

So. Congress Prostitution Problem

April 1999

ABSTRACT

South Austin's century and half year old history of prostitution which was on the Grand Avenue leading to the Capitol of the State of Texas, was responsible for disrupting the lives of business people and the citizens who live there.

In 1992 citizens began meeting with the police to express their concerns over the growing problem of prostitution, especially the presence of a hill top pornographic theater across from a junior high school. Using police stings, they often netted over a hundred "Johns" along with an elected state official. In 1995 a new way of addressing the problem was formally put into action. A.P.D. Crime Net South officers began to address the issues of prostitution by using the SARA model. Now a former feed store and hot bed for prostitution, has become a Mexican Restaurant where President Bill Clinton ate.

SCANNING: The Crime Net unit looked at the long history of prostitution, they surveyed police reports, talked to fellow officers and with citizens. They found that a high number of police calls for service were taking place at several motels along South Congress. They used surveillance, undercover buys, stepped up patrols and the abatement law to gather additional information

ANALYSIS: In assessing the problem they found that the motels in question seemed to encourage and support the presences of the prostitute by allowing them on the property along with drug dealers. Sometimes the motel employees were the drug dealers.

RESPONSE: They meet with the owners and neighborhood associations to talk about the problems. They offered training to employees and owners and encouraged other businesses and

the associations to work with them. Developed a Coalition of citizens and police to work together to continue positive change to South Congress.

ASSESSMENT: Fewer prostitutes and police calls for service to problem motels. Physical changes to streets, sidewalks and buildings. New businesses, more customers, higher profits, no abandon buildings, and elimination of a pornographic theater.

So. Congress Prostitution Problem

by: Ofc. Roger L. Behr 873

April 26, 1999

History of So. Congress Prostitution: The South Congress prostitution problem is said to be about 150 years old. The problem goes back to the times of the cattleman when they drove their herds Northward to the railroads and slaughter houses along the trail which later become known as So. Congress Ave., long before this area ever became part of the city of Austin. In later years, another contributing factor was Camp Mabry, a U.S. Army post. During the 1950's and 60's, Maddie Valdez, a well known madame, had her brothel located in South Austin at the southern end of So. Congress Ave. Maddie employed a number of young ladies over the years and was known to have judges, businessmen and politicians patronizing her establishment.

For South Austin, prostitution has been a common practice, ignored and tolerated for decades. However, as drugs became more readily available, citizens became less tolerate with prostitution as they began to find their streets and yards littered with spent condoms, drug rigs, beer cans, and liquor bottles and on occasion, a prostitute or two waiting for a potential customer. South Austin had become known, not for its quaint neighborhoods, cottage style motels and eclectic shops, but where prostitution could be readily found along with drug dealers and transients.

Decline of businesses and neighborhoods: With South Austin's seedy reputation, there seemed to come a gradual decline as businesses failed or moved away while others struggled to stay on. Mornings usually brought greetings by a transient asleep in the front door. Apathy and fear began to take its tole on the area while the occurrences in the morning were becoming

more and more common place as they as they dealt with the beer cans that usually littered the sidewalk and the dark rancid stains that gave evidence of someone having had urinated earlier, usually a transient. The alleys behind the shops bore some of the same evidence along with the occasional spent condom and maybe a hypodermic needle as well, while on the buildings, fresh evidence of graffiti could be found. In short, South Congress Avenue between Barton Springs and William Cannon had begun to show signs of indifference, as vacant buildings, graffiti and general neglect began appearing.

Many of the neighborhoods were also experiencing some of the same problems. Gang houses, and reports of drug dealers were known to be every where as evident by the increase of graffiti, drive-by shootings and heavy vehicular traffic up and down certain streets.

In 1977 the old Austin Theater was leased out to be come a pornographic movie theater and the name was changed to Cinema West. Drug and prostitution problems, in that area, became more noticeably almost over night. Women who lived in the area became targets for sex hungry men who had just come out of the theater. While a small park adjacent to the Cinema West became known as prostitution park by the Fulmore Jr. H.S. kids who's school was only a block away. The park, Austin Island, had been dedicated to Austin's name sake, Stephen F. Austin. The statue which had been erected and dedicated to our founding father had been torn down and the pedestal used by transients and the drug dealers, who took possession of the park, as a place to urinate.

Development of A.P.D. Neighborhood Center Advisory Board: In March of 1992 the P⁵¹ Advisory Board of the AP.D. South 1st Neighborhood Center was created and one of the first items on the agenda was to learn of the concerns of the South Austin Community. Almost without exception the main concern was the prostitution problem that was disrupting the lives of the home

owners and business people. Several community meetings were held where the community got the opportunity to voice their concern to the administration and to learn what they could do to make a difference. To help empower the people officers from the vice, the gang and the narcotic units were brought in and fielded questions from the people.

in 1993 members of the A.P.D. Advisory Board formed COPS (Citizens On Patrol-South) a group of citizens working to empower themselves and reclaim their neighborhoods. They worked closely with the Vice Unit and patrol officers reporting suspicious activity and videoing prostitutes their pimps and the "Johns". Their activities were so successful that they were featured on national TV by Current Affairs and in later years received Good Citizen Award by the West Austin Rotary Club. In 1993 several of the members received the first training on Problem Solving that the department had to offer.

Even though the Advisory Board and the COPS groups had no formal training at first on problem solving and the **SARA** model we did look over the problem using citizen complaints, police reports and patrol officers information when looking at the activity. Different ways of handling the problem were discussed before proceeding on and taking action. Then once an effort had been applied we monitored the problem using eye witness accounts, police reports and police patrol information to determine how affective the efforts had been.

Development of Crime Net: About the middle of 1995 the police department developed a unit known as Crime Net. There were six separate units each working in their respective sectors and were made up of officers from that sector. These were patrol officers who were taken off the street for three months to work on a problem that, that unit identified.

One of the first Crime Net units to start the process had identified a couple of the motels in the South Congress Ave. area that catered particularly to the prostitute and drug pushers. They had

become familiar with them through taking reports and having worked with the Neighborhood Center Advisory Board members and the COPS groups.

The first process they did was to examine all police reports of the targeted motels for criminal activity and the same for the immediate area that might be linked to the target location. It was found that these suspected locations accounted for, in some cases, several hundred, police calls for service. The Crime Net Unit took this one step further and equated the calls into dollars and cents per police call. To say the least, it was costing the tax payers thousands of dollars for police calls for service. Two of the motels came under the **Abatement Statute** and were sent letters pointing out the fact that their business was allowing criminal activity to be conducted at that address.

The second process was to convince the owners that it would be to their advantage to strongly consider making changes on the type of client they leased to, thus able to better control the activity that goes on at their business. They were also encouraged to clean up their property by removing trash and applying a fresh coat of paint to the buildings. In short, to spruce up their business and attract a better clientele resulting in higher profits, and becoming a better neighbor.

The police department was prepared to make a commitment to the owners by conducting a **Landlord Training** class for their managers on lease writing, ID'ing customers and landlord rights, thus arming them with information that would allow them to run a more efficient business. By improving the type of customer their business could attract, the motels could begin noticing an increase in their gross income.

A third part of the process after persuading the owners to participate, was to involve the business community and home owners as a part of the maintenance process, to see to it that the targeted businesses were living up to the agreement. The Crime Net unit knew that once their committed time was up that the next Crime Net officers would be working on a new set of

problems. This brought about the idea to form a coalition that would act as maintenance process. It would be made up of at the time, three neighborhood associations (a fourth has since joined), the Avenue Merchants Association, the Austin Police Department, St. Edward's Univ., the District Attorney's Office, and some departments of the City of Austin.

The first meetings were held around January of 1996 at the newly built **Jefferson on Congress Apartments**. The development of the **South Congress Coalition** and the eventual authoring of the Justice Department, COPS grant was that of Sgt. Darla Gay. Sgt. Gay had the group consider goals and objectives towards improving the look and business climate of the Avenue. Some of those goals and objectives were to improve the lighting and make it more pedestrian friendly, slow traffic along the Congress Avenue, put in trash containers, clean up Austin Island Park, get rid of the porno theater, improve the sidewalks and add curbing where needed, along with a number of other suggestions.

To being the implementation of these goals, the services of the University of Texas, LBJ School of Public Affairs was recruited to do a survey of the businesses and residences to determine the communities concerns. The police department researched police reports for the area to determine the types of crimes and who was committing these crimes. This information was then used in the application for the grant to show that prostitution was a major concern to the community. The grant was written so as to incorporate Community Policing Problem Solving techniques and the SARA model. It was designed to be a MEASURING GRANT (differing from that of an enforcement grant) aimed at working with the community to encourage the development of committees to work in different segments of the community and local and county governments. The grant was to train community leaders in Problem Solving using the SARA model as a guide. It also allowed for the purchase of some computer equipment, two part-time employees; a crime

analysis who would only work for six months and a community organizer who would be with the grant for a year which is the extent of the grant. The community organizer along with police officers working in the Crime Net unit and citizens involved with the South Congress Coalition were sent through the first Problem Solving training using the SARA model as a guide, which was conducted by the University of Texas, TIPPS (Texas Institute for Public Problem Solving) program. The three day training jump-started the process of dealing with the prostitution problem on South Congress Avenue by using the SARA model.

RESPONSE

I began my new job as Community Organizer on April 1, 1998. My first assignment was to attend the TIPPS training with police officers who were working the South Congress area. The timing was perfect: we learned about the SARA model, and the three-day training gave us a common experience and a shared language with which to approach the problem of prostitution.

I have lived and worked in the area for more than twenty years, so I was already familiar with the problems—and the potential—of South Congress Avenue. Prostitution was a key problem, contributing very heavily to the seedy, unsavory, rundown appearance of the Avenue. This condition was especially unfortunate on this street, the "Main Street of Texas", as it creates the main approach to downtown Austin and the State Capitol.

In employing the SARA model, Ofc. Behr has thoroughly presented the history of prostitution in the area and the many ways in which prostitution was identified as a problem. Thus the "SCAN" step in the SARA model is complete. Likewise, many of the factors which enable prostitution to thrive on the Avenue have been discussed earlier, so I will briefly summarize the "ANALYSIS" step; several run-down motels serve the prostitutes; a porn theatre located at a very prominent intersection; empty buildings and store fronts provide places to loiter; dark side streets leading into neighborhoods; many businesses in the area are not thriving, but barely holding on; a small park across the street from the porn theatre is a hang-out for transients and winos. These elements create a physical environment that is not conducive for legitimate businesses, nor is it healthful for children—and there are several schools in the area. Also contributing to the problem is the mind-set of many area residents: tolerant, laid-back, "live-and-let live." The long history of prostitution on the Avenue makes it seem almost "normal", as residents become accustomed to seeing it happen daily. Finally, many long-time residents describe South Austin as a "step-child" of the city, neglected by city leaders who favor more affluent, influential parts of the city. At any rate, signs of serious neglect have been evident on the Avenue for a long time.

All of these factors, physical and mental, have created the conditions for prostitution to thrive on the major thoroughfare known as the "Grand Avenue of Texas".

Now we come to the "**RESPONSE**" step of the SARA model. We approached the problem from several different angles, recognizing that it would be difficult to impact such a well-entrenched problem.

First, the police put more focus on the problem and more resources in the area. The Crime-Net Unit worked the street and conducted a major sting operation at one of the notorious motels, netting 135 "Johns" and several prostitutes. They also began working the porno theatre, making busts for public lewdness and other crimes inside the theatre... that had never been done before. This was not "business as usual". This was an unprecedented, sustained effort to address the roots of the problem.

We also stepped up the effort to get rid of the porn theatre that had dominated a major street corner for twenty-two years. It was within a few blocks of four schools, including a large middle school that was virtually across the street. The theatre had been up for sale for more than two years, but because the owner was asking more than the appraised value, and because it was in a risky area, there was no progress on the sale. I invited a long-time friend, a local realtor and property-owner, to have a look at it, and, after much debate and doubt, he acquired the theatre in an effort to move the pornography out and improve the area. With the support of neighborhood groups, business groups, PTA's, the School board, etc., he approached the Austin City Council to seek financial help in acquiring the building. The issue made it to the Council's agenda, but in the end they decided not to participate. However, the enormous amount of publicity the issue generated eventually helped to facilitate the sale. The porno theatre closed its doors at Midnight on Halloween, 1998. The closing of the theatre sparked at least a dozen exterior remodeling/paint jobs on area homes and businesses.

We used the SARA model twice: first, to get the porno theatre out of the community; second, to address the larger problem of prostitution.

Across the street from the porno theatre is a small park, Austin Island Park, named for the statue of Stephen F. Austin which since 1955 had dominated the park. Several years ago, the statue, along with a wooden gazebo nearby, was torn down by the transients who hung out in the area. Indeed, the students at the nearby middle school refer

to the park as "Prostitute Park", a sad commentary on its shameful condition. We wanted to reclaim this park and make it a source of pride for the community. Working with nearby businesses and the local neighborhood group, the city electric dep't. improved the lighting, the parks dep't trimmed the trees, and the police cracked down on alcohol consumption. The nearby H-E-B Grocery contributed \$17,500 to rebuild the gazebo. Efforts are underway to replace the statue of Austin, as well.

Another major goal was to improve the business climate of the Avenue. The South Congress Coalition sponsored monthly meetings featuring guest speakers to provide information on police activities, small business loans, long-range planning activities, mass transit opportunities, etc. We also produced a monthly newsletter with news of the Avenue, emphasizing new businesses, expansions, and fix-ups, which improved the look of the street. We are currently working with the Avenue Merchant's Ass'n. to organize an annual event which would bring shoppers to the area. We are working with the local transit agency to increase bus service, enabling people to come shop and eat without bringing their cars, thereby easing a growing parking crunch.

A key initiative was to generate positive publicity for S. Congress Avenue. We wanted the entire city to know about the many changes taking place, making the Avenue a great place to stroll, eat, and shop. On Nov. 9, the S. Congress Coalition sponsored a press conference at Austin Island Park to inform the community of more than two-dozen improvement projects happening along the 2.7 mile Avenue. More than fifty people attended, including all of the TV stations, several newspapers, and some radio. This media event created several days of positive press for South Congress. In fact, in the month of November, almost every day saw a news story on improvements to the Avenue: HEB expansion, San Jose Motel remodeling, new businesses, a new bank opening, a new Post Office soon-to-be-built, paint jobs, remodelings, landscapings, etc. Taken together, these improvements made it very clear that change was coming. South Congress is no longer a place for pornography and prostitution, but for shopping, dining, and enjoying the grand view of the Capitol.

The Dawson Neighborhood Legislative/Judicial Committee was created to pursue an additional approach to the problem. This group met with municipal judges, county judges, the D.A.'s office, and state legislators to discuss stronger penalties for the

prostitutes and their customers. We wanted to inform these officials of our efforts, and enlist their help. It was critical to our success that these key decisionmakers not handle cases of prostitution in a "business as usual" manner.

One more very important part of solving this problem is being developed by the YWCA's drug treatment program. The "Y" is spearheading the effort to provide the continuum of services that prostitutes need to get out of their dangerous, unhealthy line of work. More than a dozen social service providers have been meeting for six months, stitching together the services: safe housing, child care, job training, abuse counseling, drug treatment, etc.

This approach is most satisfying in that it addresses the real roots of the prostitution problem, and gives the prostitute hope that she/he can make a change. Two recent murders of prostitutes on South Congress reminded all of us that prostitution is dangerous and can be deadly.

All of these responses to the problem are having an impact. We are beginning to see results. After the November 9 press conference, I got a call from the owner of a nearby restaurant, a stately, historic mansion known for its elegant dining. The owner wanted to put on a party for everyone who was "working so hard and doing such a good job" in improving the Avenue. As a long-time resident, he was noticing the changes. We accepted his generous offer, and in December enjoyed a magnificent feast at his fine establishment. It was a grand gesture, and a suitable reward for the efforts of so many people who have worked for so long on improving "The Grand Avenue of Texas."

The Citizens on Patrol, the Police Neighborhood Center Advisory Board, the businesses, neighborhood groups, and especially Ofc. Roger Behr, who lead the effort, all created the foundation, the momentum, for lasting change. More than 50 organizations and city departments contributed to the solution. They have made a difference, and they are empowered. Their efforts have improved not only their immediate community, but will also impact the experience of anyone who comes to visit the State Capital of Texas.

ASSESSMENT: The observance of prostitutes along South Congress in 1992 and later years was common and usually in large numbers. Some patrol officers have told me that they have seen as many as twenty-five or more during a patrol shift. In talking to citizens and business people and police officers about the prostitute problem, say they are seeing fewer prostitutes. In many cases, there have been no complaints of prostitutes seen North of Oltorf St. To get first hand information I have gone out as well to observe those areas that in the past, prostitutes have known to hang-out. Especially around the Cinema West pornography theater and Austin Island Park, dubbed Prostitute Park by the Fulmore Jr. H.S. students. In other areas that the prostitutes have been known to frequent, especially at one place, a deserted feed store, the prostitutes would flag down the customer and take them inside where there were mattresses laid about and proceed to service the "John". The former feed store and unofficial brothel is now a highly acclaimed Mexican Restaurant where President Bill Clinton has eaten.

South Congress Avenue was once a place where abandon buildings stood, while many of the buildings showed their age by the faded and peeling paint that covered them. While the presences of pedestrian traffic at night was almost non-existent.

The Avenue of today has taken on a much different appearance. There are signs of construction and remodeling still going on. Where there was once a deserted service station is now a new bank. New restaurants have braved the objections of well meaning friends to become some of Austin's favorite eating establishments. The HEB grocery chain put in millions where is was located when they bought out a strip shopping center and expanded the store. They also purchased a run down motel that supported prostitutes and drug dealers and leveled the buildings. In addition to they gave more back to the community by putting up \$17,500.00 for a metal gazebo to replace the one that the transients had torn down at Austin Island Park. As part of the gazebo project the

Fulmore Jr. H.S. students have been asked to participate in an art project that will be incorporated into part of the design. In years previous, the Parks Dept. installed extra lighting in and around the park in an effort to help reduce the crime problem in the park. And recently, a sidewalk was laid in the park by the City's Public Works Dept.

A few other things that are currently taking place is new construction and remodeling of the San Jose Motel. It had once been a place where prostitutes would take their dates. Next door to the San Jose is the Austin Motel who's owner Dottye Dean, is remodeling each room in a different decor, getting away from the "cookie cutter" appearance. Because of her efforts to improve the motel and the image of the Avenue, she has received some local notoriety for the work.

Many of the merchants so far this year have noticed increased profits and have reported that January, normally a slow month, has been one of their best. They report seeing more pedestrians walking the Avenue but less transients and prostitutes in the area. The merchants seem to be more cohesive and are working with a local Tv station to put on an auction in June and later a fall festival. The idea of a festival came from the South Austin Coalition in an effort to promote the merchants and to bring people to the South Congress area.

Another effort of the Coalition was to get rid of the Cinema West pornography theater which would greatly reduce the prostitution and drug problem in the area. This project fell to the Community Organizer.

Since the South Congress Coalition has started to focus attention on the South Congress Avenue area, there is new interest in the area that seems to have been generated through our work. A group that came into being a couple of years ago is the South Congress Improvement Project that was funded by Capitol Metro. Their purpose was to study the development of the Avenue

and to work with local civic groups, coalitions and associations proposing ways that the Avenue might become a very vibrant area. Their work has contributed to the success that is being realized by all who depend on the South Congress area.

One of the successes that can be attributed to the Coalition's work is the passing of a \$5 million dollar bond election for South Congress street scape improvements on November 3, 1998. The bonds would be used for various improvements along the Avenue including the establishment of a roundabout at Congress and Live Oak with the statue of Austin's founding father Stephen F. Austin, astride it.

On November 9, 1998, the coalition held a press conference in Austin Island Park which was attended by many merchants, area residents, police department commanders for the Southwest and Southeast sectors, and a U.S. Congressman Lloyd Doggett along with many members of the news media. The South Congress Coalition reported at the press conference that change was occurring by the fact that there twenty-four either newly completed or on going renovations, and construction projects occurring along the Avenue-

Some other efforts that the Coalition has been involved with, have been with, the Dawson Neighborhood Association in their work toward putting together a neighborhood plan that was a pilot project designed by the City of Austin Planning Dept. The purpose was to help neighborhoods plan for the future. One of the concerns that came out of the Dawson Neighborhood plan was the problem of prostitution and how to deal with this problem. Since it was recognized that arrest and jail had very little affect on reducing their numbers, two committees were formed: one committee was to look at changing the existing laws on prostitution. While the second committee joined with the YWCA who have been administering a program known as AWARE for women on drugs. The YWCA agreed to bring together as many social service

agencies that would join our efforts and design a long term program specifically for the needs of the prostitute. The group will soon formally announce that they will be ready to start the program. The first group met with State Representative Glen Maxey, with the hope of designing a bill that would require judges to order the prostitute into a rehabilitation program.

At present there is a small pocket of prostitution in the South end of South Congress Avenue around the Alpine Rd. area. This is constantly being monitored by officers who patrol the area and citizens who own homes and rental property along Alpine. Even though officers have been able to make an occasional arrest this has not deterred the prostitute or drug pusher. To combat the problem one measure that was used has been to install flood lights at Alpine Pond which is adjacent to Alpine Rd. and about 200 feet West of Congress Ave. where prostitutes have been known to take a customers. The lights have reduced much of this activity. In the past we have found two couches, beer and wine containers, drug paraphernalia and used condoms. Since the lights much of this trash has been eliminated. Another thing that was done was to have a pay phone where several people at a time would congregate, changed to prevent incoming calls along with preventing more then nine numbers at a time to be entered. In addition the phone company reduced the amount of time the phone was on. These steps eliminated the phone being used for illegal purposes.

The efforts employed along South Congress may have displaced some of the prostitutes to an area in the Northern part of Austin around IH-35 and Rundberg and North Lamar and Rundberg. How the problem in this these areas are being handled I am not certain, only that the department was looking at the success South Congress has experienced.

DEPARTMENT COMMITMENT TO PROBLEM SOLVING & OFFICER INFO.:

About 1993 or earlier the Austin Police Department began a new program known as Community Policing and Problem Oriented Policing (POP). There were a few officers who had received the training and theory and were responsible for training the department. Two of these trainers were Sgt. Kim Nobles, and Sgt. Darla Gay, but, like many new concepts that are introduced to police officers it was received with some skepticism. In August of 1998 when Community Policing-Problem Solving was introduced by the U of T, TIPPS a number of officers and civilians were sent to the three day class and readily accepted the training. One of the officers who attended the first class was Lt. Sharon Voudouris-Ross, who was influenced by her two sergeants listed above and has since then strongly supported Community Policing-Problem Solving. Since that class, more officers have been sent to the training.

For those officers who practice the theory of Community Policing-Problem Solving in their day to day work, it is for the most part loosely applied. And yet, officers have the resource of the District Representative Officer to help them work on long range problem solving issues. The department has assigned to each district a civilian who works in Research and Planning Dept. and can do long range computer searches that would be requested by an officer.

In working this project the grant manager had all the resources necessary when needed. Some of the resources that were called upon were the Crime Net unit, the press office to help in getting information to the press as well as to put together the press conference. Research and planning provided information statistical information, while mapping would make-up necessary maps that were needed, and the photo lab would provide enlargement need of an area or building, while patrol helped during times that they were called upon, and upper management observe our requests to them, usually to appear before the Coalition and speak. This was even true with the City of

Austin, real estate office who would provide information needed on a building or lot and the same was true other city departments that were called upon, in all, I found no resistance when I needed some resource or to get something done.

One of the greatest resources that I had was to have a Community Organizer who knew the area along with the ins and outs of city government as well as the right people in the community to go to for support for certain projects. I would also like to mention the Coalition Chairman Jim Lloyd, who gave a lot of his time and energy and was always there when needed.

The South Congress Coalition grant manager and author of the Department of Justice, COPS grant was Sgt. Darla Gay, who has since has left the police department to take a position with the Travis County District Attorney's office to work as a community organizer. The project was then handed over to Sgt. Kim Nobles, who because of other duties requiring a great deal of her attention, asked that the position of grant manager be reassigned. Because of my involvement in the community and close ties to the neighborhood associations and having originally started the work on the prostitution problem, took over as grant manager and police representative to the coalition.

Roger L.Behr #873
Senior Patrolman
3008 Norwood HiURd.
Austin, Tx. 78723
512 928-0107
512 622-6159 pager
512 929-1946 fax
mybehr2@prismnet.com



City of Austin

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For immediate release

Nov. 9, 1998

Contact: Jim Lloyd, President, South Congress Coalition, 602-5761

Max Nofziger, Community Liaison, Austin Police Department, 707-8401

South Congress reclaims status as 'Grand Avenue of Texas'

South Congress Avenue, trying to shed its old image as a haven for pornography and prostitutes, presented itself today, Nov. 9, as an eclectic center of community pride and community rejuvenation.

Members of the South Congress Coalition, which includes business owners and operators, the Austin Police Department and other community members, pointed to more than two dozen projects and millions of dollars of investment in the past 18 months as signs of change along "the Grand Avenue of Texas."

That investment has included such grand projects as the \$67.5 million construction project at the Texas School for the Deaf and the \$3.7 million road and pedestrian improvements south of Oltorf Street to the individual beautification projects like landscaping and the painting of building facades.

Also, recently an adult-oriented movie theater closed and Austin voters approved \$4 million in streetscape street improvements and \$5 million for a permanent site for the neighborhood Twin Oaks Branch of Austin Public Library.

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"The South Congress Coalition is dedicated to the improvement of the South Congress environment through mutual cooperation," said Jim Lloyd, President of the South Congress Coalition. "The South Congress area, with its geographical proximity to Downtown Austin combined with Austin's economic growth, is an undiscovered treasure."

One of those landmark projects was the 1997 \$7 million renovation of the H-E-B at South Congress and Oltorf.

Today, H-E-B continued its support with a gift of \$17,500 for a gazebo in Austin Island Park at the southeast corner of South Congress and Live Oak Street. The previous one was destroyed by vandalism.

"H-E-B is committed to the revitalization and long-term growth of the South Austin community," said Kate Brown, Manager of Public Affairs for H-E-B's Austin region. "We are very excited and encouraged by the other businesses in the area that have committed additional resources to help restore the 'Grand Avenue of Texas.'

"The reconstruction of the gazebo at Austin Island Park symbolizes all of the recent growth," Brown said. "Our hope is that the park will once again become a place for residents and visitors to come and enjoy the sights and sounds of South Congress."

The South Congress Coalition works along that stretch of the avenue from Barton Springs Road on the north to Ben White Boulevard on the south. The area covers a mix of business ranging from convenience stores to restaurants; antique shops to banks. The area also includes apartments, motels, churches and St. Edward's University. •

The Coalition formed in April 1996 in an effort to build a working group of police, merchants and neighborhood associations to fight prostitution along the avenue, adjacent streets and in nearby motels.

The core group worked with the LBJ School of Public Affairs at the University of Texas to survey the community about what it considered problems. That survey confirmed that prostitution was the No. 1 concern. In January 1998, the Austin Police Department received a \$56,939 Community Oriented Policing grant from the U.S. Department of Justice grant to hire a community organizer/liaison and crime analyst to help the area.

"The bottom-line impact of these two dozen improvements is that South Congress Avenue is no longer the place for pornography and prostitution," said Max Nofziger, Community Organizer/Liaison. "Instead, the avenue is a great place to browse the unique shops, enjoy the grand Capitol view, hear live Austin music and eat at great restaurants."

The effort is a true police-public partnership.

"The South Congress coalition is a primary example of a combined effort by the community and the police working together solving neighborhood issues," said Police Officer Roger Behr, Grant Administrator. "The effort put forth by the group since 1996 has resulted in fulfilling many of the goals set forth by the Coalition to make South Congress a better place to live, work and shop. It is a true example of community policing."

Lloyd, the Coalition president, said the transformation is not complete, but South Congress now has a track record of successes.

"While a few months ago, business owners shied away from this area, that's no longer the case," Lloyd said. "The business pioneers from just a year ago, see that their businesses are a success. As one business owner said when asked why she opened here, despite the avenue's reputation: 'I'm one who can make a difference.'

"We're here today to say that she, along with many others, has made that prediction a reality."

Prostitution Intervention Program (PIP) The South Congress Prostitution Intervention Pilot

An Overview

Program Goal: The goal of this program is to meet the needs of prostitutes wanting to change their lifestyle through a comprehensive system of housing, counseling, supportive services, referrals, and case management as an alternative to incarceration.

Background: According to research of the Austin Police Department (APD), South Congress Avenue has been the central hub of Austin's prostitution problem for well over a century. The current attempt to develop a targeted, intensive effort aimed at reduction of prostitution along the avenue is the culmination of several years of addressing this problem spearheaded by the APD and various neighborhood coalitions and associations.

In March of 1991, the South First Street APD Neighborhood Center Advisory Board began meeting to address the concerns of the neighborhoods and businesses. This was during the economic "bust" which saw a rapid deterioration of the environment and an increase in the overt prostitution along Congress Ave. From this initial effort was born the Citizens On Patrol South, the members of which worked closely with the vice squad to reduce prostitution through visible community involvement.

In mid-1995 the Barton Hills, Bouldin Creek, Dawson, South River City Citizens, and Zilker Neighborhood Associations formed the South Central Coalition. The purpose of this coalition was to develop a planning mechanism for this area as well as address quality of life issues. Other organizations such as the Avenue Merchants Association were involved as well. This coalition identified criminal activity, including prostitution, public intoxication, and burglary as major forces contributing to a negative image and development environment in this area.

Shortly after this coalition was formed, the Crime Net Taskforce, under the leadership of Sgt. Darla Gay, began working on community education and visioning to develop a plan for changing the environment in south central Austin and particularly along South Congress Ave. A Sector 12, community-wide Visionary Meeting was held on December 2, 1995 at St. Ignatius Church. Business and property owners, apartment residents, home owners and renters all were present. APD facilitators worked with citizens on the areas of most concern. People divided into groups to discuss transportation and public safety; land use and urban design; parks and environment; and other issues. From this meeting came many ideas about what the community wanted to see. These were developed into a guide for development of a plan for how to proceed. The APD sponsored more community meetings throughout the winter and spring of 1996. Prostitution activity, especially when combined with substance abuse

issues, was identified as the major criminal activity affecting the quality of life along South Congress Ave.

As the Crime Net project came to an end, this effort, under the leadership of the APD South First Neighborhood Center's Officer Roger Behr, evolved into the South Congress Coalition which began meeting regularly in the summer of 1996. The Crime Net supervisor, Sgt. Darla Gay, applied for a federal grant targeting prostitution through the Criminal Justice Council's, Community Oriented Policing Services program. Assistance was elicited from the LBJ School of Public Affairs for a residential and business survey along South Congress Ave. This survey also identified prostitution as the number one concern of businesses and residents alike.

Inspired by the efforts of all of these initiatives, the Dawson Neighborhood Association (DNA) conducted its own newsletter survey, in February 1996, of 900 households. While the response was small, 5%, the number one concern about criminal activity was again listed as prostitution, hi June of 1997, the DNA applied both as a member of the South Central Coalition, and as a single neighborhood, to become one of the areas selected for the Pilot Neighborhood Planning process. In August 1997, the DNA was selected to become one of the first three neighborhoods to participate in this City initiative.

Over the next several months the Dawson Neighborhood Plan was developed. This included face-to-face resident surveys, mail-back property owner surveys, and combined face-to-face and mail-back surveys of businesses. Prostitution is discussed on page 19 of the Dawson Neighborhood Plan which was adopted unanimously by the City Council in August of 1998. The specific items in the plan addressing this subject are:

- The APD could greatly increase their visibility and reduce prostitution and other crime by beginning bicycle patrols of the South Congress area; and
- The Dawson Business Coalition and the Dawson Neighborhood Association should work with the APD to implement the recommendations made through the prostitution grant project.

A final project impacting the South Congress area is the South Congress Improvement Project. This too was a joint initiative which began with a steering committee of stakeholders meeting in late 1995. By the summer of 1996 this project was meeting regularly, supported by a grant from the Capitol Metropolitan Transportation Authority. Recently this project published the "South Congress Improvement Project Enhancement Guidelines". On page 26 of the Enhancement Guidelines the issue statement reads "Prostitution and related problems as well as degraded physical surroundings tend to be the major community nuisances in the Avenue corridor." And while much of this report focuses on transportation issues, major goals include the following:

- Reduce criminal activity in the South Congress corridor and heighten citizen awareness and involvement; and

- Stop prostitution, especially repeat offenders.

Based on the findings of all of these surveys and initiatives, it became clear that community attitudes supported taking a strong but humane approach to the problem of prostitution. Residents and businesses alike wanted serious attempts made to end the cycle of prostitution stings, court appearances, and return to the streets of the prostitutes. Residents supported harsher penalties for the customers and more options for a criminal justice system unable to cope with expensive incarceration of prostitutes in overcrowded jails. It seemed the most effective way to address this problem was through the development of an array of services designed to assist street prostitutes in breaking free of drug and alcohol dependency; under-education and lack of job skills; physical and sexual abuse; and lack of child care, affordable housing, and transportation.

Through the combined leadership of the APD, the South Congress Coalition, and the YWCA, a taskforce has been formed to address these very issues.

Statement of Need:

The lives of prostitutes are filled with physical, sexual and emotional abuse before and after involvement in prostitution. Furthermore, there is a direct relationship between drug and alcohol abuse and prostitution. According to a recent study on prostitution, 75% of the prostitutes interviewed would admit to a drug problem. When this same group was asked what they needed to leave the prostitution lifestyle, 78% cited a home or safe place, 73% cited job training, and 67% cited drug and alcohol treatment.

In 1988, the Victim Services Division of the Austin Police Department was awarded a grant to establish the Hope Program, a diversion program for juveniles convicted of prostitution. This highly successful program was in operation until the early 1990's.

Client profiles of 200 prostitutes compiled by the Hope Program Counselors describe the prostitutes in the Austin area as 98% female and 2% transsexuals. The majority are white women between the ages of 20 and 30. Over 90% report current or past drug abuse, generally TV drugs such as speed, heroin, and cocaine. All but two individuals reported a history of childhood sexual abuse that, for the majority, started early, was ongoing, and involved multiple perpetrators. In addition, they grew up in chaotic, unsupportive, abusive families with a history of substance abuse by their parents. Most of these women had been or are currently involved in a battering relationship. Approximately one-fourth have been raped while participating in prostitution and nearly all reported frequent assaults. Finally, nearly one-half of these women have been labeled as mentally ill at some time in their lives and have been hospitalized or received treatment.

Numerous studies indicate that prostitutes develop a psychological paralysis, which prohibits their abilities to break out of the victimization and prostitution

cycle. Many times, they feel hopeless and helpless to change without long-term support. As a result, a perpetual "revolving door" with the criminal justice system is seen as these women are arrested, jailed or fined, and are again seen on the streets.

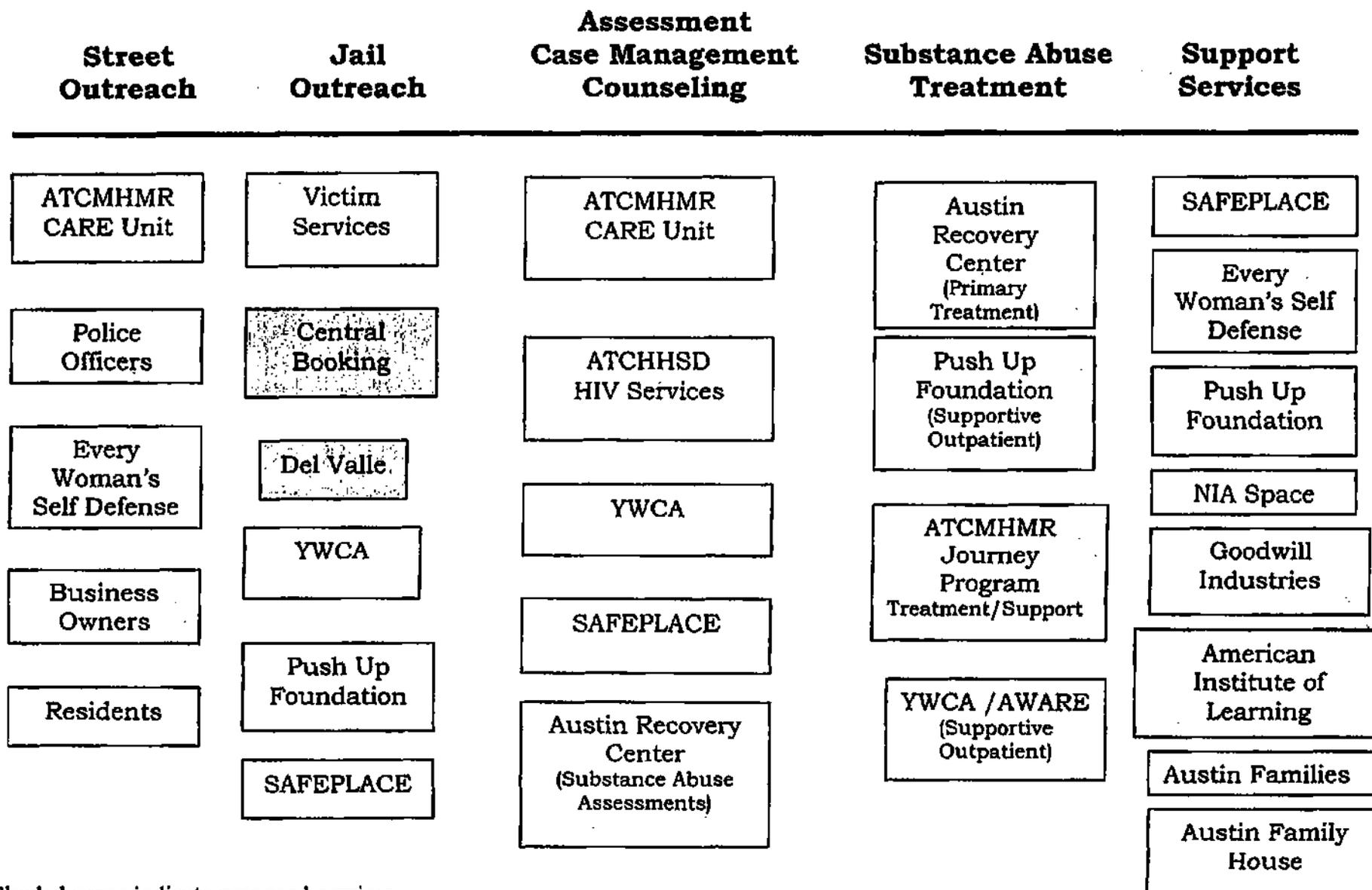
Program Description:

This diversion program will intervene at the point of arrest with as alternative to incarceration for women and men convicted of prostitution to help many to change their lifestyle. Points of entry into this continuum of care for prostitutes arrested will be Central Booking and the Del Valle jail where a needs assessment will be conducted and individuals will be screened for substance abuse. Street Outreach will also be implemented to intervene and solicit volunteer clients before they may be arrested. Individuals will be offered an opportunity to participate in the South Congress Prostitution Intervention Program (PIP) in lieu of jail time at the point of arraignment.

The pilot Prostitution Intervention Project will serve 25 individuals the first year. Services to be provided are based on an individual needs assessment at the point of entry into the program. Support and case management will continue up to two years after arrest and enrollment. Services to be provided are as follows:

- Assessment
- Drug and Alcohol Treatment
- Mental Health Treatment
- Transitional Housing
- Case Management
- Peer Support / Mentoring
- Child Care
- Job Training
- Health Care
- Confidential HIV Testing
- Counseling
- Transportation
- Self Defense
- Legal Assistance
- Employment Assistance

South Congress PIP Continuum of Care



Shaded areas indicate proposed services