

# FONTANA POLICE DEPARTMENT ANTI-GRAFFITI PROGRAM HERMAN GOLDSTEIN SUBMISSION



2001



## SUMMARY:

### Scanning:

For the past several years, graffiti and vandalism have increasingly impacted the City of Fontana. The graffiti problem had escalated from occasional gang members claiming territory to tagging crews vandalizing large areas of the city on a nightly basis. Citizens and business groups were complaining about the negative impact graffiti was having on their businesses and on the community in general. The City Council had made graffiti eradication one of their three identified priorities.

### Analysis:

Police Department personnel identified several key problems with our existing program. In the past most graffiti had been done by street gang members and our enforcement efforts were aimed at them. By 1998 most graffiti in the city was being done by tag crew members or individual taggers. Taggers have different motivations for tagging than gang members and different strategies are needed when dealing with taggers than with gang members. Downtown businesses were not cooperating with the city's existing graffiti paint out program. Most importantly graffiti was staying on buildings for long periods of time which encouraged other taggers to tag in the same area.

### Response:

Several strategies were used to deal with this issue. The police department assigned one officer to handle all graffiti related problems in the city. When arrests were made, or taggers identified, search warrants would be served on the taggers' homes to gather evidence of additional acts of vandalism and to help identify other tag crew members. The City hired extra work crews to clean up the graffiti so it would be removed within 24 hours. A city ordinance was passed allowing the city to abate graffiti at the owner's expense when it was not removed within 48 hours. Officers made contact with business owners and had them sign waivers allowing the city to remove the graffiti for free before they had to pay for removal of graffiti that was abated.

### Assessment:

All of the business owners in our downtown area agreed to participate in our free graffiti paint out program. Prior to the start of the program the city received over 40 complaints of new graffiti a day. During the last six months the city has received an average of 4.4 complaints a day. Most importantly graffiti is no longer a common sight in the City of Fontana and is no longer a major issue of concern to citizens or business owners.

## SCANNING:

For the past several years, graffiti and vandalism have increasingly impacted the City of Fontana. Graffiti was becoming a fast growing city wide issue that needed to be corrected. One of the hardest hit areas throughout the City of Fontana was the downtown area where literally dozens of buildings were being victimized by taggers on a regular basis.

The City of Fontana had implemented a Graffiti Paint Out Program with a paint crew that would paint over graffiti on city property and at businesses that would voluntarily let city crews remove the vandalism. Although this service was available, owners of many buildings in the downtown area, many of who were absentee, refused to let city crews assist in the removal of the graffiti. Some of the buildings that had been painted over were also having new graffiti go up almost as fast as the property owner or the city could remove it.

With the increase of graffiti that was occurring, the amount of cases by patrol officers were steadily rising which in turn slowed down their response times to other priority calls and reduced pro-active policing efforts.

By August of 1999, graffiti had become such a major issue to both business owners and community members that the city council identified it as one of its three main priorities for the city government to deal with. The City Council directed the City Manager to develop a program that would reduce or eliminate the graffiti issue.

The Police Department realized we needed to change the way that we looked at graffiti. The City of Fontana also needed to find a way to encourage and in some cases

force property owners to remove graffiti from their properties and be willing to assist them in that removal. The Police Department needed a more comprehensive and more aggressive approach in handling graffiti-vandalism cases and reports. We also needed to implement an overall strategy to increase the penalties of vandalism when suspects were caught. We also needed to reduce the amount of exposure the taggers received by removing the graffiti in a timely manner.

Based on direction from the City Council we decided to take a multi-disciplinary approach to this problem and come up with a comprehensive strategy to deal with graffiti. A committee that included the City Manager, the Chief of Police, the Public Works Director, and the Police Lieutenant in charge of the Community Oriented Policing Unit developed a program to eliminate graffiti as a problem in the city within a year.

Street gang Graffiti



Gang graffiti often contains numbers and locations or city names and is often crossed out by rival gangs.

Tagger graffiti



Individual taggers think of their graffiti as "art" and like to use different colors and usually write only tag monikers and sometime tag crew names.

ANALYSIS:

Traditionally most graffiti in the city had been done by gang members who used tagging as a way of marking their territory. While gang members would sometimes tag in other areas to gain notoriety or send a message to other gangs, they would not usually tag in our downtown or business areas. By the late 1990's overall gang activity in the city was at the lowest point in a decade. The fact that graffiti was up while gang activity was down indicated that there might be a change in who was putting up graffiti or why it was being done.

Officers talked to suspects arrested for graffiti and found that most were not members of traditional street gangs but were either tagging as individuals or members of tagging crews. Street gangs tagged for specific reasons but tagging was not the main reason the group was formed or stayed together. Tagging crews came together for the sole purpose of tagging. Taggers prefer to tag in business areas and on well-traveled streets. While some tagging crews evolved into street gangs most of them were not involved in any other criminal activity. We also found that once an officer learned what to look for it was relatively easy to tell the difference between graffiti done by taggers and graffiti done by street gang members. Once we started to analyze the problem we found that 80%-85% of all the graffiti committed was done by individuals or tag crews, not gang members.

Gang unit officers were handling graffiti enforcement and follow up investigations. Each gang officer was responsible for dealing with graffiti by specific street gangs. Graffiti not related to street gangs was handled by gang officers based on the location of occurrence. We did not have one officer responsible for coordinating graffiti related

investigations. This system worked well with graffiti done by gang members but was not very effective when dealing with individual taggers or tag crews.

The city did have one graffiti paint out crew but they could not keep up with the workload and they were not being allowed by the owners of many of the downtown business to remove graffiti in a timely manner. We had also tried the use of citizen graffiti patrols and civil fines for graffiti offenders, neither of those strategies had worked.

The state legislature had recently passed a bill that was going to reimburse the city for booking fees paid to the county. This meant that the city would be receiving approximately \$250,000 annually that had not been anticipated in the city budget. The City Manager advised that as much of that money as needed would be available, as long as we were able to meet the City Councils goal of reducing or eliminating the graffiti problem.

City staff identified that the following issues were the main cause of Fontana's significant graffiti/vandalism problem:

1. The Police Department needed a more comprehensive and aggressive approach in handling graffiti related vandalism. That approach needed to target individual taggers and tagging crews instead of street gang members.
2. The Public Works Department needed additional resources to paint over the graffiti in a more timely manner.
3. The City also needed to develop a strategy to allow them to paint over graffiti on property where the owners have not been cooperative in removing the graffiti or allowing the city to remove the graffiti for them.

*In summary we need an overall strategy that would increase the likelihood that tuggers were caught, increase the penalties when they were caught, and reduce the amount of exposure they received by removing graffiti as rapidly as possible.*

**RESPONSE:**

The city took a multi-disciplinary approach and came up with a comprehensive strategy to deal with graffiti. City staff identified the following issues as the main cause of Fontana's significant graffiti problem.

- The police department needed a more comprehensive and more aggressive approach in handling graffiti-related vandalism.

- The public works department needed additional resources to paint over graffiti in a more timely manner.

- The city needed to develop a strategy to allow them to paint over graffiti on property where the owners have not been cooperative in removing the graffiti or allowing the city to remove the graffiti for them.

At the time the project was initiated, the police department had several officers assigned to work both gang and tagging groups in various areas of the city. The Officers working graffiti enforcement were gang Officers and their focus was on street gang related graffiti even though most graffiti in the city was being done by individuals or tag crews. Those Officers were hampered in there investigations by lack of sophisticated surveillence equipment and a need to be relatively close to the area where they expected the graffiti to occur in order to identify and catch the taggers. The program called for the following strategies to address these issues:

- One police officer would be assigned full time to handle all graffiti related issues. If and when graffiti was reduced, that officer would spend time working general gang issues, but his or her primary function would still be coordinating the police departments' response to vandalism.
  
- The plan also called for purchasing surveillance equipment, binoculars, a night vision scope and a remote camera to make it easier for officers to fully conduct surveillances and identify taggers.
  
- A \$500 reward was offered for information leading to the arrest/conviction of the subject(s) caught tagging.
  
- Whenever a subject was caught tagging, and it was evident that the subject was part of a tag crew, the graffiti officer would write a search warrant for the taggers home. The search warrant would allow officers to search for evidence that would help identify other tag crewmembers. The search warrant also helped to convince taggers' parents, who were unaware of or in denial about their children's tagging activities. We also found that taggers simply did not like police officers searching their bedrooms and the search warrants themselves are a deterrent.

The existing city work crew was simply unable to keep up with the graffiti workload. The existing crew was scheduled to work Mondays through Fridays and if a property were vandalized on Friday night, the graffiti would stay in place at least until Monday.

- The plan called for hiring one additional crew to deal with tagging.
- The new work crew would work weekends so there would be seven day a week coverage and graffiti would not stay up over a weekend.

In order to encourage and in some cases force property owners to clean graffiti off their property, the city took several steps.

ft" The centerpiece of the strategy was a city ordinance that required property owners to have graffiti removed from their property within 48 hours. Under that ordinance, any time graffiti was up for more than 48 hours, the city could abate the graffiti at the owner's expense.

- If the owner agreed to voluntarily participate in the abatement program, the graffiti would be removed by city paint out crews free of charge.
- City workers, including the uniformed police officer working the program, made personal contact with business owners to explain the new ordinance.

With the new ordinance in place and an aggressive campaign of contacting business owners and managers, the city was able to receive virtually 100% compliance from businesses in high graffiti areas.

The strategy developed called for having all graffiti in the city removed within 48 hours, and most within 24 hours of the time it was put up. By doing this, there would be less incentive for taggers to put graffiti up, so they and their friends could see their "artwork". To make it more costly for the taggers to engage in vandalism, the police department took several steps.

ft\*- A \$500 reward was offered for information leading to the arrest/conviction of the subject(s) caught tagging.

ft" The police department also worked closely with the juvenile DA to make sure that the subjects arrested for tagging received special terms involving the possession of

tagging paraphernalia. Search terms allowed officers to search the subject's room any time they saw tagging that appeared to have originated with that subject.

- ▶ California has a law that requires subjects convicted of graffiti vandalism lose their drivers license for one year. If the subject does not have a driver's license then they cannot receive a license for a year or they must wait for an additional year after they are old enough to receive a license. Our local juvenile courts were unaware of the law and were not enforcing it. They agreed to enforce the law and we had our officers working in the schools advise students of the law.

The program simply meant that it was less cost effective for a subject to commit graffiti vandalism in Fontana. Even though there was still a fairly low probability of a subject getting caught at any given time that they committed vandalism, the probability was increased slightly. More importantly, the penalties for getting caught increased dramatically, while at the same time the benefit they received measured in the amount of time their graffiti was subject to public view was reduced substantially.

Street gang graffiti



Tag crew graffiti



ASSESSMENT:

In Order to assess the effectiveness of the program we agreed to look at the following factors:

9 Number of business owners in the downtown area that agreed to allow the paint out crews to remove graffiti.

- Amount of graffiti seen in the city.
- Citizen complaints to the graffiti hotline.

The results of the city's Anti-Graffiti Program have been dramatic. When assessing those specific factors we found the following:

- With the new ordinance in place and an aggressive campaign of contacting business owners and managers, the city was able to receive virtually 100% compliance from businesses in high graffiti areas.
- While graffiti has not been eliminated, it has ceased to be a significant issue in most of the city areas. The City of Fontana still experiences occasional outbreaks of tagging done either by individuals or gang members, however we continue to go after those outbreaks aggressively by eradication and enforcement. By adding the second eradication crew, the city was able to remove all new graffiti going up in the most visible areas of the city, including the downtown area within 24 hours. Over the past year, the paint crews spent more time going after smaller acts of vandalism such as graffiti placed on curbs, signs and mailboxes as opposed to large visible tags. Much of the graffiti that is being painted over at the present time are small pieces of graffiti in residential or remote areas that have been at those locations since before the program started.

9 On one of the most significant ways we have of tracking the effectiveness of the graffiti program is the number of complaints we receive on our graffiti hotline. For several years, Fontana has maintained a citywide Graffiti Hotline at (909) 350-GONE. This is a 24-hour hotline available for residents that see graffiti and want to report it for investigation or removal. In August 1999, the City of Fontana was routinely receiving an excess of 40 calls on that line each day.

9 Since the program has been in place, the average number of calls to the graffiti hotline has reduced significantly. During the six-month period between September 1, 2000 and March 1, 2001, the average number of calls coming into the hotline over a 24 hour period has been reduced to 4.4 calls. *This represents over a 90% reduction in complaints by citizens of new incidents of graffiti.* When those reports are made, all are investigated and the graffiti is usually removed within 24 hours, and never longer than 48 hours.

While it was not an originally chosen as something we were going to assess we decided to take a look at the percentage of graffiti being done taggers versus street gang members. We found that street gangs instead of individuals or tagging crews now do most graffiti in the city. Based both on interviews of subjects arrested a review of graffiti in the city, we believe that over 80% is being done by street gangs. This would appear to indicate that the strategies we used in this program were more effective in reducing tagging by individuals and tagging crews then they were in reducing tagging by traditional street gang members.

Another dramatic way to evaluate the success of the program was to drive through the city and down its major streets. Prior to the start of the program, it was almost

impossible to drive one block on any major street in the business area without seeing several acts of graffiti vandalism. Even though graffiti is a major area-wide problem, it is unusual to see graffiti at any time on major streets in the city, which has greatly improved the image and cleanliness of the city.

In summary, Fontana is a city of approximately 129,000 people, covering almost 40 square miles. The city was able to eliminate a problem that, little over a year and a half ago, was declared by the City Council as one of the three major problems facing the city for an ongoing expenditure of \$165,000. Even if there was no offset by the work crews ability to take on other projects and a work load reduction in the Police Department, this would still be a significant accomplishment. The City of Fontana has proved that a combination of aggressive enforcement and eradication can eliminate problems related to graffiti vandalism. Reduction of graffiti vandalism can and does have significant impacts on the overall quality of life and economic vitality in a city, especially in the business areas of the city. This is a program that can be easily replicated in other cities with major graffiti problems old or new.

#### AGENCY AND OFFICER INFORMATION:

Most of the SARA analysis and program design for this program was done by members of the departments MET (Multiple Enforcement Team) which contains the department's gang and POP teams. The analysis and recommendations were then presented to a citywide management and executive team chosen by the city manager to deal with this problem. That team consisted of the City Manager, the Chief of Police, the Director of

Public Works and the Lieutenant from the police departments' community policing unit. A presentation was then made to the City Council, which approved the budget issues.

All officers and managers at the Fontana Police Department receive extensive training in Community Policing and problem solving. The department has sent entire teams, sworn and non-sworn officers, volunteers and community members to trainer courses and conferences. All officers have attended advanced officer training in Community Oriented problem Solving Training as part of their field-training program. All members of our special operations division, which includes our POP team, Gang Unit, Crime Prevention unit, Bike Team, and Traffic Unit, have attended a basic 24-hour problem oriented problem-solving course. All managers and supervisors have received additional Community Oriented Problem Solving training.

All officers are always encouraged to participate in the problem solving process. Officers problem solving efforts are evaluated and referred to in each annual evaluation. Evaluating an officer's prior work on problem oriented policing projects is a significant portion of the promotional process. Any officer involved in a Problem Oriented Policing Project that requires additional time be given time away from patrol duties is given that time to work on those projects. Our officers are all trained to use the SARA model for problem solving. Officers involved in POP projects are expected to fill out a basic Pop project form, which is then entered in a computer database for tracking purposes. At that time, a department Lieutenant area commander reviews the report and monitors the progress until the project is complete. The Lieutenant is assigned to a certain area of the city that he is familiar with and is referred to as the Area Commander for that section of

city. His primary function as the Area Commander is to oversee a project from start to finish and make sure that the problems identified by patrol officers are in-deed resolved.

The Fontana Police Department has used this model for numerous effective problem-solving programs in the past. We have used the SARA model in principles of Problem Oriented Policing to deal with issues ranging from drag racing to the homeless/transient problems in the community. The Fontana Police Department has received several awards in the past at the state, national, and international levels for Community Oriented Problem Solving projects and programs.

There was an associated cost with this program. The initial cash investment for the graffiti program was approximately \$265,000. One hundred thousand dollars was used to purchase additional equipment for the clean up crews and surveillance equipment for the Police Department graffiti officer. These capitol costs were non-recurring. The additional \$165,000 is allocated to ongoing expenses for personnel hired for graffiti eradication, depreciation of equipment, paint and other supplies.

The officer who was assigned to work graffiti was a no-cost item. The Police Department consolidated the duties of several officers through restructuring and re-assignment. Because of the reduction in graffiti activity, the officer that was working graffiti full time is now able to handle all graffiti-related investigations as only 20-25% of his workload. The rest of that time is spent on general gang investigations. Additionally, prior to the start of this program we had five (5) officers in the gang unit, each spending approximately 20% of their time working on graffiti related issues. The five- (5) officers are now redirected into other areas, which has created substantial savings in police resources.

While the Public Works Department has seen an increase in annual operating costs of \$165,000 to maintain this program, that cost has been offset by the fact that both graffiti eradication crews are now sometimes available to work on other painting projects in the city. The City of Fontana anticipates that as the amount of back-logged graffiti, which existed prior to the start of the program, in some of the city's residential neighborhoods is eliminated, that the paint crews will be able to spend even more time working on other city projects

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