

National City Police Department

Neighborhood Policing Team



Greenwood Apartments Community Improvement Project

**NATIONAL CITY POLICE DEPARTMENT
NEIGHBORHOOD POLICING TEAM
GREENWOOD APARTMENTS COMMUNITY IMPROVEMENT
PROJECT**

SUMMARY

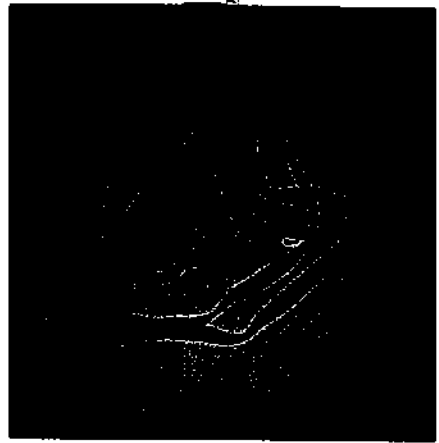
- **Scanning:** There was a high concentration of drug activity in and around the apartment complex. With the drug activity, also came the peripheral crimes associated with drug use and drug sales. The National City Police Department's highest number of calls, for that particular service area, were centered around the apartment complex. The Greenwood apartments had a reputation by local drug users as well as outside drug users as a drug and crime haven.

- **Analysis:** The problem in and around the apartment complex had existed for several years, but the violence was increasing at the time this project began. Traditional policing techniques were not effective due to the volume of drug users in the area. It seemed as if one drug dealer or user would replace any that would be arrested. Based on information gathered using a community survey, statistics gathered about the calls for service, knowledge of the history of prior law enforcement tactics and their results and an assessment of the environmental conditions, a response plan was formulated.

- **Response:** The overall response required patrol officers as well as officers assigned to the Neighborhood Policing Team, to direct unobligated time to creating a police omnipresence in and around the apartment complex. Officers maintained a high level of visibility in and around the complex by vehicle and foot patrols. Officers targeted violators at all levels, giving zero tolerance for any and all criminal conduct in the area. In addition, Neighborhood Policing Team members, wrote and executed several search warrants on two apartment units resulting in arrests for an assortment of crimes. Along with the search warrants multiple probation and parole searches were conducted, also with great success. As the criminal element was being removed from the complex, a close relationship was established between police and the owner of the apartment complex. With the owner's assistance as well as other government entities, implementation of changes began to take place.

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- Assessment: *The* strong police presence, the environmental changes, changes in management, removal of problem tenants and the screening process for new tenants all created the desired long term improvement sought. Positive feedback from apartment residents as well as other community members was immediate and all said the changes in the area were positive and gave them an overall perception that the area was safer. This was confirmed by statistics, which confirmed the calls for police service has dropped significantly. The total calls for service dropped from 163 calls to 64 calls for service during the same time period a year after the project began.



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A) Scanning

What was the nature of the problem?

The Greenwood apartments were a haven for drug users, drug dealers, parolees and gang members. Drug addicts and gang members frequented the apartment complex and constantly loitered in and around the alleys, sidewalks and walkways of the complex. Not only was the apartment complex well known to police due to the frequent calls for service, but it was also known as the "green" apartments by local and out of town drug users. The crimes in and around the complex ran the gamut from assaults on police to person(s) being under the influence of drugs. To complicate problems at the complex, the apartment building's manager had two sons who were directly connected to the Mexican Mafia and ran certain operations on and around the property. In addition, both sons regulated drug sales from the complex and bandied the collection of "taxes" from other drug dealers. The area around the complex was not only dangerous, but also the physical environment of the complex had deteriorated. Trash littered the alley, the walkways, outside lights were broken and security doors hung by the hinges. The complex created an unwelcome atmosphere for the legitimate residents of the complex as well as the surrounding neighborhood.

How was the problem identified?

The drug problems had existed for several years, but due to the close network of people at the complex, police were not able to infiltrate the drug dealers. The complex graduated from a drug haven to a very dangerous area with the introduction of members of the Mexican Mafia and gang members from 'Old Town National City' loitering in the complex. Violent crimes such as stabbings and beating became more frequent and legitimate residents were calling police more often. National City Police patrol officers noticed the increase in activity and alerted the NCPD Neighborhood Policing Team.

Who identified the problem?

See above

Far more problems are identified than can be explored adequately. How and why was the problem selected among others?

This problem did not only effect the apartment complex itself, but had a negative impact on the entire community. The drug users and gang members were highly visible loitering in the area as well as the gang graffiti and other vandalism which created fear within community and made the entire area seem unsafe. The problem at the complex was

multi-faceted, with almost all the crime in the area centered at and around the apartment complex.

What was the initial level of diagnosis/unit of analysis (e.g. crime type, neighborhood, specific premise, specific offender group, etc.)?

Clearly, as mentioned before, there was a significant amount of peripheral/associated activity that accompanied the drug use and sales, such as the assaults and gang graffiti. There were environmental/geographical issues such as the trash, lighting and general deteriorated state of the apartment complex which added to the problem. However, the primary, underlying cause of the problem was discovered to be an absentee owner, who had no idea what was occurring on his property. In addition, the owner was being misguided by his long time resident manager.

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B) Analysis

1. What is the physical setting in which the problem is taking place?

The Greenwood Apartments consists of thirty-eight units housed within four, two-story buildings. A small market is situated on the north end of the complex and an alley running in a north/south direction is located behind the complex. The area is primarily residential with an elementary school located several blocks away.

2. What methods, data and information sources were used to analyze the problem

(e.g. surveys, interviews, observation, crime analysis, etc)?

A survey was conducted with the residents residing within the target area. This survey was used to assist us in evaluating the "perception" of the problem as experienced by those who were most effected. Follow-up surveys were conducted with the residents as "feedback" for constant re-evaluation and analysis was important.

We conducted an analysis of data that covered calls for service, types of calls and any common factors relating to suspect activity (e.g. gang affiliation, drug related). We conducted overt and covert observations of the target area with surprise "walk-thru"

visits. During these contacts we noted the environmental elements which were believed to be contributing to the problem.

Meetings were held with management of the property and the property owner. Inspections of the management office files were conducted to determine the effectiveness of the system used to select tenants and manage the property.

3. History: How often and for how long was it a problem?

Through interviews with former tenants and police personnel it would appear that the problem had existed for approximately ten years. In addition, suspects arrested for drug violations at the complex confirmed that the complex has been known as the "Green" apartments, a place to purchase a variety of illegal street drugs, for many years. The popularity of the complex with frequent drug users extended beyond the boundaries of National City and was well known in other areas such as Chula Vista, Spring Valley and San Diego.

4. Who was involved in the problem (offenders, victims, others) and what were their respective motivations, gains and losses?

The primary contributing factors for this criminally infested and poorly maintained apartment complex was the corrupt manager and an uninformed property owner.

The manager had been employed for approximately fifteen years and resided on the property. In recent years the manager's two adult sons resided on the premises with her. The sons were well known convicted felons with numerous narcotic arrests. Both were thought to have had ties to the Mexican Mafia and that they played a role in the distribution of illegal drugs. In 1992 individuals opened fire on the manager's apartment with one of the sons as the intended victim. In 1998 both sons were identified by an outside task force as working for an individual who was closely linked to the Mexican Mafia and was the "head" of the Old Town National City Street gang (OTNC). Both sons frequented the apartment complex, often accompanied by OTNC gang members.

The assistant manager, who was believed to be a close friend of the manager, had been suspected by law enforcement officials of selling drugs out of her apartment. In February of 1998 the assistant manager was arrested at the Greenwood Apartments for possession of methamphetamine.

In August of 1998 National City Police Detectives executed an arrest warrant on the manager's residence. Detectives had observed the same individual known as the "head" of the OTNC street gang and suspected as a drug dealer for the Mexican Mafia, leaving the manager's residence. Detectives later found the individual living with the former assistant manager of the Greenwood Apartments.

As the result of the former assistant manager's arrest, the manager hired a couple to take her place. After a sharp increase in gang presence, it was confirmed that one of the new

assistant managers was a documented gang member with the Old Town National City Street gang. Tenants and area neighbors complained of gang members loitering in the complex and heavy foot traffic coming in and out of the assistant manager's apartment at all hours.

During the year of 1998 National City Police officers and members of the Neighborhood Policing team contacted at least 30 Old Town National City Street gang members at the complex. None of the individuals resided in the complex and appeared to be visiting the management.

During our surveys several tenants told members of the Neighborhood Policing Team that the apartment complex was "full of drugs" and that they were afraid of the gang members and the management. Tenants complained that the management not only knew of the drug-related activity but had witnessed transactions occur in the complex without making any efforts to stop it..

The manager's brother, who also resided in the Greenwood Apartments, was a notorious heroin addict and had an assortment of friends who were parolees and heroin addicts. These individuals often visited the brother, at times on a daily basis. These visits resulted in a stream of parolees, some with felony warrants, leaving the apartment after using heroin and staggering down the street. On several occasions, officers responded to this apartment on reports of subjects over-dosing on heroin. One parolee and documented gang member was pronounced dead after paramedics were unable to revive him. It was

not unusual for these subjects to loiter inside the complex where other tenant's children were at play.

During the tenant surveys and interviews with the manager, it was apparent that although the owner lived approximately twenty minutes away, he seldom visited the property. During several conversations, the manager stated that she had a long-term working relationship with the owner and that he completely entrusted her in the care and maintenance of his property.

Additional contributing factors:

The physical appearance of the complex portrayed a perception of general neglect and disrepair. Walkways were littered with trash, landscaping was over-grown and ill kept, trees were uprooting concrete, poor exterior lighting produced a dim cast of shadows , the alley and parking area was cluttered with junk and discarded furniture, and the walls were targets for gang graffiti.

An inspection of the manager's "Office" revealed out-dated and disorganized files. Many of the tenants did not have completed lease agreements, and some did not have any tenancy agreements at all. Tenant applications were poorly kept with many not efficiently completed. There were no reference or background checks made for any potential tenants.

5. What harms resulted from the problem?

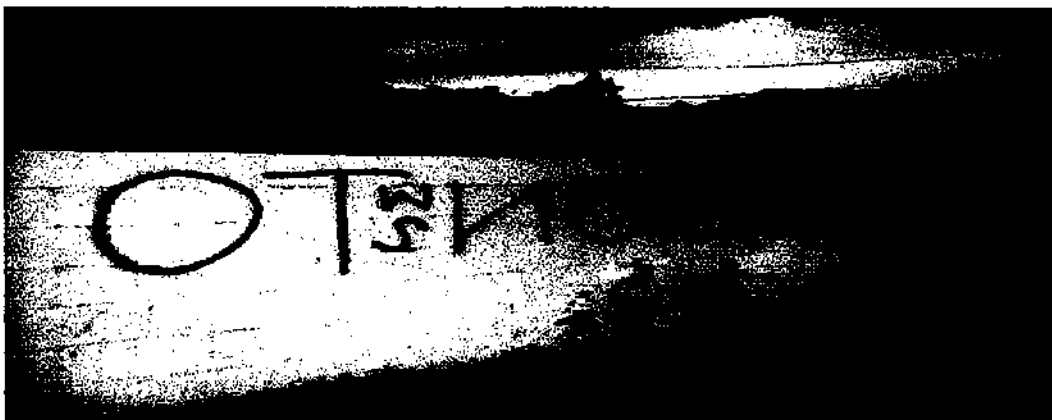
In 1997 (twelve month period) there was a total of 156 calls to service, of these were 69 calls that covered a variety of problems including but not limited to noise complaints, attempt suicide, preserve the peace, traffic stops and drug overdoses. The singular most consistent call involving criminal activity was for drug-related offenses at 21 calls and gang-related offenses at 23. Additionally, there were 8 calls for assaults, 5 for stolen vehicles, 6 for vehicle burglaries, 3 for illegal weapons, 7 warrant arrests, 4 drunk in public, 2 stolen property, 2 parolee arrests and 5 cases of vandalism.

From January 1998 thru July 15th of 1998 there was a substantial increase for calls to service of 133. 65 of these calls covered such problems as noise complaints, preserve the peace and batteries. Narcotic related calls increased to 31 and gang-related to 26. Considering this covers only the first half of 1998, narcotic and gang-related calls had dramatically increased. Drug-related arrests ran the gamut from possession for sales to heroin overdoses. Crimes against persons included a gang-related attempt murder and an assault with a deadly weapon on a Police Officer.

Although the primary problems at the Greenwood Apartments involved drug and gang activity, the miscellaneous calls to service were excessive.

Patrol officers voiced their frustration over the chronic calls to service and the constant drain of police resources. Officers complained that despite the fact that the majority of

gang members contacted did not reside in the complex, they exuded a territorial attitude and continuously spray painted the area with graffiti. Patrol officers increased their *efforts* to diminish the loitering gang members but the same individuals continued to return and display a belligerent attitude as demonstrated by graffiti messages written especially for the police.



Those tenants not involved in drug-related activity expressed their own fear and frustration. Tenants were often transient in nature, with families leaving after moving in and discovering the elements of drugs and violence that permeated the complex. Other tenants who chose to stay, preferred to not "become involved" for fear of retaliation, both from other tenants and the management. This only served to provide an unchallenged haven for individuals to partake in criminal activity.

**6. How was the problem being addressed before the problem-solving project?
What were the results of those responses?**

The Greenwood Apartments had long been a consistent drain on patrol services. Beat officers attempted to diminish the criminal activity by increasing their proactive efforts and making as many arrests as their in service time would allow. Unfortunately, patrol's efforts in arrests and convictions only served as a "Band-Aid" to the problem. In 1997 a specialized task force was assigned to investigate the drug trafficking and gang connection within the complex. Although several significant arrests were made, vacancies were filled and the narcotic activity continued. No one communicated with the property owner or even knew who he was. It would appear that the symptoms were being addressed with little attention to the root cause.

7. What did the analysis reveal about the causes and underlying conditions that precipitated the problem?

Our analysis confirmed that the drug and gang-related activity was a symptom of the problem. The root of the maladies effecting the Greenwood Apartments was a corrupt property manager and an absentee property owner who was ignorant of the criminal element controlling the quality of life for his tenants.

As a result, approximately one-third of the tenants residing in the complex were involved in drug-related activity. It was determine that some of the tenants had close ties with each other and created a network for the sales of heroin and methamphetamine.

8. What did the analysis *reveal* about the nature and extent of the problem?

Information provided by a study of calls to service showed a serious problem with drug and gang related calls in 1997. Further, a dramatic increase for the first 6 1/2 months of 1998 confirmed that calls to service had nearly doubled. With tenant surveys, field interviews, arrests and police contacts, we were able to confirm that the problem with the Greenwood Apartments began with the management and the landlord. It became apparent that our first step in a carefully formulated plan was to inform the owner of the serious problems occurring on his property and his legal responsibilities. Clearly, traditional "arrest and book" techniques alone were not working to resolve the problem and providing a permanent solution.

9. Was there an open discussion with the community about the problem?

Many tenants were afraid to talk at any length with police officials for fear of retaliation.

On one occasion, a frightened elderly tenant whispered her fears to a police officer through her bedroom window. Neighbors from surrounding homes called the police department to voice their complaints but refused to give their names. Eventually, as the Neighborhood Policing Team encouraged tenants to become more involved in helping to create a safer living environment for themselves, verbal contacts became more frequent between tenants and police personnel.

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C) Response

1. What possible response alternatives were considered to deal with the problem?

Of the possible responses that were discussed but not utilized was incorporating the Greenwood Apartments as part of the restricted geographic area of the Old Town National City Street gang injunction. The gang injunction covered an area of National City known as the 'West Side'. This particular area of the city was claimed "turf" for three generations of this street gang. The decision to not include the apartments in the gang injunction was two-fold: The Greenwood Apartments was not contiguous to the geographic specifics of the "West Side". The gang presence at the apartments was due to several gang members residing in the complex rather than for territorial purposes.

2. What responses did you use to address the problem?

The time span for the Greenwood Apartments Community Improvement Project was twelve months from inception to completion (September 1998 through August of 1999). We also anticipated extended time for follow-up visits with new management. We divided areas of responsibility into specific categories. These categories included:

Traditional proactive police response for criminal identification, legal issues as it pertained to the responsibilities of the property owner, the inception of management concepts promoted by the Crime Free Multi-Housing Program, and the introduction of C.P.T.E.D., Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design.

We believed that in order to turn this criminally infested apartment complex, known as the "one stop super-market for drugs" into a peaceful living environment we would have to succeed in the following four components:

- **Procure a strong commitment from the property owner to provide his tenants with a safe living environment.**
- **Removal of tenants involved in drug-related activity and replace with responsible tenants via the use of thorough screening techniques.**
- **Replace the property manager with management educated in the concepts of the Crime Free Multi-Housing Program.**
- **Initiate environmental changes using C.P.T.E.D.**

Listed below is a synopsis of our response:

1. A sit-down meeting was conducted in which the property owner viewed a "Presentation Book" This book covered all criminal activity for an eighteen-month period. An in depth discussion included reviews of criminal reports, police field interviews of- drug addicts, parolees and gang members, arrests for drug-related crimes and crimes of violence. The property owner expressed shock and disbelief at the amount of criminal activity and found it difficult to accept that his property manager had not kept him informed. This first meeting established a basis in developing a working relationship between the property owner and the Neighborhood Policing Team.

2. The Neighborhood Policing Team began a rigorous campaign of identifying those tenants involved in the use and sales of drug. The Neighborhood Policing Team conducted covert surveillance's, intelligence gathering, effected numerous drug-related arrests and successfully executed several search warrants. Patrol Officers enthusiastically assisted by providing field interviews and self-initiated arrests. Police presence was established by nightly walk-through visits in which tenants were encouraged to share their thoughts and opinions. Over a period of several months, tenants began to "open up" and express their support and their own desires in creating a drug-free living environment.

3. Throughout this campaign, the property owner was kept apprised of all criminal cases

and arrests. The City Attorney's Office was provided with a copy of the project plan, activity logs and copies of written correspondence with the property owner. Although we had the cooperation of the property owner, he was made aware of his responsibilities as they pertain to the Drug Abatement Act, California Health and Safety Code Section 11570-11587. The property owner began to evict those tenants who were arrested for drug-related offenses and others involved in drug-related activity. We provided the property owner with direct, specific information as to those tenants arrested on the premises for drug offenses or other criminal acts.

4. The property manager was relieved of her duties and the assistant managers were fired and evicted. The Neighborhood Policing Team strongly supported the decision to hire two tenants as the new property managers. At the request and support of the Neighborhood Policing Team, the new managers were sent to property management school sponsored by the San Diego Apartment Association. Members of the Neighborhood Policing team held weekly meetings with the managers and assisted them in setting up their office. A police partnership was cultivated with the management and a " Drug-free, Zero Tolerance" policy was set in place. Tenants were given notices of the Zero-tolerance policy. The Neighborhood Policing Team encouraged management to use addendums that prohibited drug related activity and any other criminal activity.

5. As the project proceeded, the relationship between the property owner, management and the Neighborhood Policing Team grew stronger and a sense of team effort prevailed. Consistent communication became an important factor as we moved forward in our efforts to remove those involved in drug-related activity. A strong bond and commitment to achieve a higher standard of living for the tenants of the Greenwood Apartments became prevalent. The Neighborhood Policing Team assisted the property owner by providing criminal case information as several of the evictions were judicially challenged by angry tenants. As acts of retaliation and intimidation began to occur, this "team" held strong to their ultimate goal. Evicted tenants returned to the property to commit various acts of vandalism, including setting fires inside laundry rooms and destroying mailboxes. Those tenants who continued to reside within the complex began to report criminal activity and patrol stepped up their efforts to provide a police presence and a message that acts of intimidation would not stop us from reaching our goal.

6. Concepts of Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (C.P.T.E.D.) were implemented as an effective component in eliminating crime. Two key components utilized were Surveillance and Territoriality. Factors that inhibited effective surveillance at the Greenwood Apartments were overgrown trees and shrubbery, poor exterior lighting and a wood fence along the north side of the complex which provided concealment for daily drug transactions. The primary surveillance strategy was aimed at keeping unwanted subjects out of the property and undesirable behavior under control. All of the trees were significantly trimmed back as well as shrubbery.

New exterior lighting was installed and the wood fence was torn down and replaced with a chain link fence.

Via the concept of "Territoriality" we wanted to promote a sense of strong ownership. We believed that a well kept property was more likely to attract responsible tenants and deter potential offenders. The property owner began an over-all improvement program that included replacing appliances, installing new carpeting and re-painting the apartments. Exterior improvements were set in motion and were designed to change the old look of the "Greenwood Apartments." These changes include new exterior paint, cosmetic landscape improvements, and replacement of deteriorated cement carports.

3. What did you intend to accomplish with your response plan?

The over-all goal was to greatly reduce calls for service and criminal offenses in the Greenwood Apartments. The objectives were to target those tenants involved in drug related activity and remove them from the property, replace management and install a proactive management system, manipulate the physical environment to make it less attractive for criminal activity and build a sense of mutual responsibility between the owner, management and tenants.

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C) Assessment

1. What were the results? What degree of impact did the response plan have on this problem?

A final comparison of drug-related activity and criminal offenses was completed and covered a three-year span, 1997, 1998 and 1999. Our final statistical comparison rewarded us with an 84% reduction of narcotic related activity and a 100% reduction of gang related activity from 1998 to 1999.

1997 - Total Calls to Service were 157 with 21 narcotic related and 23 gang related.

1998 - Total Calls to Service were 226 with 37 narcotic related and 33 gang related.

*A 69% increase of total calls to service, 56% increase in narcotic related activity and 69% increase in gang-related activity from 1997.

1999 - Total Calls to Service were 86 with 6 narcotic related and 0 gang related.

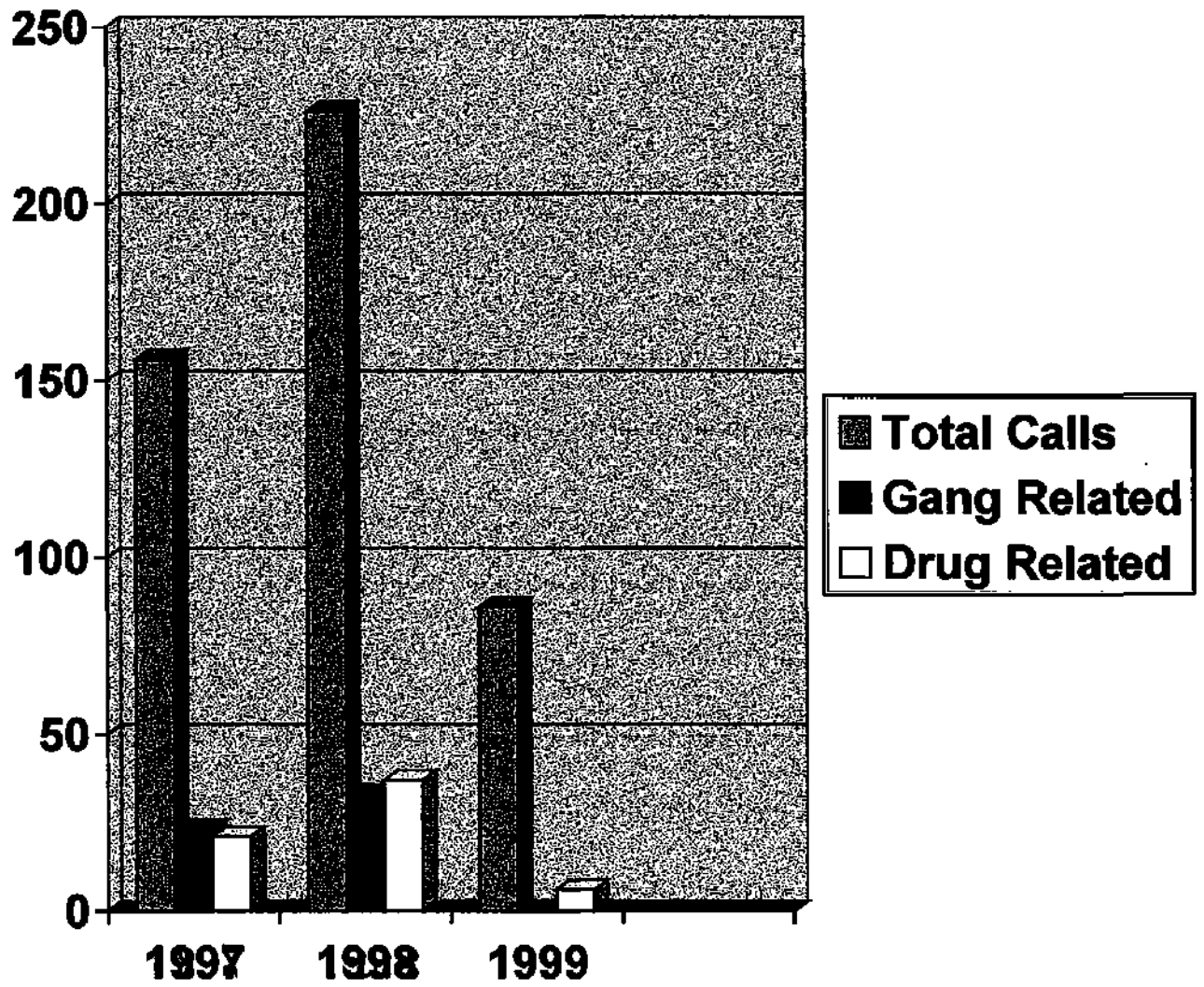
*A 62% decrease in total calls for service, 84% decrease in narcotic related activity and **100%** decrease in gang related activity from 1998.

(Neighborhood Policing Team initiated the project in late 1998 and completed it in August of 1999).

Although the primary goal was to greatly reduce police calls for service to this apartment community, the end result was an apartment community once over-ridden by drug dealers and violent criminals to a peaceful and safe living environment for the residents of the Greenwood Apartments. The physical improvements made to the complex have helped to provide a strong sense of pride of ownership and has attracted responsible tenants to the complex. Through a collective team effort involving the Police Department and members of our community, we share the remarkable success of which is formerly known as the "Green" apartments.

2. Will your response require monitoring or continuing effort to maintain your results?

We have found that as we move towards the summer months of the year 2000, calls to service remain consistently low. Management for the Greenwood Apartments has continued to enforce their commitment to a Drug-free apartment complex. The owner, management and tenants have assumed responsibility for ensuring a peaceful living community. Members of the Neighborhood Policing Team periodically drop by to check in with the management team and interact with the residents.



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AGENCY AND OFFICER INFORMATION

- 1. At what level of the police organization was this problem-solving initiative adopted (e.g. the entire department, a few select officers, etc.)?**

The level of this police organisation that led this problem-solving initiative was the Neighborhood Policing Team. This six-officer team, assisted by patrol officers, directed all activity for this problem.

- 2. Did officers or management receive any training in problem-oriented policing and/or problem solving before this project began or during its execution?**

All members of the Neighborhood Policing Team specialized in problem oriented policing prior to the inception of this project.

- 3. Were additional incentives given to police officers who engaged in problem solving?**

There were no additional incentives offered to the members of the Neighborhood Policing Team, other than job satisfaction.

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- 4. What resources and guidelines (manuals, past problem-solving examples, etc.) were used, if any, by police officers to help them manage this problem solving initiative?**

The team relied heavily on each of its members, since each member had specialized training in certain fields such as drugs, crime free housing and environmental laws.

There were also past successfully completed projects that team members could refer to when needed.

- 5. What issues/problems were identified with the problem-oriented policing model or the problem-solving model?**

There were no issues/problems with problem-oriented policing identified during this project.

- 6. What general resources (financial and/or personnel) were committed to this project, and of those resources, what went beyond the existing department budget?**

The Neighborhood Policing Team were directly committed to this problem and used patrol officers on an "as needed" basis.

*Greenwood Apartments Community Improvement Project
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