

# Partners In Pride



Fresno Police Department  
Fresno, California

## Partners in Pride

### Abstract

Officers from the Central District Problem Oriented Policing Unit joined with Fresno City College staff, Heaton Elementary School staff and students, and concerned citizens in an attempt to intervene in a growing problem, mainly the blight and dilapidation of the area, in the neighborhood North of the college main campus. A committee, known as "Partners in Pride", was formed. The committee met and identified problems in the areas of safety, education and infrastructure. Crime in the neighborhood was growing, while drugs and prostitution had gained a foothold. The growing college population made a dangerous traffic situation for elementary students walking to and from school.

Residences were becoming dilapidated as displaced owners allowed them to remain vacant, or be occupied by non-scrupulous renters, while the infrastructure was far below standard, having not been improved since the 1940's. Missing curbs, gutters, sidewalks, streetlights and signs were the norm. Rainy days yielded flooded streets.

Statistics were analyzed, and problem locations were identified. Information from patrol officers, citizen contacts and general observation during several neighborhood "clean up days" was utilized. These problems affected the entire neighborhood, not only the immediate area where criminal activity was occurring. Observation of the traffic concerns took place in several areas.

In response to the identified traffic problems, speed enforcement was conducted. An extensive narcotics enforcement operation was also conducted in the neighborhood, which resulted in the identification/arrest of numerous individuals. Prostitution abatement operations were planned and implemented, concluding with the identification/arrest of

numerous subjects, some of whom lived within the neighborhood. When blighted conditions were found as a result of any of these operations, code enforcement was immediately contacted and their procedures implemented.

Officers continue to attend planning meetings with the Partners in Pride steering committee, as well as the safety sub-committee. Bicycle Officers patrol during neighborhood clean up days, maintaining close contact with citizens in the neighborhood. Better communication has been fostered between the Fresno Police Department and the Fresno City College Police Department, making collaborative efforts to improve safety a much greater possibility.

As a result of Partners in Pride, criminal activity has dramatically decreased. There have been significant drops in narcotics and prostitution related offenses. Neighborhood citizens, the college community and elementary school staff and students are realizing a safer, cleaner, more vital area to live, work and play.

## Partners in Pride

### Scanning

Fresno City College has the distinction of being the oldest among California's community colleges, opening its doors in 1910. From its humble beginnings, Fresno City College has grown into a beautiful 103 acre site, with modern, state-of-the-art buildings, classrooms and theaters. In its nearly 90 year history, Fresno City College has been a model for academic and extra-curricular activities and continues to meet the demands of an ever-changing world.

In late 1997, Fresno City College staff began to be concerned about the neighborhood North of the main campus. This 12 block area was not typical of most of the residential areas which had grown up around the college. Bordered by Clinton Avenue on the North, Blackstone Avenue on the East and the Burlington Northern Santa Fe railroad on the West, this well established neighborhood had fallen into disrepair over the decades. Many residences had become dilapidated and were left vacant or unkempt. Roads leading to the college were poorly maintained and lighting was nearly non-existent. The safety and well being of college students and staff was in jeopardy.

Having a stake in the direction the neighborhood was going, Fresno City College staff members called a group of people together to discuss the problem. During initial meetings, college staff and members of both the Fresno Police Department and campus police, as well as staff members from nearby Heaton Elementary School talked at length about their concerns. Heaton School became involved simply because this neighborhood was home to the majority of it's students. Problems discussed ranged from crime and criminal activity, traffic concerns, infrastructure disrepair to blighted conditions in general.

More meetings were planned with a desire to gain further insight from citizens who live in the area.

A committee was formed, including Police officers, college staff, Heaton School staff, and citizens from the area. Specific problems were identified for action. Among the highest priority issues were public safety, blight, infrastructure problems, and empowering the public through education. Sub-committees were formed to address each of these specific concerns, chaired by experts in each particular field. Each sub-committee contained volunteers from each agency, as well as community members. Police Officers began working closely with the safety sub-committee to address the crime concerns in the neighborhood.

The safety sub-committee determined that crime in the neighborhood appeared to be increasing. Graffiti, which indicated the presence of gangs, marked most buildings, walls and fences. Traffic related offenses were commonplace. The lack of street lights and traffic signs, especially stop signs, added to the traffic concerns. The blighted conditions of many residences, along with the area in general were of particular importance to the citizens. The neighborhood lacked sidewalks, curbs and gutters in many areas. The lack of streetlights made conditions favorable for the criminal element. Every time it rained, the streets flooded due to lack of adequate drainage, which increased traffic problems. These infrastructure concerns, although related to safety and a cause of some of the traffic problems in the area, were given to the appropriate committee for review and action.

### **Analysis**

In an attempt to analyze the crime problems, the safety sub-committee reviewed

crime statistics and saw a steady increase in all calls for police service in the project area. Calls for service in the area had increased 36% between 1995 and 1996. Another 4% increase was observed between 1996 and 1997. As calls for police service increased, so did the level of violence and variety of criminal activity not seen before in this usually quiet neighborhood. Among particular concern to the committee were the increases in burglaries, graffiti, vandalism and narcotics related activity. These criminal activities allowed for a gradual, steady decrease in the overall living conditions of the neighborhood.

The "Partners in Pride" committee held a neighborhood meeting to introduce the members, and other stakeholders, to the general community, and to seek support and input from community members. From this meeting, Officers learned that major concerns of the community almost directly mirrored those of the safety sub-committee. Drugs and prostitution were the criminal activities that most concerned the majority of community members. Blight in the neighborhood, including tenants and landlords who allowed violations of building codes to go unrepaired, was another concern. The traffic problems created by too many college students and not enough parking on campus plagued the area and created a hazard for young children. The lack of street signs and complete disregard for those signs that were present, added to the problem.

Armed with this information, Officers contacted neighborhood residents door to door to confirm the identified problems. Property management companies were also contacted as a bridge for displaced owners to become involved in the effort. Many property owners and renters aided in the identification of persons involved in criminal activity, and it was learned through this information gathering process that some of the identified perpetrators lived within the project area. This further compounded the need for

intervention and action, not only by traditional policing methods, but by the citizens themselves. If left alone, these problem locations and persons would become a fixture in the neighborhood and further deterioration would be imminent. The city could only paint out graffiti vandalism so often, which seemed to only give the vandals a new "canvass".

The identified offenders had no stake in the neighborhood. They did not care what happened in the area, and had no responsibility to assist in any efforts to create change. Offenders were mainly renters, and property owners had no direct supervision over the properties where the nuisances had festered. Neighbors of offenders either were afraid to take action, or refused to recognize the need. If any complaints were received, retaliation was the norm. Given this freedom to reign over the area, offenders were drawn to the neighborhood to ply their "trades", often times conducting business in the streets, in broad daylight. One community member recalled an incident where he was propositioned by a local "worker", as he left one morning, directly in front of his residence, with his wife and children standing on the front porch.

Events such as this were responded to, when calls were made, in a traditional manner. If offenders were located, there was not much officers could do because there were no witnesses, no actual crime, or they could not be dealt with because of their resident status. This not only frustrated the citizens, but also the responding officers. Matters were worsened by the amount of calls for service throughout the city, and a great deal of officer initiated enforcement was not conducted. Another frustration to the officer was the contact of the same offenders time and time again, with no end in sight.

During scheduled "clean-up days", officers surveyed the area in an attempt to gain knowledge of any environmental conditions which were a concern to the community, and

which provided ideal conditions for offenders to locate to the area. Officers found that the area lacked street lighting, which may have been a factor in the increase in criminal activity over the past few years. The neighborhood also contained numerous vacant and abandoned residences and apartments, which were a draw for the criminal element. Trash and debris were dumped in vacant lots and alleys, which hampered access for vehicles, including police vehicles patrolling the area. The lack of citizen involvement in the neighborhood was also found to be an underlying cause of the increase in crime in the neighborhood. Residents were contacted regarding neighborhood watch, which, it was learned, had not existed in the neighborhood at any time.

In researching those criminal acts most important to community members, it was determined that narcotics related activity had increased 167% between 1995 and 1997. Prostitution related offenses, which prior to 1995 had been all but non-existent, had increased more than 5 times. The increase in graffiti vandalism was evident on just about every sign, fence and pole in the area. The number of "for sale" signs in front yards showed the level of frustration in the neighborhood.

Traffic accidents, drunk drivers and reckless driving in the project area had seen a 40% increase between 1995 and 1997. To get a better grasp of the traffic concerns in the area, a three day traffic survey was conducted, at the times which were identified by community members as the busiest. During a community forum, residents in the area identified the traffic problem times as being between 7:45 - 8:30 a.m., and 11:30 a.m. - 1:00 p.m., mainly on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays. During the survey, a radar signboard was utilized to educate drivers on their speeds and prevent any unforeseen accidents in the area. The survey was conducted on numerous streets in an attempt to



gain a clear picture of the problem. Of the 656 vehicles charted during the survey, 310, or 58% were found to be traveling above the speed limit. Fifty-eight vehicles, 9%, were traveling at least 6 M.P.H. above the speed limit. Four vehicles were in excess of 10 M.P.H. above the speed limit, with 42 M.P.H. being the highest charted speed. Numerous other traffic violations and one traffic collision were observed during the survey. The area was also found to be highly traveled by pedestrians, which added to the safety concerns of the community.

### **Response**

The first step in responding to identified criminal activity and safety concerns was to gather needed resources from within the police department, as well as to contact other agencies which could assist in conducting operations in the project area. Agencies and organizations which assisted in the initial process were:

Alcoholic Beverage Control

City of Fresno Code Enforcement Officers

Fresno Police Department Crime Prevention Unit

Fresno Police Department Traffic Unit

Fresno Police Department Graffiti Enforcement Team

Heaton Area Residents Neighborhood Watch Patrol

Fresno City College Police Department

City of Fresno Traffic Engineering Department

Heaton Elementary School

Fresno Police Department, Central District Problem Oriented Policing Unit

The increasing amounts of burglaries and other property crimes in the

neighborhood was addressed from the beginning. Although not a deep concern of community members, review of crime statistics showed an increase in burglaries in the project area of over 42%. Community members had identified the need to become involved in neighborhood watch, and the sentiment was agreed to by the safety sub-committee. The need to decrease these type of calls was clear. Not having to respond to property crimes which may have occurred hours or days earlier would free officers to respond to life threatening or "in progress" type calls and decrease the response time to these calls. Community Service Officer Ron Hults was put in contact with several community members who wanted information about starting not only a neighborhood watch, but a watch patrol as well. Members of the highly successful Heaton Area Residents Neighborhood Watch Patrol were asked to assist. A watch patrol was initiated and instantly was effective in identifying criminal activity, or potential criminal activity, before it could occur. Patrols operated one day per week to begin with, then expanded to two as interest in the operation grew. The patrol shares radios with Heaton Area Residents patrol, so a quicker response can be realized when suspicious activity is observed.

Officer Dan Edwards, Fresno Police Department Graffiti Enforcement Team, was contacted and accompanied officers on a tour of the area. It was felt that the identification of graffiti vandals, and the quick removal of graffiti from the area would act as a deterrent to those individuals who would commit this type of crime. After viewing the patterns and styles of the graffiti marking the neighborhood, Officer Edwards found that several of the vandals were possibly already identified from other vandalism around the city. Officer Edwards agreed to take an aggressive stance against any individuals identified as graffiti

vandals that live in, or targeted the "Partners in Pride" area. After the tour of the area, the City of Fresno Graffiti Abatement unit responded and painted over a large amount of the graffiti found in the neighborhood. Some residents allowed the city to paint over graffiti on their private property, showing that they were taking more pride in their neighborhood.

An extensive narcotics operation was conducted along Vassar Avenue, identified by patrol officers as being the area with the highest incidents of narcotics related activity. Numerous undercover operations were conducted which resulted in the purchase of "rock" cocaine and "tar" heroin. Removing narcotics from the streets, and making it harder for users to purchase, was felt to be a deterrent to individuals wanting to sell or purchase drugs in the neighborhood. It was especially important to remove the narcotics from the area because of the children who lived or walked through the area on their way to and from school. The ensuing search warrants yielded more than a dozen arrests, including that of a subject known as "Puppet", a major supplier of illegal narcotics to the area. This area was targeted due to efforts of patrol officers who were advised of the "Partners in Pride" area, and diligently worked to gather information regarding the *who, what, why, where, when* and *how* of narcotics in the area. Other locations were also identified and operations were conducted in numerous places within the project area, all with varying degrees of success. Those operations which did not yield an arrest resulted in the suspected offenders being served a notice that the area was being "taken back" by the community.

To combat the prostitution situation in the area, several large scale operations were planned, to include other areas of high prostitution activity, in an effort to identify and arrest those individuals who participate in the activity. Undercover operations involving agents of the Alcoholic Beverage Control acting as potential "customers" were successfully

conducted and numerous arrests made. Not only females who worked as prostitutes, but would be customers were also targeted. The effect that this type of crime has on a neighborhood was of particular importance to the residents. On more than one occasion, citizens had found prostitution "paraphernalia" in their yards and on the street. Often, it was the children in the neighborhood who found these items. At various times, smaller operations are conducted in the area, intended to continue the effort to keep offenders out of the area.

After a media campaign to educate the public about the dangerous traffic situation in the project area, Fresno Police Department traffic officers, Central District Problem Oriented Policing Team officers and officers from Fresno City College Police Department conducted a series of enforcement operations in the neighborhood. It was felt that the media coverage should be conducted because it was not the intent of "Partners in Pride" to alienate the students, or even issue a large amount of citations. The intent of the operation was to prevent accidents and educate the public about the situation. In addition to the enforcement operations, the city Traffic Engineering department was contacted regarding a possible addition of a four-way stop sign at one intersection in the neighborhood, determined to be one of the busiest. At the same time, the education sub-committee began a campaign in conjunction with the enforcement effort, to educate Heaton Elementary School students living in the project area about the dangers of walking in the streets, not looking both directions when crossing the street, etc.

At every step of the project, Code Enforcement Officers worked closely with P.O.P. Officers and property owners/management companies to inspect buildings, residences and apartments for violations. Blighted conditions were also reported to property owners,

who were reminded of Fresno Municipal Code section 9-909, which required them to abate any declared nuisances on their property, regardless of who created the nuisance. Code Enforcement was also called to respond to all narcotics search warrant locations to conduct on the spot inspections of the properties and immediately speak with property owners/management companies if they could be contacted to respond.

### **Assessment**

Results of "Partners in Pride" are both tangible and non-tangible. The most important factor to consider is that the program is on going, and continues to gain acceptance in the neighborhood. A major concern of some portions of the effort was the displacement of criminal activity from one area to another. This has not been seen. Crime statistics from the area were gathered and compared to those from earlier years and significant declines were seen in many areas. Total calls for police service in the project area increased 27% from 1997 to 1998, although total calls for service for the first quarter of 1999 show a 23% decrease from the same period in 1998. The increase in total calls for service may be due to the increased level of officer initiated activity in the project area, targeting those specific, identified problems. A recent survey of residents in the area was conducted and it was found that all criminal activity was, in the majority opinion, on the decline.

Due in part to the formation of the Neighborhood Watch patrol in the area, burglaries have decreased by 42% in the first three months of 1999, when compared to the same time period in 1998. The patrol's success is evident by the increasing patrol days and hours, and the cooperation that has developed between the Partners in Pride watch patrol and the Heaton Area Residents watch patrol. It can be inferred, from the

decrease in burglaries and total calls for service in the project area, that all property related crimes have decreased in the past months. The effort, again, is ongoing and tangible success will continue to be seen. The intangible success of this aspect of Partners in Pride is the better living conditions in the area, as expressed by the residents themselves during the phone survey, and the latest neighborhood clean-up.

Since the beginning of our response effort, the Graffiti Abatement unit makes routine stops in the target area, and has even responded to requests for special "paint outs". The team also has been an integral part of all clean-up days, and has left their own mark in the fight to combat the graffiti problem. The Graffiti Enforcement Team has made inroads into arresting graffiti vandals in the area, making a large, felony arrest of a group of individuals who targeted the neighborhood with their "tagging". It was later found that one of the vandals did live in the neighborhood, and another was related to a family there. Graffiti is no longer an eyesore in the neighborhood, although still appears once in a while.

During the narcotics operations, in a matter of a few days, four of the locations causing the greatest concerns in the area were vacant, their former occupants in jail and eviction proceedings in motion. More than a dozen arrests were made at various locations and narcotics, paraphernalia and cash were confiscated. Property managers have begun to screen their prospective tenants a little closer, and are now the first to call when they suspect narcotics activity. The evictions now normally occur faster than undercover operations can be planned. Narcotics related incidents in the neighborhood are the same in the first three months of 1999 as during the same time in 1998.

Prostitution related offenses in the project area have also remained the same in the

first three months of 1999 as the same time period as 1998. Resident prostitutes, however, have moved from the area because of the operations and other enforcement activity in the neighborhood. Community members recognize the signs for potential prostitution related problems early due to education by officers, and contact the Police and property owners as soon as a problem is perceived. Subsequent operations to identify/arrest offenders of this type have not been as successful, as the numbers of offenders have dwindled. Other programs designed solely to combat the problem of prostitution have aided in the removal of this activity from the Partners in Pride area.

Although a large number of citations were not issued during the initial enforcement period, traffic related complaints have gone down. The area did see an increase in traffic accidents, drunk driving and reckless driving in 1998 by 21 % over 1997. In the first three months of 1999, there have been five calls for service regarding dangerous traffic related incidents, as compared with three during the same period in 1998. Further enforcement/education is needed to keep the increases in this area to a minimum. The traffic volume in the area does keep increasing, as more students attend classes at Fresno City College. Fresno City College Police Department has expanded their patrols to include the project area, assisting regular patrols to enforce traffic regulations and decrease the dangers in the area.

During the initial phases of the program, the Traffic Engineering Department was contacted regarding the placement of a four-way stop sign in the project area. The intersection of Yale Avenue and Glenn Avenue was identified by community members as the most dangerous in the area. Statistics were checked and the information was given to traffic engineering for review. After a lengthy process, involving surveys of the traffic

in the area, a review of all accidents at the intersection and monetary factors, a stop sign was not warranted at the intersection. The intersection is frequently monitored by patrol officers for violators and the request for the stop sign may be made again at a later time. A survey of several of the residents around the intersection revealed that the traffic situation in the area, not only at the one intersection, is still a major concern.

Blight in the neighborhood is still a big problem, according to residents. Clean-up days are scheduled twice a year, and the area looks good for several weeks after each. But there is still a lack of pride on the part of some residents. The problem of displaced property owners is also a concern. Without a local contact, properties go for long periods of time without repair. In areas where property owners do care, conditions are vastly improved. Code enforcement continues to periodically check identified problem locations, and an aggressive effort is being made to either repair or remove boarded up, abandoned property within the project area.

Many of the identified problems have successfully been approached. Others have not seen the desired results. From the beginning, the Partners in Pride project was going to be a long term collaboration, eventually designed for the residents in the target area to "reclaim" their neighborhood and require less of a Police presence. Only with continuing effort in the area will this be possible. One resident recently remarked that the area was "on the whole, a lot better to live in. There are still a few problems here and there, but *we'll* take care of them."

### **Agency and Other Information**

Partners in Pride is a localized project in the City of Fresno's Central Policing District. Captain Tom Frost was a member of the steering committee from its inception,

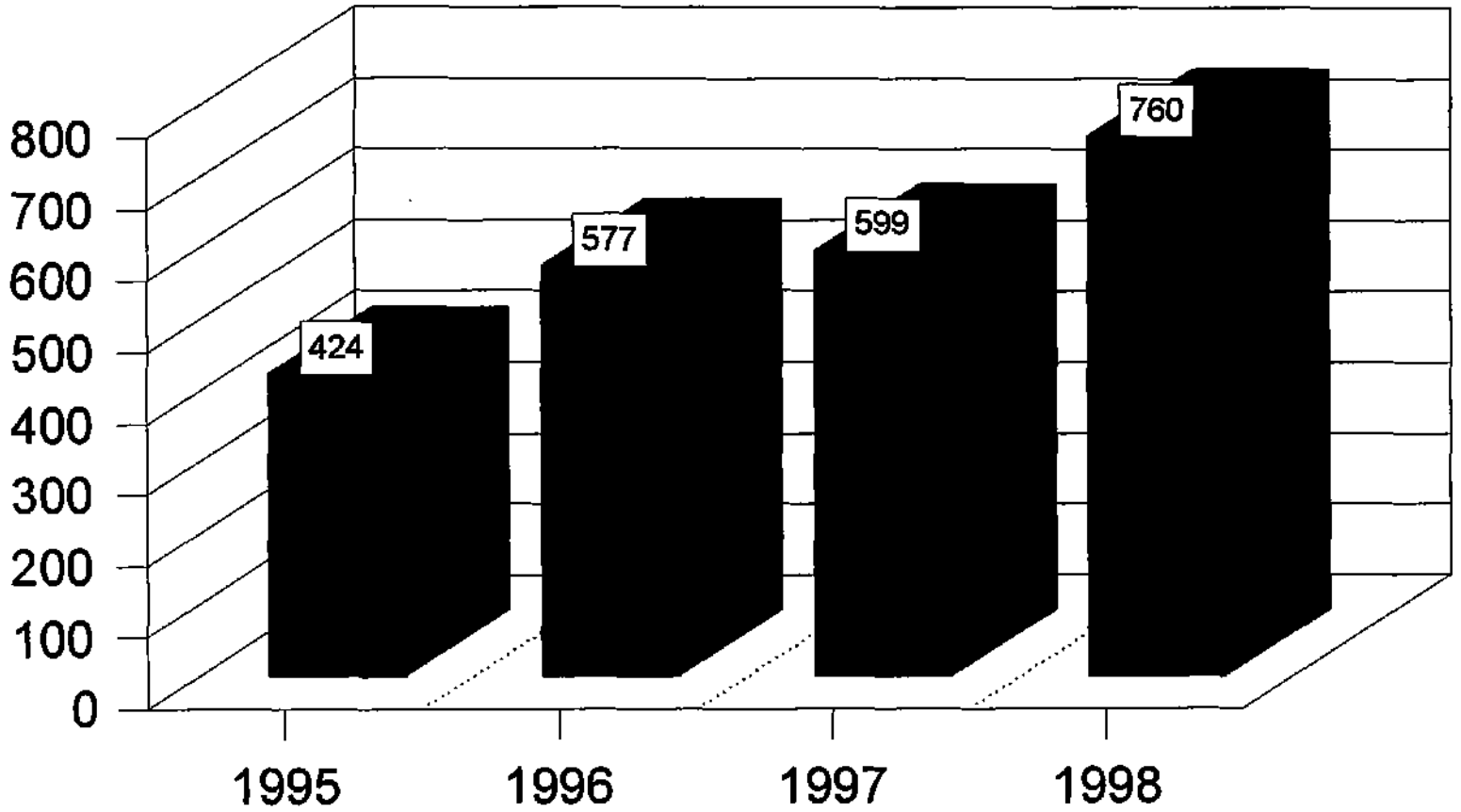


and continues to serve as co-chair of the safety sub-committee. Officer Franks attended the 9<sup>th</sup> annual Problem Oriented Policing conference in 1998, and also participated in a 40 hour in house training on Problem Oriented Policing. As both presenter and attender, in 1997. Other than the giving of time and adjustment of schedules, the project has not had a fiscal impact on the department. As a result of this project, street improvements are scheduled to begin in early 1999. Partners in Pride was recently honored with a "Realizing Shared Dreams" award, presented by the Community College League of California.

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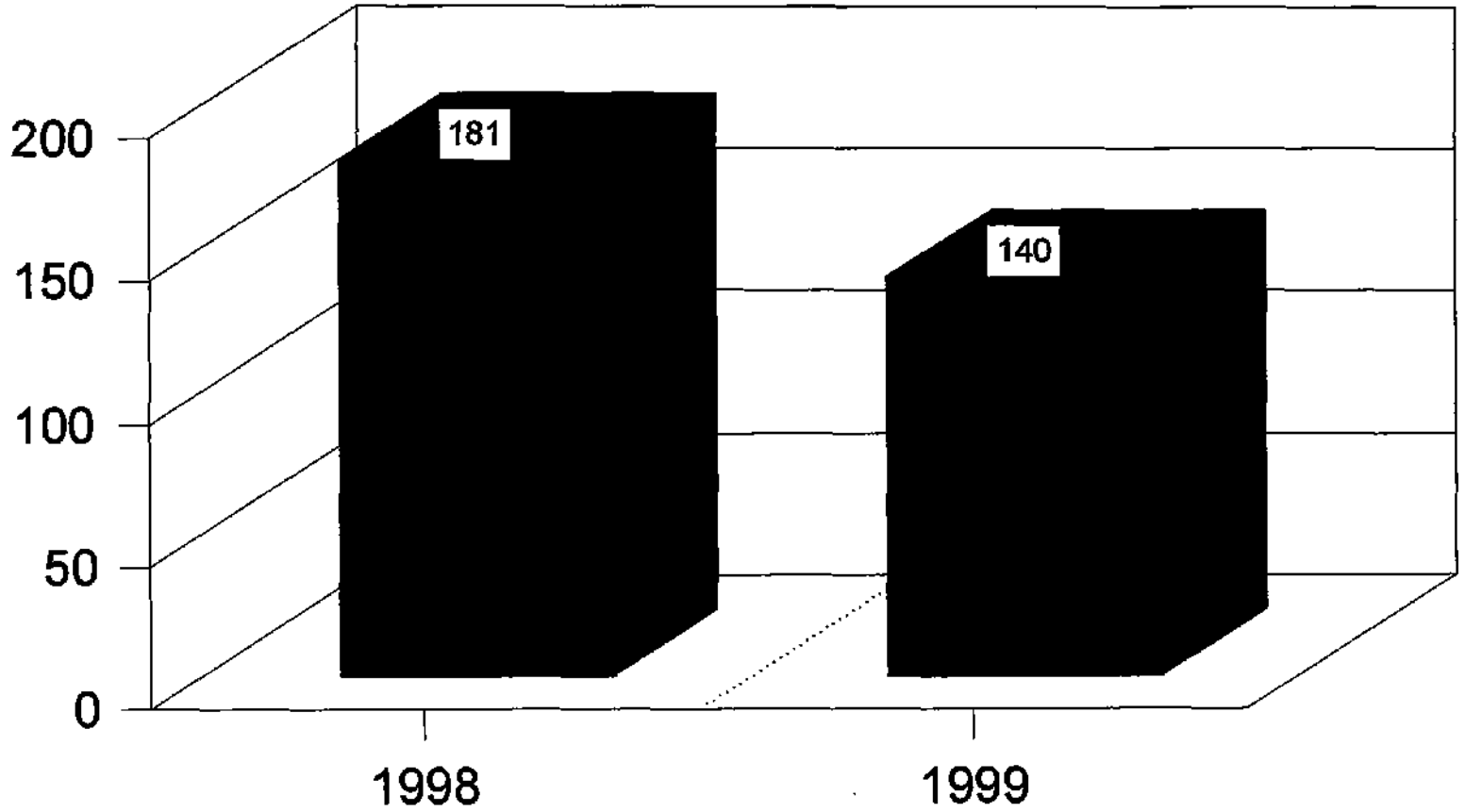
# Total Calls For Service

Partners in Pride Area



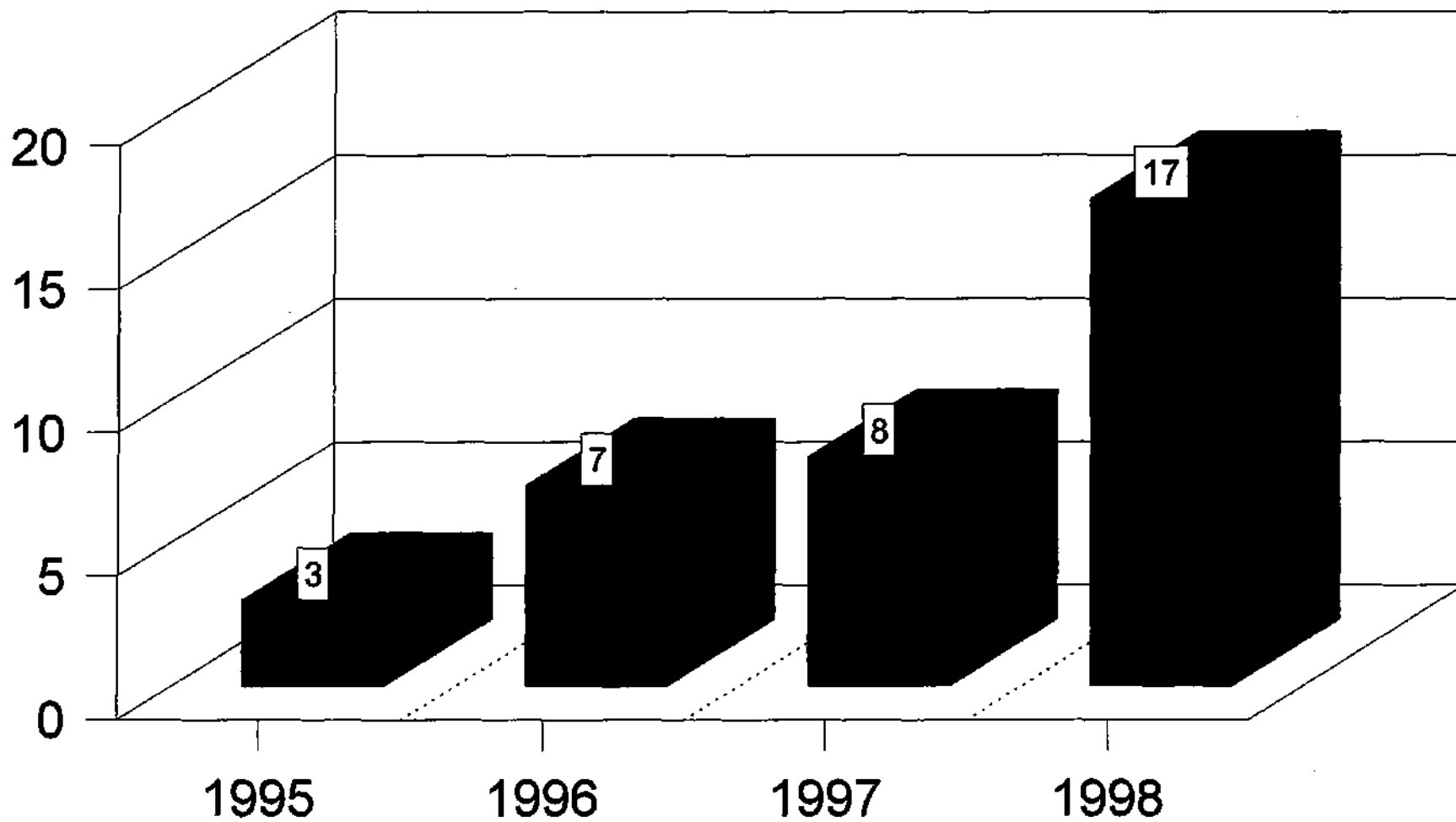
# Total Calls For Service

Partners in Pride Area / Jan. - Mar



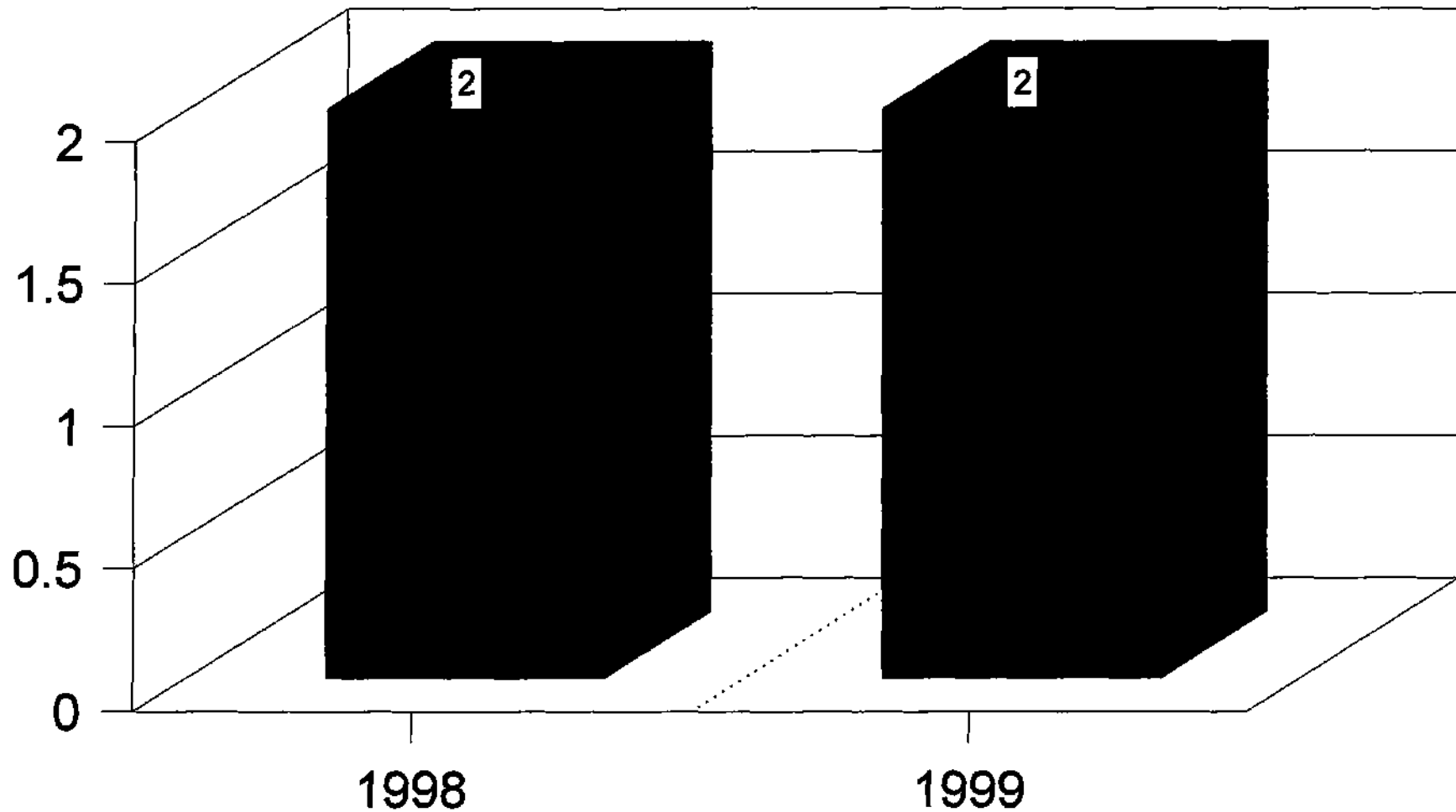
# Narcotics Offenses

Partners in Pride Area



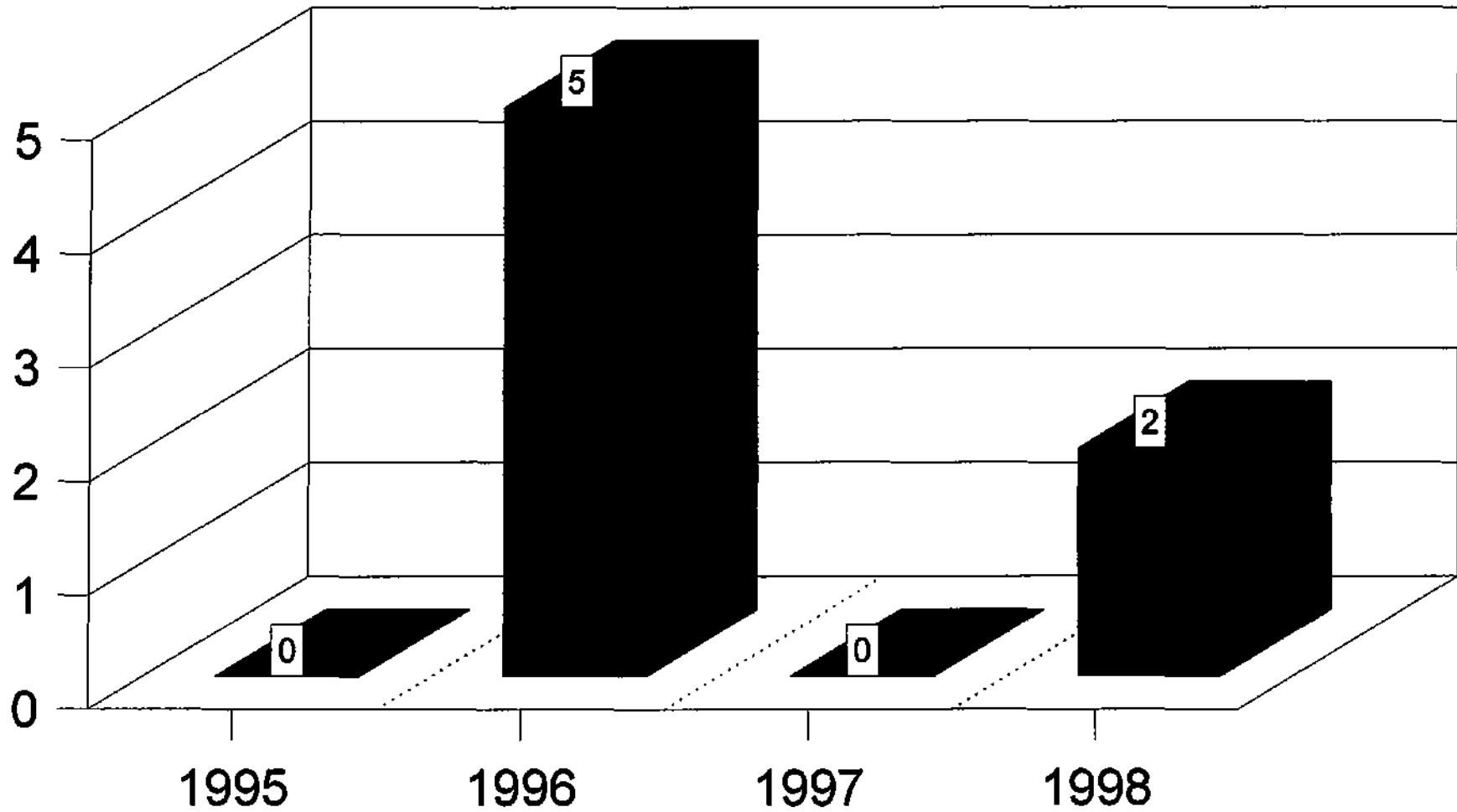
# Narcotics Offenses

Partners in Pride Area / Jan - Mar



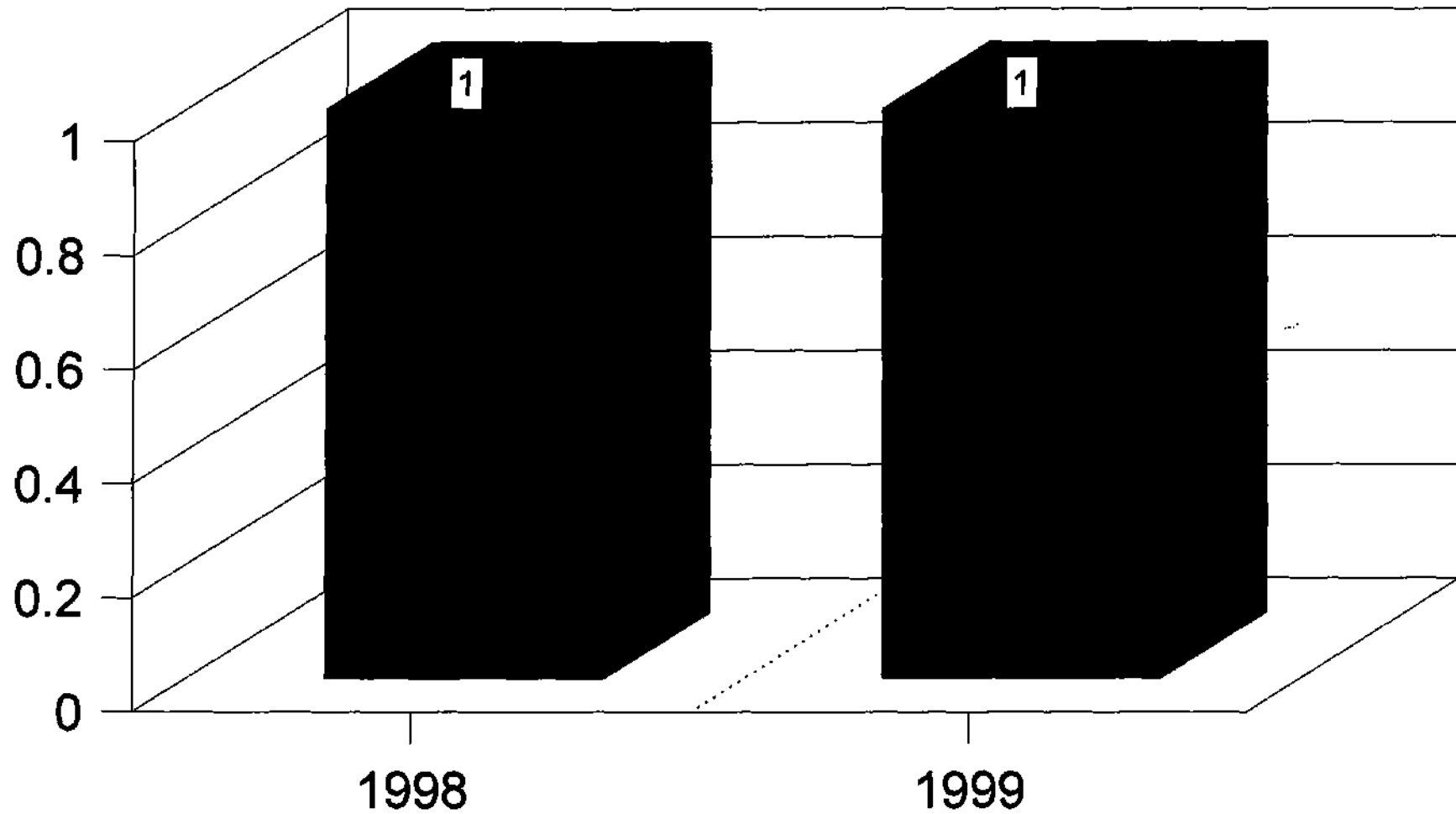
# Prostitution Offenses

Partners in Pride Area



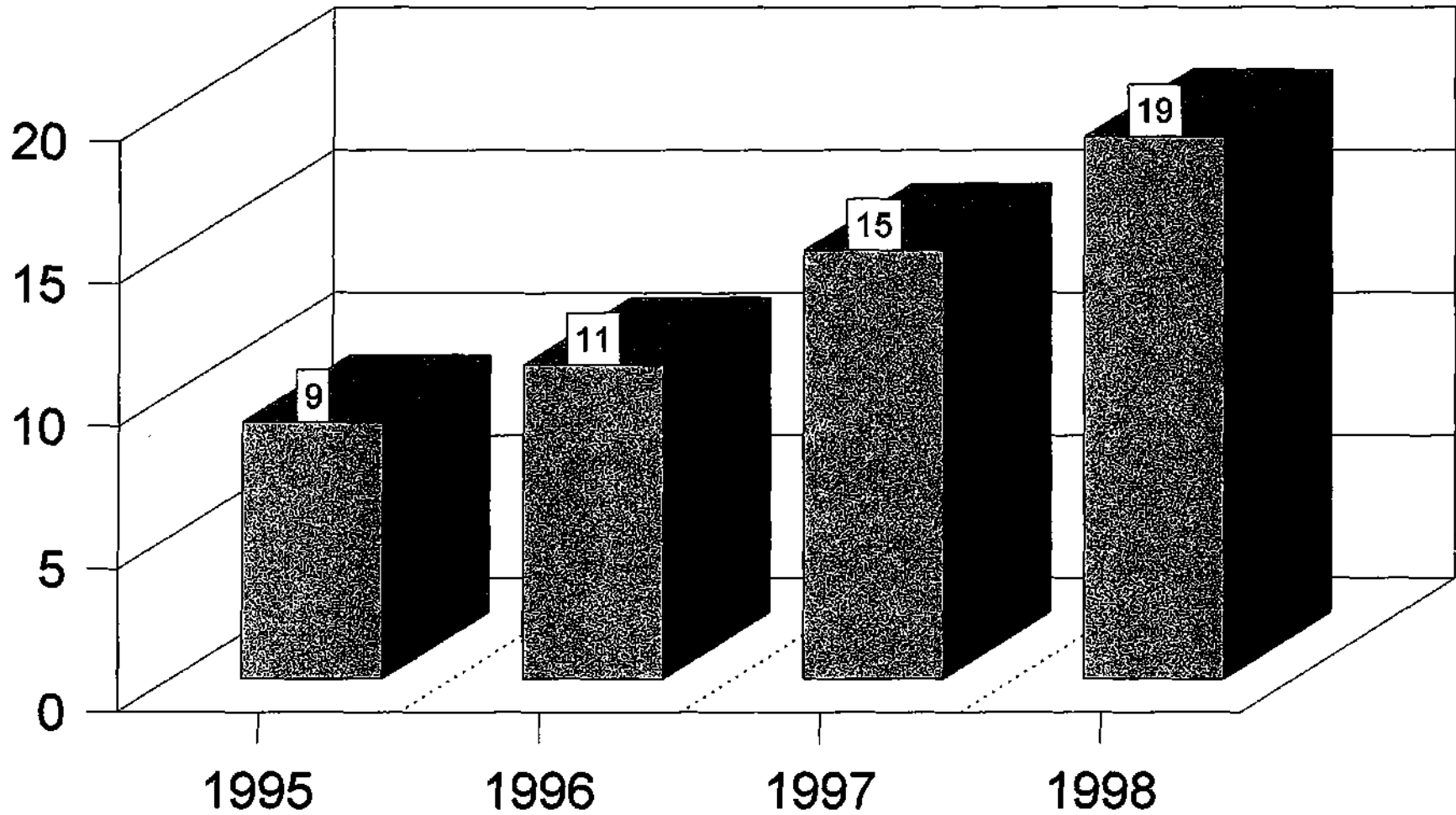
# Prostitution Offenses

Partners in Pride Area / Jan - Mar



# Traffic Related Offenses

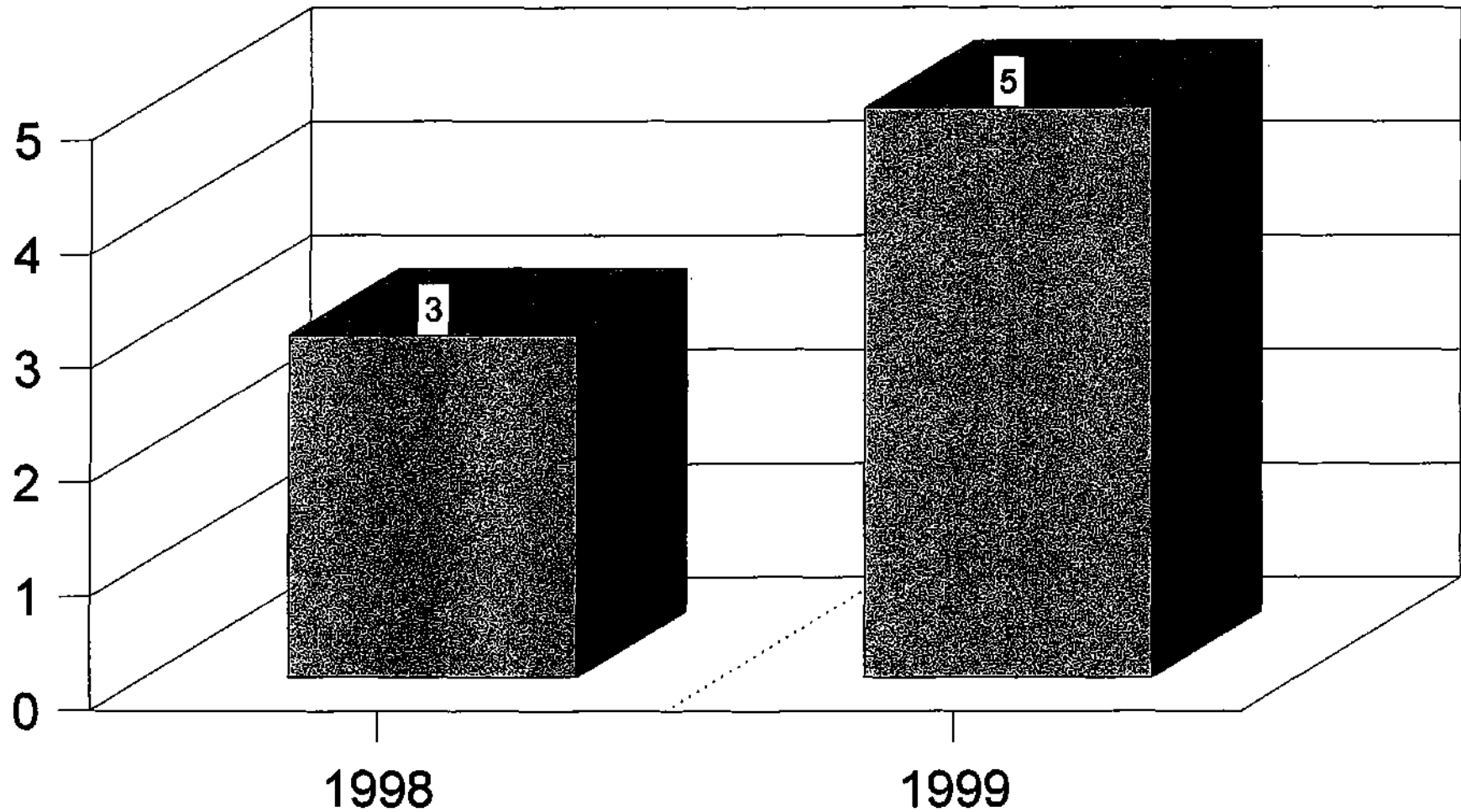
Partners in Pride Area





# Traffic Related Offenses

Partners in Pride Area / Jan - Mar



# Burglaries

Partners in Pride Area

