico. Additionally, there are migrant farm workers seeking an economic alternative in an urban work force.

Like all of us, day laborers want to work to provide basic necessities for themselves and their families. However, these individuals often lack English language skills, formal education, and in some cases legal documentation. For these reasons casual labor remains their sole employment option.

The nature of the day labor situation is such that, even when hired, day laborers usually make less than minimum wage and may work one or two days a week, if at all. They often do not receive their promised wages. There have even been incidents of felony assaults among the laborers themselves due to the fierce competition for jobs - experiencing "survival of the fittest."

Since many workers are recent immigrants and refugees, many are fearful of government officials, especially immigration officers, and are reluctant to sign any document. It was therefore very important to the success of the project for COPPS officers to form positive relationships with the laborers to gain their trust and cooperation.

Previous attempts to address the situation had been met with only temporary and limited success. Traditionally, police department efforts amounted to extra patrol in affected areas or the deployment of a special response team that would target a particular area for a certain amount of time.

However, since there were no laws prohibiting the solicitation of employment on city streets and sidewalks, the only recourse that remained was a reactive one—issuing citations for pedestrian jaywalking, littering, public intoxication, or making the occasional arrest for assault or drug possession. There was no plan to proactively address the root cause of the problem. As a result, when enforcement was redirected, the symptoms of the problems returned.

Other attempts to involve the private/social service sector were also complete failures. In one instance, Catholic Charities attempted to use one of their offices as a day labor center. However, the center's distance from any building supply stores and lack of incentive to use the facility doomed the project. The City of Glendale continued its search for a comprehensive approach to the day labor problem.

## **RESPONSE**

The main objective of the Day Labor Program was to develop, manage, and operate a fixed hiring site where prospective laborers could assemble to lawfully solicit temporary employment without causing problems for the surrounding community. Officers began by meeting with major social service providers such as The Salvation Army and Catholic Charities to discuss the feasibility of such a facility.

In a series of successful meetings, the team introduced a balanced, humane approach that would manage the congregation of laborers throughout the city. Catholic Charities expressed interest in managing such a program and becoming an active partner in the development of the center. As the largest social service provider in Glendale, Catholic Charities was already heavily involved with Glendale's Community Development Department. In addition, their staff was very familiar with the cultural and immigration issues of the laborers.

With one of the key partnerships established to ensure permanent resolution, COPPS officers and community members developed a program tailored to the needs of the community that would address the issue from a variety of perspectives.

As they devised a response plan, COPPS officers decided that several issues had to be addressed. First, the program had to be well balanced. The interests of the community had to be weighed equally with the interests of the workers. Laborers needed a safe, organized location to solicit work and benefit from social services as well.

Second, while the police and other city divisions needed to respond to community complaints, the political and legal issues involved were also major considerations. City officials were well aware of the potentially negative perception of involvement in the creation of a facility that might serve some undocumented workers. There was also the possibility of protests from community activists regarding perceived civil rights violations involved in the enactment of laws to make curbside solicitation illegal. Potential litigation because of the use of city property was also a concern.

Third, COPPS officers were cognizant of the fact that day laborer programs existed elsewhere with varying degrees of success. Officers sought to learn more about the successes and failures of other centers. Therefore, included in the response plan preparation were two visits to existing day labor sites in Southern California.

These site visits provided much needed insight into the development and implementation of a

project of this type, as well as an awareness of the serious drawbacks, which could result in the absence of a comprehensive program. Many ideas and experiences related during these visits were of great value to the formulation of Glendale's planned approach.

Finally, officers developed a response that provided a measure of dignity and services to the laborers and also solved a longstanding community problem. COPPS officers, in partnership with the community, proposed a five-step approach for solving the problems related to day laborers as follows:

1. **Locate a site for a facility.** A railroad easement across from the city's Home Depot store was identified for the facility. This location attracted the greatest number of day laborers due to the high demand for unskilled labor from the building supply store's customers. As a result, this area was also one of the most blighted areas of the community in terms of congregation of laborers. Conveniently, the identified location was available for lease from the Metropolitan Transit Authority (MTA).
2. **Site development.** The development would include a drive-up section, staff office, waiting area, access for the disabled, telephones, benches, shade awning and health and sanitary considerations such as fresh drinking water, rest rooms, hand washing areas and trash receptacles.
3. **Facility staffing.** The need for full-time staffing was evident. If the facility was left unsupervised, the same problems would exist there that existed on the streets. Workers staffing the site employed a lottery system, which ensured no laborer received preferential treatment. Laborers would be divided into areas of specialty skills - a plus for potential employers. Staff would assist workers with social services such as food, clothing, shelter assistance, immigration services, English classes, legal services, wage negotiation monitoring and a host of other quality of

life programs. In addition, staff would maintain records pertaining to the number of individuals hired, wages offered, and the number of contractors utilizing the facility.

4. **Create a new ordinance that would require laborers and employers to use the site.** Absent the authority of a municipal code section, laborers or employers would not be motivated to use the facility. The enactment of a municipal code would make both the solicitation and the offering of day labor employment, anywhere other than the facility, unlawful. The No Solicitation Zone in Glendale would cover all public and properly posted private places 24 hours a day. Employers or workers who refused to use the site would be subject to citation or arrest. Such an ordinance would ensure that workers used the facility, eliminating the sometimes-fierce competition for jobs and the "survival of the fittest" culture that had been evident on street corners (see illustration in appendix).
5. **Establish an outreach program.** An intensive education program would be put into effect. Employers and laborers would thereby be exposed to the benefits of using such a facility. Employers would learn that their labor pool would be divided according to specialties (painters, framers, plumbers, etc.). Laborers would be offered a safe, organized environment in which to solicit work and receive a variety of social services. Volunteers would be used for the outreach education plan.

COPPS officers were confident that this plan represented the best possible solution to the day labor issue. Alternate plans, which were considered, included the establishment of a "No Solicitation" ordinance without a fixed hiring site *Computer classes for day laborers while they wait* and the procurement of a day labor center without an ordinance. However, the COPPS team felt very strongly that if any one of their five proposed components were eliminated, the success of the project would be threatened.

The Day Labor Program is intended to provide a humane and dignified solution to an existing and very real social problem while offering a safe and clean environment for workers, away from city streets, sidewalks, and private parking lots. Hence, the main objective of the program was to develop, manage, and operate a fixed hiring site where prospective day laborers could seek temporary employment without creating a nuisance to the surrounding community.

The idea of a fixed, permanent location represented an alternative to the practice of "swarming." Through the establishment of a supervised day labor center, a more systematic approach to filling the mutual needs of potential employers and the casual work force in Glendale would be achieved. Problems arising from the solicitation of employment along city streets would be substantially decreased.

Throughout the development of this proposal, COPPS officers regularly met with a variety of community representatives prior to implementation of the Day Labor Program. These groups and individuals included Home Depot representatives, surrounding businesses, nearby residents, city officials, MTA, social service providers, community activists, and the laborers themselves. All sides of the issue were carefully considered.

A Day Labor Advisory Board was created to ensure the continued effectiveness of the community police partnerships, which were being formed. The Board membership included Home Depots Loss Prevention Manager and a paid political consultant who represented Home Depots corporate offices in Atlanta, Georgia. Local business owners and residents were also represented, as was Glendale's City Manager's Office, Community Development Division and Redevelopment Agency. Catholic Charities and The Salvation Army were also active participants.

Advisory Board meetings addressed the development of a long term, collaborative approach to the day labor issue. Prior to these meetings, the private sector felt the problem was the responsibility of the City, and City officials

felt it was a shared responsibility. The results of these meetings were as follows:

- ◆ It was decided that the only true solution to the day labor issue was a collaborative one involving business owners, residents, the city, police, and the private/social service sector.
- ◆ Home Depot would commit to construction materials for the facility and one staff position for five years if COPPS carried out a plan to address the day labor issue.
- ◆ The City would address the problem if there were significant private sector involvement, including a social service provider to administrate the program.
- ◆ Catholic Charities (a non-profit, non-sectarian organization) agreed to administer the program if COPPS could find funding for the site worker position(s).
- ◆ COPPS would be willing to proceed with the project plan if all entities present committed to honoring their offers.

Consensus was reached. All involved partners agreed that the proposal could successfully address the issue at hand, but there were no public funds available to begin the project. Construction costs were estimated at \$100,000. In order to eliminate the funding issue, COPPS wrote and received two grants for funding. A Facilities Development Grant was written in the amount of \$49,377. This was through Glendale's Community Development Block Grant allocation (CDBG). A second CDBG Grant was written for \$40,452 for staff and recurring costs.

Although the second grant request received only partial funding, with the assistance of the City Manager, the monies not funded by CDBG were replaced as a service level increase within the Community Development Department and then allocated to the Day Labor Project.

Home Depot supplied all of the building materials needed for construction of the center

as well as an office trailer. The total amount of their monetary contributions, including funding for a paid staff worker with benefits, exceeded \$50,000.

Working in cooperation with Catholic Charities, COPPS initiated the hiring process of a Day Labor Site Coordinator. This individual was managed by Catholic Charities, Glendale, and worked closely with COPPS officers on a daily basis.

The partnerships formed and developed during this project were very successful and long lasting. However, COPPS officers and involved community members had to work together to overcome a variety of obstacles along the way. In fact, there were difficulties encountered in almost every phase of the project.

For example, before they could proceed with their proposed plan, officers had to receive "buy-in" from all entities involved. Historically very conservative, members of City Council were understandably skeptical about the use of taxpayer money to deal with a problem considered unsolvable. There were also the legal and political concerns previously mentioned.

In meetings with Home Depot representatives, officers had to propose the program in terms of benefit to the community and increased sales for Home Depot. They demonstrated that investing in this partnership would not only solve the day labor problems in and around the store, but would also improve health and safety issues for their customers and the surrounding community. This ultimately resulted in the assignment of a paid political consultant who functioned as the liaison between Home Depot and COPPS in order to facilitate construction of the day labor center.

Of course, all parties involved were concerned about the substantial financial commitment involved in such a project. As indicated earlier, this problem was resolved through the grant funding previously mentioned. In addition, there were also numerous complications involving the lease agreement with MTA and the usual construction delays and cost overruns associated with any project of this size.

Any one of these obstacles could have derailed the project; however, COPPS and concerned community members were very resourceful and dedicated to the successful resolution of this issue. Today, after a year and a half of intensive work, a previously unmanageable problem has now been resolved.

## **ASSESSMENT**

After approximately one year of collaborative efforts between day laborers, COPPS officers and identified community partners, the success of this project has been overwhelming. After one year of evaluation, laborers are no longer congregating in various parts of the city. As originally intended, their activities are now confined to one managed location.

By design, the close relationship between COPPS officers and laborers has resulted in the laborers' voluntary compliance with the No Solicitation ordinance. Although the ordinance is available as a tool for noncompliant individuals, no enforcement action has been necessary to date.

The project's success can be documented by the positive feedback received from the community as well as statistics gathered by Catholic Charities and the Glendale Police Department's Crime Analysis Unit. All sources indicate that the Day Labor Program has dramatically improved the quality of life for day laborers, the surrounding community~ local business and has reduced the demands placed on emergency services.

The program could have been more effective with a broader marketing strategy in place prior to the opening of the center. The majority of education efforts were directed toward the laborers, with less emphasis on contractors, other employers, and the community at large. This resulted in some confusion regarding usage of the center and application of the ordinance.

In the past, statistics have shown that only 10% of day laborers received work while standing along curbside. One year later, our statistics have shown that on an average day the hiring rate of laborers has risen from 10% to approximately 80—100%. In addition, laborers

have taken advantage of the variety of social services offered at the center, including English language instruction, computer classes and classes related to immigration.

Local residents and business owners are no longer subjected to the problems associated with the congregation of day laborers. In addition, there has been a significant reduction in the number of incidents requiring attention from various City divisions such as police, fire, etc. This has resulted in a dramatic savings to the community.

In regards to displacement, COPPS officers were not concerned with displacing the problem elsewhere. On the contrary, officers anticipated that a successful resolution of this problem could increase the number of laborers coming to the city since they were more apt to find work. Therefore, COPPS met with representatives from other communities to assist them in the development of their own day labor centers.

In order to ensure the continued success of this project and the adherence to the rules and procedures established for operation of the center, the Advisory Board was tasked with monitoring its day-to-day operation and facilitating our education and outreach program efforts. COPPS officers continue to nurture the partnerships created with the various entities throughout the community to ensure that their commitment to the success of the center continues.

### **FOR MORE INFORMATION**

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### **NOTES**

1. The problems associated with the congregation of day laborers in and around large building supply stores in the City of Glendale had impacted our community on a citywide basis for over 25 years. Attempts to deal with this

growing problem by both police and city government had all resulted in failure, and the problem was subsequently labeled "unsolvable."

2. In 1994, Police Chief James Anthony introduced community policing to the City of Glendale and assigned a small cadre of officers to bring his vision of community policing to fruition. As a result, two line level officers assigned to the COPPS team accepted the challenge of developing a long-term resolution to the day labor problem.
3. It was determined that past efforts failed due to the propensity for addressing the symptoms of the problem rather than the true cause of the problem. The long term strategy, engineered strictly by two line level officers, involved a five-step approach. This five-step solution was subsequently endorsed by police management and formally adopted by the City Manager and City Council.
4. Prior to implementation of the Day Labor Project, Chief Anthony sent both line and management level officers to the Problem Oriented Policing Conference in San Diego as a means of facilitating Glendale's COPPS efforts. As a result of attending this PERF conference, COPPS officers were able to incorporate the S.A.R.A. model in their problem solving strategy. S.A.R.A. proved to be a valuable component in the development of a viable, long lasting solution to this historically unsolvable problem.
5. While COPPS officers were determined to solve the problems related to day laborers, their true incentive was a better quality of life for everyone involved, including the laborers themselves.
6. Although the S.A.R.A. model introduced to these officers at the PERF conference was very helpful in developing a long lasting solution, the officers did experience several obstacles while attempting to implement the

response phase of their plan. For example, officers had to gain buy-in from all entities involved. During negotiations with Home Depot, it was important to emphasize that by working with the police, they would be improving the quality of life, not only for their customers, but the surrounding community. This, in turn, could also potentially increase sales revenues.

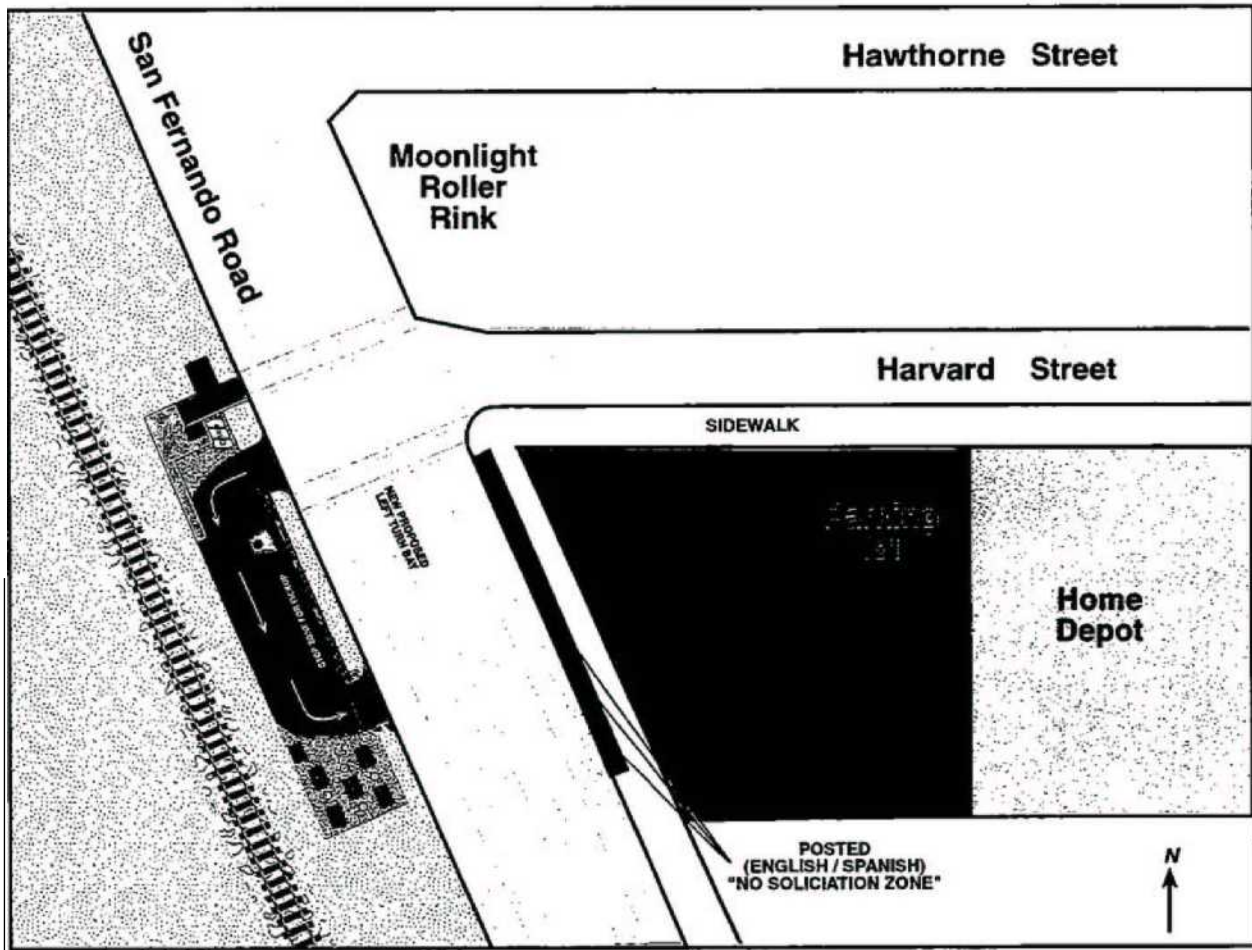
7. Another problem encountered by the officers was the substantial financial commitment involved in such as project. This obstacle was overcome through the creativity of the officers in forming

partnerships with stakeholders and local business owners.

8. Because the City was not in a position to contribute any money for construction of the facility, officers were faced with augmenting private sector funds, which had been pledged to the project. The officers researched other avenues for funding and subsequently applied for and received federal monies through Community Block Grant Funds, earmarked for the improvement of neighborhoods through the removal of blight.

## APPENDIX





The illustration above shows the location of the Day Labor Site on San Fernando Rd. in Glendale. Below is the plan view of the site showing the location of facilities for the day laborers and the routing of traffic through the site.

