

POLICE EXECUTIVE RESEARCH FORUM

PROBLEM SOLVING AWARD

THE MEADOWBROOK PROJECT

SUBMITTED BY

OFFICER PATRICK SOUTH

AUSTIN POLICE DEPARTMENT

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THE LOCATION

Meadowbrook is a one hundred sixty unit complex occupying eight hundred tenants. It is bordered by a city park, two city streets and a railroad. Internally, Meadowbrook consists of twenty-six buildings and two city streets. The residents of this area are predominately lower income African-American and Hispanic.

THE PROBLEM

The problems in the Meadowbrook area included extensive drug dealing, gang activity, prostitution, and family violence. During the evening hours, drug dealers and gang members controlled the interior streets and surrounding areas. Community members were not only in fear of their safety but were afraid to let their children play on the streets in broad daylight. Police enforcement was ineffective due to the contained nature of the complex and accessibility of exits by perpetrators. It was not uncommon for numerous patrol units to answer minor calls to insure officer safety and public well-being. The overall perception of the Meadowbrook community was displayed by a lack of confidence with the Police Department and in the officers' ability to perform their duty.

WHO WAS THIS A PROBLEM FOR?

The Austin Housing Authority was unable to provide safe and affordable housing to lower income tenants. The Austin Police Department had difficulty in serving its primary function: to adequately protect and serve the community. Community members were in fear of retaliation for any assistance given to the Housing Authority or the Police Department.

WHO WAS AFFECTED BY THIS PROBLEM?

Community members were unable to take an active role or participate in how their community was governed. Local youths had little access to positive role models or positive community responses. Police officers dealt with incidents on a call-to-call basis instead of taking an active role in solving community problems;

PRIOR POLICE ACTION

Prior to the initialization of this project, officers dealt with incidents in the Meadowbrook area with a reactive method of police enforcement. Situations were handled with numerous officers and a strong police presence.

COLLECTION OF INFORMATION

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Initially, Meadowbrook tenants were extremely distrustful of police involvement. Citizens questioned the police officers' ability to handle criminal activity in the area. Citizens

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further expressed doubt about the Housing Authority's ability to improve the standard of living in Meadowbrook.

The first contact was made to the Austin Housing Authority to assess the overall needs of Meadowbrook, specific criminal activity, and individuals committing the majority of the crimes in the area.

Secondly, community meetings were established between officers and residents to discuss areas of concern in Meadowbrook. Citizens and officers educated themselves not only to the problems of Meadowbrook, but to the police procedures needed to correct the situations.

A survey was also conducted within the Meadowbrook community to measure specific interest and support for the Police Department.

Also, prior calls to service in this area indicated a need for an increase in community awareness and tenant participation.

THE GOAL

The goal of this project was to establish a base for trust and communication between the residents of Meadowbrook and the Austin Police Department.

THE STRATEGY

First, an agreement was reached between the Austin Housing Authority and the Austin Police Department to assist each other to serve the needs of the Meadowbrook community.

Specific classes were conducted by police officers in response to community needs and requests. During this time an increased officer presence was made in the community by additional patrols, overtime assignments and interactive community participation. The Police Department also assisted the Housing Authority in documenting specific criminal activity and removing repeat offenders from the complex.

The joint effort between the community, the Housing Authority, and the Police Department enabled the residents of Meadowbrook to establish a resident council to assist in solving future problems.

Numerous community meetings were held and security measures were established for the complex to increase personal safety and security-

AGENCIES INVOLVED

Austin Housing Authority

Austin Police Department

Texas War On Drugs

Meadowbrook Residents Council

ACCOMPLISHMENT OF THE GOAL

Accomplishments include:

- 1 . The residents of Meadowbrook have an increased trust and positive perception towards the Police Department.
2. Trust was established by increasing interaction and assisting in problem-solving with the residents.
3. Residents Council has been established and will be vital to future interaction between the residents and the police.
4. Survey results showed an increase in community support for the Austin Police Department.
5. The quantitative percentages for calls during the following periods showed significant improvement in the Meadowbrook area: 7-1-92 to 4-1-93 as compared to 7-1-93 to 4-1-94.
 - a. 28% decrease in assaults
 - b. 31% decrease in crimes against persons
 - c. 34% decrease in property crimes

- d. 73% decrease in narcotic crimes
- e. 50% decrease in disturbances

The original intent of this project was not to reduce the crime in the area; however, this does display a positive interaction with the residents to achieve the original goal. *

The success of this project has been a cumulative effort between the patrol officers, the residents of Meadowbrook, and the Housing Authority. Without this joint effort, the project would not have shown the results achieved. The officers listed below were vital in this project and to its success:

Officer Bob Benfer
Officer Gina Brewster
Officer Gilbert Cardenas
Officer Shannon Fiske
Officer Cindy Seago
Officer Lester Vanzura
Senior Sergeant Jerry Seidl
Lieutenant Mike Ford

around town

If you have news tips or questions involving 'Around Town,' call Tim Green at 445-3643 or Sue Taylor at 445-3615.

Meadowbrook fetes changes

■ Housing complex residents, police officers celebrate reduction in crime

By Sharon Jayson
American-Statesman Staff

The police presence was obvious Saturday at the Meadowbrook Housing Development, but the officers were celebrating rather than making arrests.

At a picnic sponsored by the Austin Police Department and the Austin Housing Authority, residents said life is safer now at the South Austin low-income housing development where crime was commonplace.

"There was always shooting going on out here," said Victor Diaz, a resident for 30 years. "We just wouldn't sleep at night hearing the guns going off. I've been able to sleep now."

The change is attributed to a year of cooperation between the police, residents and the Housing Authority that has resulted in a 30 percent decrease in crime.

"This is an area a lot of cops wouldn't go in unless they had somebody with them," said Austin Police Department patrol officer Patrick South. "Now we're having a picnic, and kids are playing and having a good time."

While children played volleyball and basketball, adults enjoyed performances by two local bands. Free barbecue was donated for the event.

About 800 people live at the 160-unit complex where drug deals, drive-by shootings and family violence were all too familiar. Last spring, three people were killed at Meadowbrook in separate incidents.

"Sometimes we wouldn't even come out during the day. There was shooting and fighting," said Amelia Garcia, who has lived there almost eight years.

But South said reducing crime wasn't the goal. "The main intention was to open up the lines of communication and change the percep-



Photo by Kevin Vroblik-Adams
Josh Ortiveros, 6, sits on Dodger with the assistance of officer Donnie Williamson during a picnic at Meadowbrook on Saturday.

tion," he said. "The big problem we had here is people wouldn't call the police. They said, 'You're not going to do anything anyway, so why bother to call?' Now I've got them past that. They're not afraid of retaliation, and they're not afraid to call the police."

Meadowbrook Manager Isiah Hernandez said the second shooting spurred residents to take control.

"We had a meeting, and we talked about how all the security and all the police patrolling wasn't going to do any good until they decided themselves they were tired of it," he said.

Because the police and Hernandez agree that visitors provoked many of Meadowbrook's problems, the Housing Authority took action to

evict several families and paid for increased off-duty police patrols. Unauthorized vehicles were towed away. At the same time, the police increased its presence.

"We made it a habit of making sure to watch the Meadowbrook area and to come by as many times as possible to increase visibility and increase interaction between the people here and the police department," South said.

"It's not a Utopia," he said. "The problems are going to be here, but now instead of being a totally out-of-control problem where it's an enforcement nightmare, it's now where the community has taken back their neighborhood."



City of Austin

Founded by Congress, Republic of Texas, 1839
Police Department, 715 East 8th Street, Austin, Texas 78701-3397 Telephone 512/480-5000

MEADOW BROOKS SURVEY

1. HOW DO YOU RATE THE OVERALL PERFORMANCE OF THE AUSTIN POLICE DEPARTMENT ?

A. GOOD B. AVERAGE C. POOR D. UNCERTAIN

2. DO YOU SEE CONTACTS BETWEEN CITIZENS AND POLICE OFFICERS AS A NEGATIVE EXPERIENCE ?

A. YES B. NO C. SOMETIMES

3. DOES THE AUSTIN POLICE DEPARTMENT REPRESENT YOUR COMMUNITY SUFFICIENTLY ?

A. YES B. NO

4. DO YOU TRUST THE POLICE DEPARTMENT ?

A. YES B. NO C. UNCERTAIN

DO YOU TRUST THE POLICE OFFICERS THAT WORK IN YOUR COMMUNITY ?

A. YES B. NO C. UNCERTAIN

5. WOULD COMMUNITY MEETINGS BE USEFUL WHERE APD OFFICERS TAKE AN ACTIVE ROLE ?

A. YES B. NO

6. WOULD CLASSES FOR SPECIAL TOPICS, SUCH AS FAMILY VIOLENCE OR JUVENILE LAW, BE OF INTEREST TO YOU ?

A. YES B. NO

7. WOULD YOU BE WILLING TO PARTICIPATE IN COMMUNITY MEETING AT MEADOW BROOKS ?

A. YES B. NO

8. WOULD YOU BE WILLING TO ACTIVELY PARTICIPATE IN INCREASING TRUST AND COMMUNICATION BETWEEN RESIDENTS OF MEADOW BROOKS AND THE AUSTIN POLICE DEPARTMENT ?

A. YES B. NO

COMMENTS:

1. OVERALL PERFORMANCE OF THE AUSTIN POLICE DEPARTMENT

GOOD 39%
AVERAGE 48% 4% DID NOT RESPOND TO QUESTION
POOR 7%
UNCERTAIN 2%

2. CONTACTS BETWEEN CITIZENS AND OFFICERS AS NEGATIVE EXPERIENCE

YES 27%
NO 27%
SOMETIMES 46%

3. DOES THE POLICE DEPARTMENT REPRESENT THE COMMUNITY SUFFICIENTLY

YES 77%
NO 16% 7% DID NOT RESPOND TO QUESTION

4. TRUST THE POLICE DEPARTMENT

YES 68%
NO 7%
UNCERTAIN 23% 2% DID NOT RESPOND TO QUESTION

TRUST THE OFFICER THAT WORK IN THE COMMUNITY

YES 73%
NO 5%
UNCERTAIN 20% 2% DID NOT RESPOND TO QUESTION

5. WOULD COMMUNITY MEETINGS BE USEFUL WITH POLICE

YES 95%
NO 2% 3% DID NOT RESPOND TO QUESTION

6. WOULD CLASSES ON SPECIAL TOPICS BE USEFUL

YES 93%
NO 7%

7. WOULD YOU PARTICIPATE IN COMMUNITY MEETING

YES 80%
NO 18% 2% DID NOT RESPOND TO QUESTION

8. WOULD YOU BE WILLING TO PARTICIPATE IN INCREASING TRUST AND COMMUNICATION WITH THE POLICE

YES 89%
NO 11%

DATE: JULY 28, 1994
TO: MOLLY MCCOHNILLE
FERF
FROM: OFFICER PATRICK SOUTH
AUSTIN POLICE DEPARTMENT
SUBJECT: RESUME

PATRICK SOOTH

EDUCATION: TEXAS A & M UNIVERSITY, COLLEGE STATION, TX
GRADUATED IN 1988
BACHELOR OF BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION
MAJOR: FINANCE

EXPERIENCE: U.S. MARINE CORP, CAMP PENDLETON, CA
SHAVANO PARK POLICE DEPT., SAN ANTONIO, TX
APPOINTED PATROL LIEUTENANT

AUSTIN POLICE DEPARTMENT, AUSTIN, TX
PATROL OFFICER BEGINNING JANUARY 11, 1993
CURRENTLY ASSIGNED TO PATROL DIVISION