

Summer Sundays at Sadie Thomas Par

Summary of Project

It's no secret that Sadie Thomas Park was a park that needed some special attention due to the amount of discomfort it was causing the surrounding community. Through scanning and analysis, we determined that the problems ranged from homicide, assaults, illegal drug sales and usage, littering, noise, traffic congestion and many violations of the city municipal code. These problems had persisted for over fifteen years.

Summer was approaching fast and an answer to the problem was needed. Several meetings were held with the residents around the park. These meetings were also attended by city officials, community leaders, police officers, and others who felt a change was needed. Along with these meetings, we completed surveys and door to door contacts. We soon learned that the majority of the people wished to see the park return to a family atmosphere. The challenge was how to remove the "bad element" at the park.

We needed a change fast and we knew we needed help. With this in mind, we decided on the idea of church in the park. Since the problems were happening only during the summer months, our response would be for the months of June, July and August. With great willingness, representatives from fifteen churches volunteered to render services at the park. They were scheduled throughout the summer on every Sunday evening, thus creating "Summer Sundays at Sadie Thomas Park".

The evenings consisted of fun for all. There was food, games, songs, prayer and brotherhood for everyone.

It was unbelievable; families were using the park in a way that was not previously possible. Neighborhood kids were even playing basketball with the police officers. Soon the soccer and baseball fields were being used; something that had not happened in over three years. Everyone was beginning to smile at the park that was once an eyesore, the most important measure of success.

Without a doubt, the program made a tremendous difference for the community. We have received countless 'thanks' for making the change in the park. We know that it would not have been possible if it were not for the partnership with the community.

The upcoming summer events have been organized by a citizen committee that did not want to see the program cease. Several other churches have joined the effort and are committed to making "Summer Sundays at Sadie Thomas Park" an annual event.

Summer Sundays at Sadie Thomas Park

Description of Project

SCANNING

Sadie Thomas Park is a park with deep community roots. The property on which the park was built was donated by a concerned community leader that wanted to insure that the children and families in the neighborhood had a safe place to participate in family oriented activities. Years went by and the usage of the park began to change. Problem after problem began to originate. The community had lost its park to homicides, assaults; illegal drug sales and usage, littering, loud noise, traffic congestion and many violations of the city municipal code. The park was a problem of disorder to the point it could not be ignored by anyone.

The summer months were approaching fast and a solution to the park's problems had not been found. We were aware that in the past there had been several attempts made to rid the park of its problems. These attempts were never successful, so we knew we needed to think of something new. We were responsible for solving the problems in our assigned area and this was by far the largest and most obvious.

ANALYSIS

In August 2001, we mailed surveys to one hundred people that lived in the area surrounding the park. With this survey, we hoped to get feedback from the community, in the way of ideas, to solve the before mentioned problems. The surveys revealed just what we already knew. The community wanted their park back as a place for the children to play. The problem, we as police officers faced, was that only fifteen people returned the surveys. Therefore we did not know how much support we could count on from the citizens.

We wanted more input to form a coalition between the police officers and the community. Since we were in the late summer months, we decided to increase police presence around the park until we could come up with a permanent and lasting solution. The police presence would also help to generate support from the community, since it was the primary suggested response received through the surveys. We summoned some of our reserve officers and formed a directed patrol team. Although numerous citations were issued and multiple arrests were made, we knew that it was not the long term solution we were looking for.

We were able to confirm our suspicions; increased police presence would not provide a lasting solution to any of the problems. It was evident that the park had many problems. Pressure was mounting from citizens, city parks and recreation employees, city officials and police administration.

A very intensive look was taken at the park situation. It was the beginning of the winter months, which meant we could give our total attention to developing a response. We continued to focus on the development a partnership between the community and the police department. We held several community meetings to discuss the problems and search for the solutions. Additionally we also met with city directors to discuss the problems. We met with community leaders and obtained vital information from veteran officers about the park. By meeting with these specific groups of people, we were able to:

1. Develop a list of suggestions that had been tried and failed.
2. Create a list of suggestions that the community felt would work.
3. Create a list of items that Sadie Thomas Park did not have as compared to other parks.
4. Discuss changing the city's park curfew and gauging the public's reaction to the change.
5. Actively involve the community in the change.

In addition to these items, we were able to learn that the problems had existed for approximately fifteen years. The meetings also revealed that the problems occurred only during the summer months. We learned that the majority of the individuals involved were young adults. We learned that a majority of these young adults enjoyed drinking alcohol, and listening to loud music and that it had become a tradition in the community.

During our meetings with members of the surrounding community they expressed their concerns in terms of safety and quality of life issues. One resident stated that because of the traffic problem around the park on Sundays, if he had an emergency at his house, he felt medics or the fire department would not be able to rapidly respond to his house.

Another family that lives across from the park stated they put their kids in the bed at 9:00 p.m., but due to the noise coming from the radios of vehicles, they can not sleep until after midnight.

Additionally we met with the Parks and Recreation Advisory Board of citizens, which had been created to help the city parks and recreations department make decisions. We met with them to solicit their opinions on what the response should be. The advisory board informed us that because of the illegal activity that occurs at Sadie Thomas Park, the city limits the amount of funds that are spent to beautify the park. The director of the advisory board stated that on Monday mornings the city picks up the trash at the park. The trash weight alone was about 1,500 lbs every week. The director advised that other parks, that are just as active as Sadie Thomas Park, only had 200 - 300 lbs. What made the problem worse was that at Sadie Thomas Park, most of the trash was collected off the ground. The people utilizing the park did not use the trashcans. This also led to trash ending up in the surrounding residential areas.

All meetings would prove to be important. With the help of all of those that attended we were able to determine several things. 1. Time and day the park was causing problems for community. 2. Nature of problems in park. 3. Impact of problems on community. With this information we felt it was time to move on to the next step in assisting the community in making a change in their park.

With so many suggestions on hand we were sure that we could find a viable solution, it was just a matter of making it happen. There were a few questions still, before we would start developing a plan of action: 1. What solution would benefit all the parties involved? 2. Was there a way to incorporate all the suggestions? 3. How could we make the community a part of this change? 4. Does the change need to be gradual or sudden? We were sure that our response would be "outside the box" and original.

RESPONSE

Our first step was to obtain more trashcans for the park in an attempt to reduce or eliminate the litter problem. An additional fifteen trashcans were added. Our thought was that more visible trashcans would promote their use.

There were many lights in the park, but many of them were not working. This created "dark spots" in the park, which made perfect areas for illegal activity. A simple phone call to the utility department and this problem was solved by replacing the broken bulbs.

We then added three signs in the park stating the park rules, highlighting **no glass containers and no alcoholic beverages**. Next we contacted the transportation department and coordinated to have no parking signs put up along the roadway entering the park.

We believed these simple fixes would help to reduce some of the problems, but we wanted to permanently address them. As mentioned before, it was stated that the wish of the community was to see the park return to its family like atmosphere. This is when the concept of "Summer Sundays at Sadie Thomas" was developed.

Our analysis had shown that it had become tradition for young adults to frequent the park on Sunday evenings. With the crowds, came the traffic congestion and the abuse of the park. We had tried a police presence in the park, but it was soon realized that we would have to completely displace the crowd to prevent them from entering. Most of the young adults had police records and their respect for law enforcement was questionable. We looked to the community for an organized group with members that would be respected by these young adults.

The project consisted of involving local area churches and their members. With enough participation we were able to assign a church to each Sunday during the summer months. On these Sundays, the assigned church was responsible for holding family oriented activities in the park during the hours when the problems were happening.

Each church assigned was responsible for having fun and games for the neighborhood kids and the families that attended. The churches were expected to bring food to promote family fellowship time. A benefit for the churches was that the time was also available for them to seek out new membership for their congregations.

This response required minimal police involvement and the vision would result in a park that fulfilled all the involved parties' expectations. One of the greatest things this would accomplish is that the "bad element" would be driven out, due to the fact that they would be replaced by a "good element". Finally we were on our way with a joint effort to effect a change in the worse park in the city.

At this point we began to meet with leaders from fifteen churches and began to present them with the idea of church activities in the park. Along with the fifteen churches were five other individuals that volunteered their time to assist in the project. They all received the calendar dates that were to be used for the project. Calendars were turned in with the available dates they could volunteer. We scheduled up to four churches for each Sunday and gave each of them time blocks to fill. When deciding to structure the event in this manner, we knew the churches would turn the event into a competition. Each of them would try to better the one before.

Everything was starting to come together. After the dates were confirmed, a media campaign was initiated with local television stations and radio stations. The people and churches were eager to get started and the community was just as eager to welcome them to the park.

ASSESSMENT

"Unbelievable", "breathtaking", "heart-stopping" and "incredible" are just a few words to describe this project and the affect it had on that entire community. Most of the neighborhood was completely shocked to see the park return to it original purpose. They did not believe it could happen.

For the first two weeks we competed with the "bad element" for the park. We supplied uniformed police presence to discourage illegal activity and to ensure that church members felt safe. Even with the competition from the "bad element", you could tell that the program was making a difference.

There are ten basketball goals and all of them were being used by kids and their families. Some games even consisted of police officers as team members. The impact could be felt most when you looked out and saw a sixty-three year old lady resident who had once cried when asking us to solve the problems, competing in the free throw contest. She stated that winning was not important, being able to return the park and to feel safe was good enough for her.

Another moment that has to be mentioned is when one of the church members noticed a man sitting in the park, alone. As the church member began to talk to him he learned that he needed some assistance in obtaining a job for the support of his family. The church member escorted him over to the services and made the request known. Before services were over the man was given several job opportunities from supervisors that were in the congregation. The churches also collected funds to give to the man and his family.

We continued to monitor the success of the project. We were only in the first month, but it had yielded great results. The project continued to improve as the church members began to spread the word through out the community. No one wanted to miss a Sunday and our crowds became so large that there was no room for the "bad element" to enter the park. The competition was over and the community had won. For the remaining two months, our role as police officers was to enjoy the police radio silence and a hot dog.

Results were what we needed and that is just what we got. In the month of September we compared calls for service in the previous years with the present year. We were surprised and pleased to know that the calls for service had decreased dramatically: loud music calls were down, parking complaints almost disappeared completely, and parks and recreation reported a huge decrease in pounds of trash that was picked up out of the park, all of which had made it to the trash cans.

Based on the astonishing results, we were able to convince a local soccer club to move its games to the soccer field at Sadie Thomas Park. Before the Summer Sundays project the fields were not used. We also were able to convince a local softball league to reserve the softball field to use when playing games and tournaments. This made the city officials happy because that brought in revenue.

As a result of this project, we have learned that the best solution is one that involves little or no police response and presence. This is important because it keeps us free to handle other issues in the community. We didn't have to organize a directed park patrol team as was done in the past. The citizens have learned that they can better their own neighborhoods and parks with a little organization and involvement. We have reduced the possibility of criticism, since the improvements in the park were voluntary and not done by the force of the police department.

The plan of the department is to forever be a part of this project. We have become closely acquainted with the families in the area. Our plans are to monitor the success and help in the planning of future summer events at the park. While we monitor the park in our area, we also help others as they deal with the problem of displacement, which has been minimal. It seems that the tradition has ended. Because the results were so self supporting, we can focus our efforts on other problem areas.

The task of solving the park's problems at times seemed to be unattainable. We were new at the concept of problem oriented policing, and that presented a challenge. Our supervisor offered no easy fixes just words of encouragement to find the solution. Resources began to surface and new ideas were fresh on the minds of the whole team. We were in an area of town dealing with people that are not accustomed to working with, let alone speaking to, the police. All of the obstacles were overcome when both sides realized that we needed each other to make a change happen.

A change it was, from vulgar loud music to soul soothing music, from beer bottles in the park to the crackling sound of a soda on ice, from the smoke of a marijuana joint to the smoke cooking hot dogs for the neighborhood kids. What a transformation!

With the hiring of a new police chief we changed our policing philosophy and began approaching problems through problem oriented policing. Most were non-receptive of the concept because of the unknown. As we dealt with problems, we soon realized the benefits of working with the community. Problem oriented policing sells itself. All you have to do is see a smile on one of the citizens' face and you can not help but be an advocate of the model. It was explained by my supervisor: if the community has a problem then you have a problem and only by working with the community it can be solved.

Summer Sundays at Sadie Thomas

Agency and Officer Information

With the arrival of a new chief of police, a new philosophy of policing was implemented in the City of Bryan, Texas. This change in philosophy was instated through the entire department with the driving force coming directly from the chief. Officers were broken into teams and assigned permanent segments of the community called beats. Over each of the beats was a patrol sergeant. The new chief told these sergeants that they were the de-facto police chief for their area of the city. Teams were told that they were responsible for their beats and would be held accountable for solving problems and improving the quality of life for citizens.

Sergeants and Officers were given information in the form of guides from the United States Department of Justice Office of Community Oriented Policing Services to read as examples of problem solving and received some basic classroom instruction on the application of the S.A.R.A. model. Based on the permanent beat assignments, officers were given the incentive of only dealing with problems in their area of responsibility. Through problem solving officers could directly control their own workload. All resources in the department were at the disposal of the beat officer. If you were not assigned to a beat team then your position became a support position for the beat personnel. Everything and everyone department wide was geared to solve problems.

The presented project titled, "Summer Sundays at Sadie Thomas" was accomplished through a partnership between the community and the members of the 4 A beat team. There were five officers and one sergeant assigned to the team responsible for policing fourteen percent of the city, an area of 7.35 square miles. One officer, Bobby Williams was assigned as the project coordinator and was responsible for the bulk of the work. The sergeant for the beat was, Wayland Rawls and will serve as the project contact person.

Wayland Rawls
Beat Sergeant
P.O. Box 1000
Bryan, Texas 77805
979-209-5301 office
979-209-5303 fax
rawlsw@ci.bryan.tx.us

Videos, photographs, letters from citizens and other information available upon request

**SUMMER SUNDAYS AT
SADIE THOMAS PARK
VISUAL AIDS**

Walling, Choya K

From: Barton, John W
Sent: Monday, April 23, 2001 11:15 AM
To: Walling, Choya K
Cc: Schmitz, David J
Subject: BPD ASSISTANCE/THOMAS PARK

Choya:

HELP!!!

Thomas Park is becoming a war zone again. This weekend was a mess with beer bottles and litter everywhere. Numerous bottles were broken throughout the park, in the parking lot, on the basketball court, and against the buildings. We've had one person over there since 7:00 this morning, and he's still not through cleaning up the bottles and debris.

As usual, any help appreciated - especially here. Thanks.

Wes

Walling, Choya K

From: Barton, John W
Int: Monday, June 04, 2001 10:13 AM
To: Walling, Choya K
Cc: Schmitz, David J
Subject: SADIE THOMAS PARK

Choya:

We got hit pretty hard in Thomas Park Sunday and Sunday evening. The aftermath was worse than the worst Juneteenth Celebration I've ever seen. Most of the debris was glass bottles strewn from one end of the park to the other, including in the pool. The pool supervisor finally called the Police Sunday evening. I don't know if they showed.

We did discover, after the fact, that FM 103 was broadcasting a party at the park. We've not been able to uncover who was responsible.

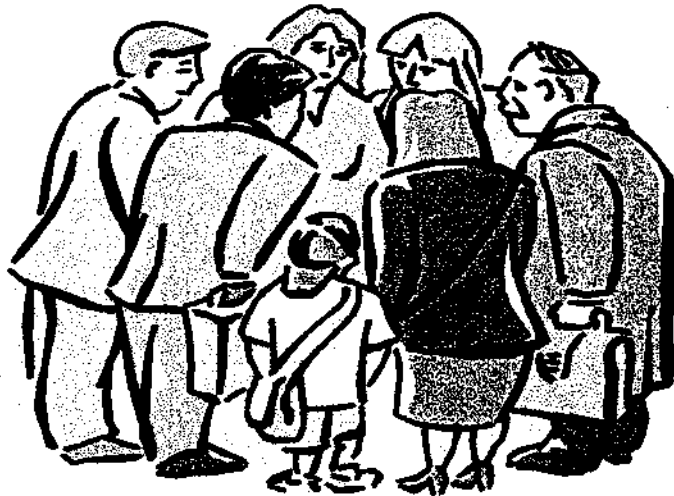
My question arises about the new local policing efforts. If local policing is occurring, how could this get so far out of hand? Should it not have been noticed sooner? We're seeing a tremendous increase in use and abuse at Thomas Park. You and I have corresponded many times, but I see no improvement.

What can I do to help? Adding trash barrels is not the solution!!!

Please advise. Thanks.

Wes

TOGETHER WE CAN MAKE A
DIFFERENCE



COMMUNITY MAKEOVER MEETING
SPONSORED BY THE BRYAN POLICE DEPARTMENT

April 4, 2002 @ 6:30 p.m. @ Peaceful Rest Baptist Church

1409 Congo St.

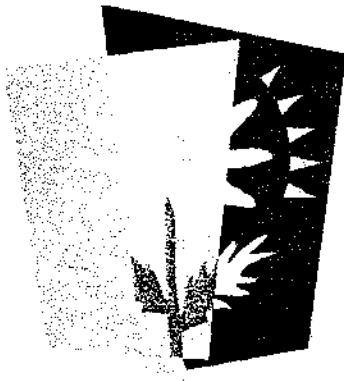
IF YOU HAVE QUESTIONS THAT NEED ANSWERS OR MAYBE YOU
HAVE A CONCERN ABOUT YOUR COMMUNITY, THEN THIS
MEETING IS FOR YOU!

A VARIETY OF TOPICS WILL BE DISCUSSED. FOR EXAMPLE: SADIE
THOMAS PARK, LOUD MUSIC FROM VEHICLES, CITY CODES, AND
MANY OTHERS.

SUMMER SUNDAYS AT SADIE THOMAS PARK

THEME:

**BETTER FAMILIES MAKE
BETTER COMMUNITIES**



HOST CHURCHES: North Bryan New Birth
Peaceful Rest Baptist Church

ACTIVITIES: life changing, soul saving preaching,
inspirational singing, 3point and free
throw contest and many other games

FESTIVITIES START AT 5:00 P.M.

If your church would like to get involved in this effort to change the image of Sadie Thomas Park and the community, contact Wayland Rawls or Bobby Williams at The Bryan Police Department @ 209-5301. This event is sponsored by local churches of Bryan and coordinated by The Bryan Police Department.

Bring your lawn chairs and lets make a difference in the community

The Bryan Police Department has adopted a new form of problem solving called Geographical Policing. This means officers and supervisors are given specific areas of town and are responsible for solving problems that arise.

The area of town that you live in is called 4a Beat. The police officers assigned to your neighborhood are:

Lieutenant C. Walling / e-mail of wallingc@ci.bryan.tx.us

Sergeant W. Rawls / e-mail of rawlsw@ci.bryan.tx.us

Detective S. Carver / e-mail of carvers@ci.bryan.tx.us

Officer W. Fleming, Officer D. Thane, Officer A. Wescoat, Officer J. Eyre

This survey is being passed out in the neighborhood surrounding Sadie Thomas Park. From a police stand point, it is easy to state the problems that occur at the park, but not easy to solve them. Our intention is to learn what the neighbors effected by the park see as a problem. We want to have the park available for everyone to enjoy, but with the multiple violation including excessive littering it is difficult to see the benefits. Please take a few moments and answer the questions below. They will give us an idea of what the citizen's want done to better the park's environment for everyone.

1. Is parking a problem? How would you like to see it addressed?
2. Would you want to change the no parking signs to cover everyday of the week?
3. Would you like to see the curbs in the middle of the U removed to allow people to circle the park?
4. Do you see the usage and sale of illegal drugs as a problem?
5. Does the load music from vehicle present a problem to you?
6. How do you recommend we solve the littering problem?
7. How do you recommend we keep alcoholic beverages from the grounds of the park?
8. Would you like to see an increased police presence at the park?
9. How would you feel to closing the park to all traffic on Sunday evenings?
10. Please list anything the police department can do to make your community better.

(If you need additional space on any question, attach an additional page)

Thank you for taking your time to assist the police department in endeavors to better the city of Bryan. Please return this form to the police building located at 300 South Texas Avenue at the corner of 29th Street and Texas Avenue as soon as possible. The form can also be mailed to the preprinted destination on the back of this form by folding this page and attaching postage. If you have any questions do not hesitate to call me or any of the other officers at 209-5301.

Thank you and do not hesitate to make our communities better,

Sergeant W. Rawls