

South Grand & Rotary Park Project



Dobson District
Community Action
Team



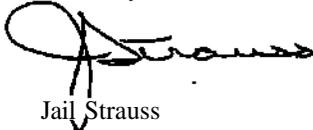
To: Herman Goldstein Award Selection Committee

It is my pleasure to send a letter of nomination for the work done by our department members on the Rotary Park/Grand Avenue Project.

I believe the work done on this project is truly exemplary of community policing at its finest.

I appreciate your consideration of this project.

Sincerely,



Jail Strauss
Chief of Police



South Grand and Rotary Park Project

The South Grand area of the City of Mesa, Arizona, is a neighborhood that comprises about one-half square mile. It is an older lower income neighborhood that is primarily Hispanic with several generations of families residing in the homes. There is a very small percentage of the homes that are owner occupied. The area and the park it surrounds had been steadily declining over the last two decades. Many of the homes were in disrepair and property values were plummeting. Members of three different street gangs live in the neighborhood and it has been the scene of numerous drive by shootings.

Rotary Park is a small community park located in the southern central portion of the neighborhood. It had declined to a business location for drug dealers, a meeting place for Gang members and a campground for over one hundred transients. Transients, gang members and drug dealers would congregate in such large numbers that the residents of the neighborhood refused to enter the park even in the daylight hours. The people who lived and worked in the area displayed a general feeling of apathy and fear.

The Mesa Police Department Community Action Team opened a project in the South Grand and Rotary Park area in October of 1996.

Although the Police Department was a major factor in facilitating the project, at least 15 agencies and social organizations along with numerous neighborhood residents were involved in the undertaking. A neighborhood committee was established in addition to a block watch and a citizens on patrol group. Older homes were removed and rebuilt or remodeled by Housing for Mesa (a non-profit group). Neighborhood cleanups were conducted and a neighbor helping neighbor program was initiated by the Boy's and Girl's Club, which is located within the project area. Rotary Park was temporarily closed to allow for renovation using federal funds. An enhanced prosecution project was established with the city prosecutor's office to address issues with repeat offenders. Drug dealers and criminal transients were targeted through special enforcement and a gang intervention project was established through federal grants. Due to the response, the park and the surrounding neighborhood have been re-taken and returned to the people who live there. The transients and the drug dealing population are gone and families once again use the park. Neighborhood pride is on the rise and calls for police service has significantly decreased.

South Grand and Rotary Park Project

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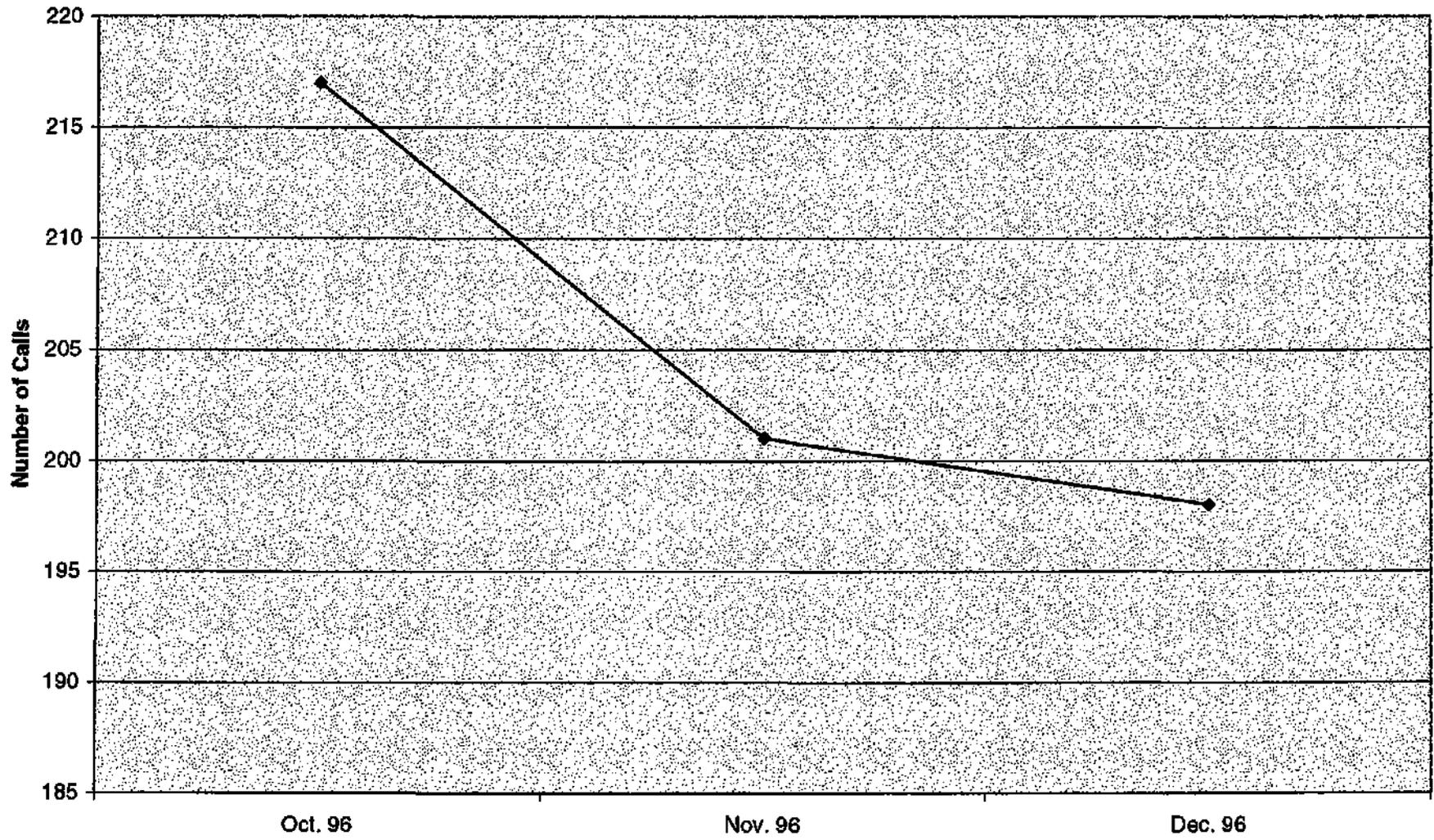
Members of three different street gangs live in the neighborhood and it has been the scene of numerous drive by shootings. Calls for service were extremely high for a neighborhood this size.

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SCANNING:

Officer John Duhigg of the Mesa Police Department's Community Action Team opened a project in the South Grand and Rotary Park area in October of 1996. Officer Duhigg noticed the very high calls for service and the obvious signs of the criminal elements activities at all hours of

Chart 1-1
Calls for Service (South Grand Project)



the day and night after conducting a Computer Aided Dispatch records scan of the area. (See Chart 1-1)

During the initial inquiry stages of the project, calls for service dropped dramatically, this was due to increased presence of police officers in the neighborhood.

This half square mile area comprised nearly half of the calls for service for the entire district during its peak hours. The most common calls for service were disorder type crimes, i.e. loud music, shots fired, fights, gang activity, drinking in public along with numerous warrants and arrests for traffic offenses.

ANALYSIS:

Officer Duhigg then contacted the beat officers who worked in and around the area, they believed that most of the activity happened on Friday and Saturday nights and was due to the drinking habits of the local undocumented workers and local street gangs. With three major street gangs living in such a close proximity to each other, the officers believed nearly eighty percent of the activity was due to the gangs.

Officer Duhigg then contacted other city service agencies in the area. Among the other departments contacted were the City's Code Compliance Office, the Neighbor Coordinators office, Public Utilities, Transportation, Streets and other city agencies. During the meeting each of the agencies expressed their concern as to the rapid decline of the neighborhood. They also raised issues such as the agencies lack of intercommunication. It was discovered that there were three agencies that had working projects within the area at one time. Code Compliance, the Police Department and the Neighborhood Coordinators office were all working on the same problems at

the same time. Each of the agencies decided that it would be better to combine and coordinate their efforts.

Public agencies contacted included the Department of Housing and Urban Development, The State Gang Intervention Task Force and Housing for Mesa. All the agencies agreed that the area would be a primary concern for their own projects and each would coordinate with the other to insure a more uniform approach.

Social Service agencies contacted included the soup kitchens in the neighborhood, i.e. Paz de Cristo and St. Vincent de Paul's. While they showed concern for the neighborhood, these agencies thought they could do little to impact the neighborhood, as they were primarily concerned with aid to the areas homeless population.

After contacting the above agencies, Officer Duhigg contacted the staff at the local Boy's and Girl's Club and they offered the use of their facilities to host any community meetings that might need to be held.

Officer Duhigg along with help from the city's Neighborhood Coordinators Office, arranged a meeting of all the above agencies, over 15 in all. Each of the agencies agreed that the situation in the South Grand and Rotary Park area was approaching a volatile point and wanted to intervene prior to this happening.

After the Service Agency meeting, a neighborhood resident and business owner's meeting was held. During this first meeting, which was attended by 60-70 people, the residents and business owner's were very critical of the police department and city agencies. They were dissatisfied with the level of service provided by the agencies and expected the police to arrest and prosecute suspects in crimes without resident involvement.

It was clear that several meetings would be necessary in order to get to the root of the problems in the neighborhood.

On the third neighborhood resident meeting the people were calmed down enough to understand that the police department and the City of Mesa were willing to help them in their struggle to reclaim their neighborhood. Although the number of residents attending the meetings dwindled to around 50, they were interested in and dedicated to their neighborhood enough to form a neighborhood organization called "Vecinos Unidos" (United Neighbors). This neighborhood organization acted as a liaison between the Police the Service Agencies and the residents of the neighborhood. They brought the concerns of the residents to the attention of the Police and Service organizations.

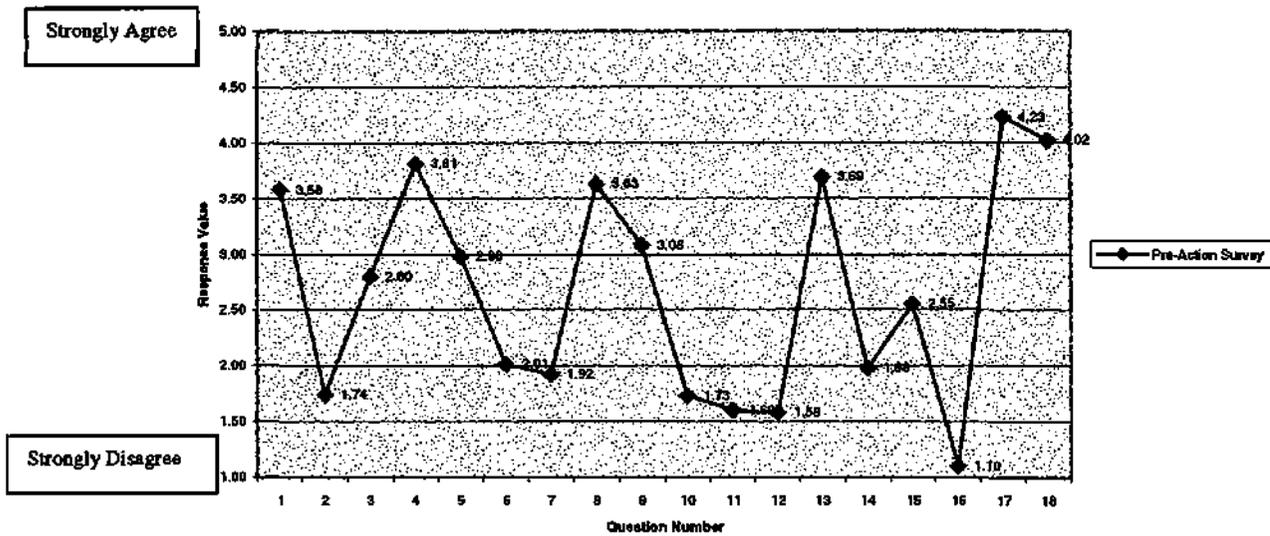
Another method of research used to diagnose the problems in the neighborhood was a neighborhood survey. Residents in the neighborhood were asked 18 neighborhood-related questions. Their responses to the questions were rated from Strongly Disagree (1) to Strongly Agree (5). For statistical purposes the numeric value for each question was used and a neighborhood average response was calculated.

We were able to plot the responses with the values indicated on a chart to enable us to determine which areas were of concern to the people involved. (See Chart 1-2)

From the attached graph we could see that the people surveyed were very dissatisfied in the areas of the Neighborhood's Quality of life, Safety in the park for both adults and children, the Fear in the neighborhood, Crime Problems in the neighborhood, Police Involvement in the Neighborhood and current legislation for dealing with transients in the neighborhood and park.

Chart 1-2

South Grand and Rotary Park Survey (Pre-Action)



- #1: I like my neighborhood
- #2: I do not want to move.
- #3: There is a lot of crime in the neighborhood.
- #4: Police service in the neighborhood is satisfactory.
- #5: I feel safe in the neighborhood.
- #6: I feel safe in the part
- #7: Children are safe in the park.
- #8: Crime is caused by only a few in the neighborhood.
- #9: I feel good about the future of the neighborhood.
- #10: I have no fear of the neighborhood.
- #11: Crime is not a problem in the neighborhood and it is not out of control.
- #12: Police do enough about crime in the neighborhood.
- #13: I am willing to volunteer time for neighborhood projects.
- #14: Gangs are not a problem for the neighborhood.
- #15: Transients cause no problems for the neighborhood.
- #16: We need new legislation for dealing with transients.
- #17: I am willing to call the Police to report crime.
- #18: I am willing to aid in prosecution of criminals.

Things that the neighbors surveyed were very satisfied with were condition of the neighborhood, police service, crime being concentrated to a few, neighbors willingness to volunteer time for neighborhood projects, willingness to report crime and willingness to aid in the prosecution of criminals.

Through these methods Officer Duhigg was able to determine the following:

1. Transients, Drug Dealers and Prostitutes were taking over the park, the alley behind South Grand and the areas surrounding the park.
2. Gangs were confronting each other and having wild parties in the open street due to the lack of police presence.
3. Drug dealers were trafficking in "Crack" in the alley, the park and the streets near the Boy's and Girl's Club and Mesa Arts Academy.
4. Service Agencies did not communicate common problems in the area.
5. Prostitution was beginning to be a problem in the alley behind South Grand.
6. Neighborhood residents were afraid to get involved in their own community.
7. The neighborhood's appearance was deteriorating at a rapid rate.

RESPONSE:

Since other officers had tried a program of strictly "Saturation Patrol" in (he area on previous occasions, this method of response was ruled out. With the neighbors afraid to get involved and with their lack of trust and respect for the police, this method was deemed inadequate as a sole response.

The neighborhood organization, while working with the Police, Code Compliance and the Neighborhood Coordinators Office did neighborhood clean ups, formed a block watch, a

citizens on patrol group, and convinced neighbors and friends not to only call the police, but to call the police and act as a witness. This was a giant step for the neighborhood.

Patrol Officers working within the Dobson District were made aware of the project at each stage of its progression. They were invited to participate in not only the enforcement aspects of the project, but the interactive portions as well. The result was the Patrol Officers working in the area took a greater interest in the neighborhood and its problems.

Calls for service increased dramatically. Instead of getting the anonymous call that "Something" was happening at a particular address, the police received a call from a person that they could contact. That person appeared in court and acted as a witness. That enabled a case to be prosecuted and showed the neighborhood that results would come from working with the police.

Officer Duhigg contacted the Mesa Arts Academy School Board and helped them establish a "Drug Free School Zone" around their school. Arizona law provides for enhanced penalties in drug cases which violate a "Drug Free School Zone" This School Zone, extends 300 feet into the neighborhood from the outermost boundary of the school property and 1000 feet on public property. This boundary included the worst problem areas, such as the alley and the park.

During this phase of the project, other members of the Community Action Team were available to assist with the project and were instrumental in its success.

Officer Duhigg contacted the Streets department and found that the alley behind south Grand was city property and no longer served any purpose. So with the cooperation of the Streets department he had the alley behind South Grand posted "No Trespassing". Since this was a common location for people who buy and sell drugs to partake of their activities, all arrests made

in this area were "In Custody" type arrests. This enabled the arresting officer to search the suspect incident to arrest and netted an additional charge of Possession of a Dangerous Drug in a Drug Free School Zone.

Officer Duhigg and Officer Charles Pradelt interacted with the neighborhood children at the local Boy's and Girl's Club and the Mesa Arts Academy (A Charter School) on nearly a daily basis. This allowed them to contact the children in a neutral, non-threatening environment and allowed the children to get to know them on a more personal basis. Officers Duhigg and Pradelt continued enhanced enforcement in the neighborhood, while contacting the children at the schools and Boy's and Girl's Club to enable the neighborhood residents, and the children, to see that there were actually real people who cared about the neighborhood working as police officers in the area. Through the children Officers were able to meet more of the neighborhood residents. As they went about their normal patrol activities the children would greet them in the street. Stopping and talking with the children brought their parents out to see what was going on. This enabled the officers to contact even those parents who were afraid of the police due to their immigration status.

Officer Duhigg was invited to join the local school board as a board member due to his activities in the neighborhood, which helped him to establish an even closer working relationship between the neighborhood, the school, the police department and city service agencies.

In working with the City of Mesa's code compliance office and the city's building and electric inspectors Officer Duhigg was able to close three "Crack" houses, within hours of their discovery by patrol officers. This was due to the formation of partnerships with the service agencies during the Scanning and Analysis Phases of the project.

Pride swept the neighborhood, neighborhood marches and block parties were taking place and the non-profit group "Housing for Mesa" began renovating and building new houses in the neighborhood.

Housing for Mesa purchases renovates, builds and sells affordable quality housing to low income families within target areas located in the City of Mesa. Families from these houses are screened and required to participate in community events. This enables families living in the neighborhood to take stock in the area by allowing them to purchase the quality housing in the area. Housing for Mesa renovated or built 13 houses in the area giving the neighborhood residents a fresh perspective of the neighborhood.

After holding a meeting with the neighborhood residents and service agencies in the park, it was thought that closing the restrooms would dissuade the transients and drug dealers from continually loitering in the park. The City's Parks and Recreations Division agreed and installed iron gates over the entry to the restroom. While this kept the clean law abiding transient from staying in the park, it did not effectively change the minds of the transients that did not care to use the restrooms in the first place.

To deal with the transient issue, Officer Duhigg and Sergeant Goulet created a "Transient Advisory Flyer" which was distributed to transients who loitered in the park. This flyer listed some of the social organizations that specialized in helping the homeless population and some of the common violations that were being committed by members of the homeless population. The flyer was two sided and had both English and Spanish versions on it.

The sprinkler schedule in the park was also adjusted to activate at different intervals during the peak transient hours. This convinced them not to stay for long periods at a time.

While studying how to best approach the problem in the park, Officer Duhigg became aware of the city's parks and recreations division's plan to renovate the park by closing small portions at a time and making minor improvements. Officer Duhigg and Sergeant Goulet of Dobson Community Action Team approached the City Council with the idea to close the park completely during the renovations. With the park closed and posted "No Trespassing", it would enable officers to arrest and prosecute the people who insisted on returning to the park to conduct drug transactions.

After explaining to the city council the purpose of the closure, the council approved the closure. It was closed, fenced and posted "No Trespassing".

During the time the park was closed, members of the Community Action Team, working with the block watch and Citizens on Patrol programs, conducted numerous "Selective Enforcement" details in the area, the C. A.T. officers varied their work schedules and spent many hours on foot and bicycles. As street level narcotics transactions diminished, so did activity in and around the park.

While renovations were still being completed, members of the Community Action Team took the opportunity to pose as construction workers in order to note the activity of a suspected "Crack" house. Intelligence gathered during this phase was later used to take enforcement action against some of the local "Crack" dealers who had moved to a near by apartment complex.

Once the discovery of the dealers was made in the apartment complex, Officers Duhigg and Pradelt began a covert surveillance of the drug transactions taking place in the parking lot. The management of the complex were members of the Mesa Crime Free Multi Housing Program and offered the officers use of a third floor apartment for use as a point of observation. Officers Duhigg and Pradelt video taped transactions being made in the parking lot and turned the

information over to the Mesa Police Department's Narcotics Team. This new evidence enabled the Narcotics team to do several covert buys and after a sufficient case was established, five "Crack" dealers were arrested. This completely devastated the drug trade in this area and other dealers were hesitant to work the area from then on.

The Community Action Team, along with the Mesa City Prosecutor's Office developed an "Enhanced Prosecution Project"

Under the terms of this project any person who was arrested within the boundaries of the 1-mile square in and around the neighborhood was not allowed to return to the neighborhood. Should they return to the neighborhood it would violate the terms of their probation and it would be revoked. Should a person who lived in the area be enrolled in the project, they were given a narrow corridor within the project area to arrive and depart from their residence.

This convinced the habitual offenders in the area that the Police Department and the City Prosecutor's Office were watching the area AND taking action against even the smallest of offenses.

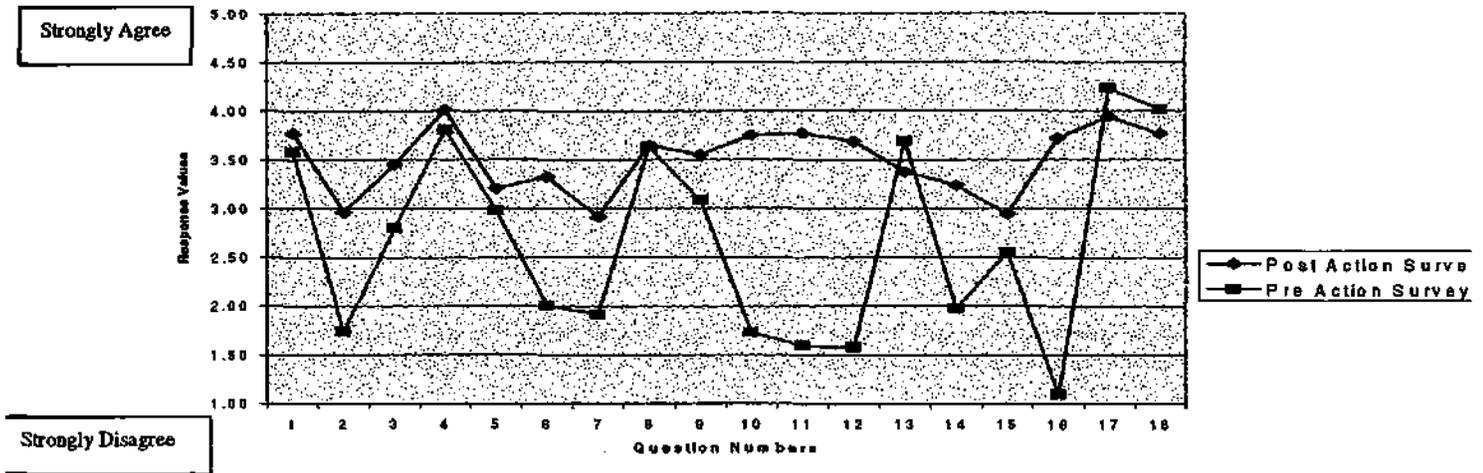
The above listed responses involved members of the Community Action Team, Patrol Officers, Motor Officers, Bike Officers, Gang Detectives and Narcotics Detectives. A police presence was maintained nearly continuously, calls for service in the neighborhood were given priority over other calls of the same level within the city.

ASSESSMENT:

In order to evaluate the impact this project had on the community, we conducted "Post Action Interviews" with patrol officers during a "Beat Meeting". Beat meetings are gatherings of all the beat officers from all the shifts in a particular beat. Patrol Officers contacted agreed that

Chart 1-3

South Grand and Rotary Park Survey Results (Comparison)



#1: I like my neighborhood.

#2: I do not want to move.

#3: There is a lot of crime in the neighborhood.

#4: Police service in the neighborhood was satisfactory.

#5: I feel safe in the neighborhood.

#6: I feel safe in the Park.

#7: Children are safe in the Park.

#8: Crime is caused by only a few in the neighborhood.

#9: I feel good about the future of the neighborhood.

#10: I have no fear of the neighborhood.

#11: Crime is not a problem in the neighborhood and it is not out of control.

#12: Police do enough about the crime in the neighborhood.

#13: I am willing to volunteer time for neighborhood projects.

#14: Gangs are not a problem for the neighborhood.

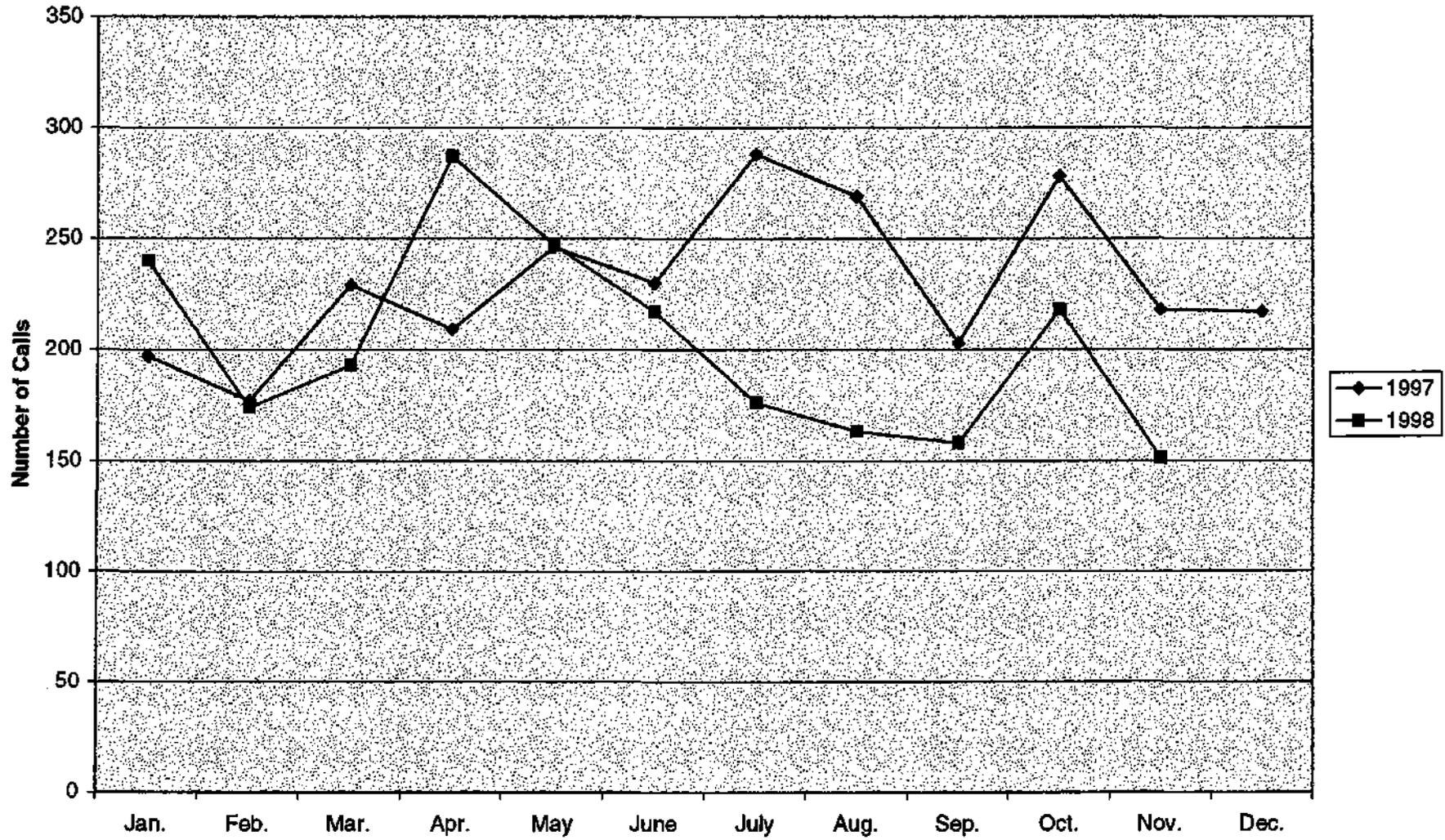
#15: Transients cause no problems for the neighborhood.

#16: We need new legislation for dealing with transients.

#17: I am willing to call the Police to report crime.

#18: I am willing to aid in prosecution of criminals.

Chart 1-4
Calls for Service (South Grand)



the area had been significantly impacted. Calls for service were down which enabled officers to do more "Pro-active" work. Officers no longer felt the need to respond to simple calls for service with two back up officers. Complaints from the officers about the area included the lack of "On view" type activity. Prior to the project being opened a patrol officer could drive down the street and take his pick of people who were involved in suspicious activity. Now the activity was so significantly reduced, they had to work harder to find suspicious activity.

A "Post Action" Survey was completed. Where ever possible the same people were contacted and surveyed. The results of the survey showed a dramatic improvement in the responses of the neighbors. (See Chart 1-3)

The "Post Action" Survey showed significant improvements in nearly all aspects of the survey with three exceptions. When asked about volunteering time for neighborhood projects, people showed a slightly lower interest. This is believed to be due to the numerous projects conducted with their help in the area. The other two lower responses dealt with calling the police to make complaints and aiding in prosecution of criminals. Again, it is concluded that these decreases are due to the neighborhood involvement in each aspect of our response. People were not as afraid to walk next door and ask them to turn their music down as when we started the project.

We also conducted a "Post Action" interview with our Service Agency Partners. It was the general consensus that the neighborhood had improved dramatically.

We completed a Calls for Service comparison for the area and found that we had reduced calls for service by 32 percent as compared with the beginning and ending of the projects calls for service. (See Chart 1-4)

With our response to the problems expressed in the Scanning and Analysis phases of this project we accomplished the following:

1. Transients are no longer living in the park or the alley.
2. Gangs no longer have wild parties or open confrontations in the street due to an increased presence of Police and the reporting habits of the neighborhood.
3. Street level drug dealing has ceased in the area.
4. Service agencies working within the area now have a point of contact and communicate problems and solutions as needed.
5. Prostitution has ceased in the area.
6. Neighborhood residents hold block watch meetings, work as Citizen on Patrol members, hold marches and get involved in the community.
7. The neighborhood's appearance and corresponding real-estate values are improving.

By closely monitoring the surrounding areas, i.e. parks and surrounding neighborhoods, the members of the Community Action Team were able to eliminate the simple displacement of the problems issues addressed in this project.

This project was opened in October of 1996 and was closed in November of 1998. A project of this size in an area of this type must continue to be monitored and maintained to prevent a re-establishment of the same or similar problems. Members of the Community Action Team and Patrol Officers continue to keep track of problem areas that arise within the boundaries of the project area.

During the course of this project officers involved in its facilitation received training in Community Policing from the Police Executive Research Forum and implemented some of the ideas presented at several Problem Oriented Policing Conferences.

Although the Police Department was a major factor in facilitating the project, at least 15 agencies and social organizations along with numerous neighborhood residents were involved in the undertaking. A neighborhood committee was established in addition to a block watch and a citizens on patrol group. Older homes were removed and rebuilt or remodeled by Housing for Mesa (a non-profit group). Neighborhood cleanups were conducted and a neighbor helping neighbor program was initiated by the Boy's and Girl's Club. Rotary Park was temporarily closed to allow for renovation using federal funds.

Due to the success of this project, the media has taken quite an interest in it. The local papers have written several articles about the project and the success we experienced while working with the neighbors. (See Attached).

The park and the surrounding neighborhood have been re-taken and returned to the people who live there. The transients and the drug dealing population are gone and families once again use the park. Neighborhood pride is on the rise and calls for police service has significantly decreased.

The Contact Person for the South Grand and Rotary Park Project is:

Officer John J. Duhigg #10476

Mesa Police Department
130 N. Robson
Mesa, Arizona
85201

Phone 480-644-4-71

Fax 480-644-3478

E-mail John_Duhigg@ci.mesa.az.us