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Graffiti Vandalism & the Auckland Region Graffiti Free Project

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Introduction

Early 2007 the Board of Management, Policing Metropolitan Auckland, proposed a three-year, joint regional graffiti free project to local authorities, Chief Executive Forum. Such a project would have strategic alignment to the police goal of community reassurance in the New Zealand Police Strategic Plan to 2010 (New Zealand Police, 2007), the New Zealand Police Crime Reduction Strategy, the Local Government Act 2002 [sections 14(1)(e) and (g) and 91(3)(a)] and the Auckland Youth Support Network. It would also have alignment to existing, discrete Graffiti projects e.g., Auckland City Zero Tolerance Graffiti Programme, Manukau Beautification Charitable Trust, (Papakura) Tag Out Trust (Waitakere City), and Franklin Graffiti Project.

The regional Chief Executives agreed in principle to the graffiti project and a meeting was called by Manukau City to proceed and further develop the proposal. Thus, the seven Auckland Territorial Local Authorities (TLAs) and the three Auckland Police Districts established a partnership aimed at adopting a collaborative zero tolerance approach to graffiti vandalism and a programme aimed at eradication, education and prevention. The core of development team of ten grew into a Project Steering Committee which comprises approximately 25 members representative of the three police districts, the seven TLAs, their Trusts employed to eradicate graffiti vandalism in their jurisdictions and the Ministry of Justice's Crime Prevention Unit.

Governance for the project is provided by the Chair of the Police Board of Management and a representative of the CEO Forum, currently the CEO of Manukau City. The Project Steering Committee is supported by a Project Coordinator who reports on progress every six months.

Project Rationale / Why graffiti vandalism

Graffiti's modern history can be traced to the 1960s when it first came to public attention in New York and largely as "an outgrowth of political radicalism and of black and Hispanic empowerment and identity" (Ferrell, 1993). Since its emergence and proliferation via the hip-hop culture, graffiti vandalism has presented an increasing challenge to police and local authorities nationally and internationally and has placed considerable costs on private property owners, schools, and local and central government. The term "graffiti vandalism" refers to a wide range of markings and etchings that deface public or private property, writing or drawing in a public space without permission. At the launch of the government's crackdown announced in February 2008, Prime Minister Clark called it a

destructive crime, an invasion of private and public property and no mere nuisance crime (New Zealand Government, 2008).

With the recent escalation of street gang activity and associated taggings in regional Auckland, costs have increased. However, not all graffiti vandalism is committed by alienated, socially and economically deprived young people. University students also express social and political views on the walls of buildings, mainly in stairways and toilets (Nwoye, 1993; Selwyn, 2008). Most taggers, nevertheless, are teenage offenders, although offenders as young as 9 and as old as 35 have been apprehended in Auckland City (R. Shields, personal communication, September 20, 2007). Offender profiling shows that the offenders inflicting the most damage are usually aged between 14 and 19 years and predominantly male. The Auckland experience has shown that graffiti vandalism does not recognise any socio-economic, geographical, religious, or cultural boundaries (R. Shields, personal communication, September 20, 2007).

In the Auckland region it is estimated that approximately \$8 million per year is spent on the eradication of graffiti vandalism by the local authorities (Reid, 2007) and the cost is escalating. As well as imposing unknown substantial financial costs on property owners, illegal graffiti costs the community in other ways. International research suggests that graffiti and other signs of disorder deter legitimate users from entering public places, leaving them unattended and open to further criminal activity (Bradley, 2006). The seemingly trivial offence of graffiti vandalism has been associated with damaged civic pride, increased criminal activity, a decline in property values and may be perceived as a symptom of community instability (Gibbons, 2004). It has been associated with fear of crime (Grabosky, 1995) and heightened fear within the community (Ministry of Justice, 2007).

The type of graffiti vandalism that is known as “tagging” has spread widely and rapidly since 1993. Communities are being affected by perceptions of disorder, contempt for the law, fear of crime and lawlessness that are consequences of the tagging phenomenon. In a neighbourhood study of 2,482 residents, those who reported living in neighborhoods with high levels of vandalism, graffiti vandalism and other criminogenic variables were found to be more mistrusting of others (Ross, Mirowsky & Pribesh, 2001). Common in such neighborhoods people have sense of powerlessness (Ross et al, 2001). A homicide in Counties Manukau in January this year was, allegedly, the reponse of one citizen to a 15 year old tagger (Vass & Thompson, 2008).

Research shows that people practice graffiti to satisfy their basic human need to communicate, The type and purpose of graffiti varies to include messages of a political, racial, threatening or obscene nature, as well as personal or group / gang identification, or “tagging” (Grant, 1996; Halsey & Young, 2002). Motivation for graffiti vandalism includes gaining fame and notoriety, gaining territorial recognition, alleviating boredom, competing with others and for a dare (R. Shields, personal communication, September 20, 2007).

A review of best practice (Bradley, 2006) aimed at graffiti vandalism eradication found that a full time coordinator’s position is an essential component to implementing an effective anti-graffiti model. All of the models examined used multiple strategies and included comprehensive networks. For non-gang offenders, interventions were included

that aimed to channel young people into productive pastimes. In the most successful instance, a 90 percent reduction in graffiti was achieved through the use of solutions that included: professional psychological counselling for chronic juvenile offenders; convicted juvenile offenders to paint over graffiti as a condition of probation; citizen volunteers monitoring / cleaning graffiti-prone areas; police officers helping to supervise juveniles on probation for graffiti related offences and enforcing laws prohibiting graffiti; encouraging juveniles to paint murals in select areas; and a juvenile bicycle patrol coordinated by police to monitor the neighbourhood for graffiti.

Outcomes sought

The Auckland Region Graffiti Free Project (ARGFP) has four outcomes:

- i) Graffiti Free Metropolitan Auckland in 0 -5 years
- ii) Development of a co-ordinated approach between the New Zealand Police, Auckland Region Local Authorities and their communities to the eradication of graffiti vandalism across Metropolitan Auckland
- iii) Improved community safety and public confidence in Police and Territorial Authorities
- iv) Improved quality of life.

The Development Process

The project was developed around the four control components: response, enforcement, problem solving / intelligence and prevention (Table 1). It was then further developed by identifying three key strategic themes for the project which would become the drivers for the project's output activities.

The strategic framework for the ARGFP is based around the themes of Eradication, Enforcement and Education. Within each of these themes the control components were placed and used as guidelines for the preparation of project plans.

As part of the development process a Terms of Reference was prepared which provided transparency for all partners of the strategic processes being used and ensured the required levels of trust and confidence from not only the sponsors but key stakeholders.

Progress to Date

To minimise the risk of ambiguity in working across organisations standard project management tools were used. As part of the planning processes Project Charters were drawn up by members of the Steering Committee for each of the identified streams of work. Originally nine project work streams were identified but this was rationalised back to five and are described below.

Table 1. Control Components

Control Component	Police	TAs
<i>Response</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Provide a 24/7 response capability to reports of graffiti offending in progress ▪ Receive and follow up on reports of graffiti crimes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Provide a 24/7 0800 hotline to receive reports of graffiti ▪ Provide a response capability to remove reported graffiti within 24 hours of notification
<i>Enforcement</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Provide investigative capability to deal with identified graffiti offenders ▪ Hold offenders to account via prosecution or other agreed actions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Provide information to police regarding known or identified graffiti offenders
<i>Problem Solving & Intelligence</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Receive and analyse graffiti data ▪ Link inter area and inter district hot spots/hot offenders ▪ Maintain and distribute schedule of hot offenders 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Establish and maintain graffiti database ▪ Data sharing – including referral to police for investigative follow up
<i>Prevention</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Develop and implement a communication plan (including graffiti awareness campaign) ▪ CPTED assessments of identified hot spots (consider improved lighting and greenery) ▪ Ensure eradication within 24 hours ▪ Mobilise all stakeholders – stakeholder engagement ▪ Promote successes ▪ Support and formal recognition for graffiti volunteers programme 	

Project 1. Regional Graffiti Database.

The main purpose of having a singular regional database is to enable increased detection and apprehension of offenders and to eliminate duplication of data held on several independent databases. The secure website for hosting offender data (www.taggertracker.co.nz) has been registered, the prototype developed and consulted to ensure as many fields are included to capture meaningful and accurate data. Offence data will be entered into the data base "graffiti tracker." Tagger Tracker is being designed for authorised users of the TLAs and Police and will have intelligence capability for investigations and prosecutions. To preserve the integrity of the database strict protocols and joint agency standard operating procedures are being developed. An analyst has been employed to interrogate the data.

Project 2. Enforcement

The charge of Wilful Damage gives the police the power to deal with graffiti vandalism yet there is a perception that police do not take graffiti offending seriously. In the past there was no way it could be measured separately. However, the introduction and utilisation of a specific code for graffiti vandalism (5134) in the Property Damage class of offences will enable the crime to be measured. Deliverables include the utilisation of TLA staff, Neighbourhood Watch, Māori and Pacific Wardens and others to deter graffiti vandalism; the active promotion of zero tolerance within districts, an increase of prosecutions of recidivist offenders and the appointment of staff dedicated to graffiti vandalism. Auckland City has a dedicated Graffiti Officer and a Graffiti Intelligence Analyst, Counties Manukau, a Community Relations Officer (Graffiti) and in Waitemata, the Problem Solving Teams have graffiti vandalism in their portfolio and a Graffiti Officer position is to be advertised.

The intentions are i) to increase prosecutions of recidivist offenders which will occur as the database provides evidence; ii) increase applications for reparation from graffiti vandals; iii) utilisation of restorative justice processes.

Since the inception of the project, the Government announced a new offence for tagging and graffiti vandalism in the Summary Offences Act and increased fines (up to \$2,000) and/or community based sentences. Interestingly, in April a judge sentenced a tagger to 28 days imprisonment as well as imposing a fine of \$1, 092.45 for reparation (Dominion Post, 2008).

Project 3. Partnership Programme

The first task in the Partnership Programme was to produce a matrix that identified strategic partners and key community organisations critical to the success of the eradication of graffiti vandalism. So that there would be consistency in the partnership agreements a set of protocols was agreed then contact made with potential partners. At the time writing, letters of introduction had been mailed to the CEOs of 12 utility companies seeking support, seven had expressed support for a collaborative partnership with the Project. Other deliverables include the work along the region's rail corridor with On Track

and an investigation into the benefit and logistics of establishing an Auckland region 0800 number for members of the public to report graffiti vandalism.

Project 4. Local Programmes

Nine deliverables i) immediate paint-out by residents and property owners; ii) identification of hot spots; iii) mural programme; iv) volunteer programmes; v) recovery of recycled paints; vi) alternative education sites; vii) stock take of local initiatives; viii) community education programmes; and, ix) increased reporting of graffiti vandalism and offenders.

Project 5. Education

This is the most recent work to get underway. Researching current graffiti education programmes in New Zealand and elsewhere has been the first phase of the workstream. The project team, in consultation with educational experts, is reviewing these to identify effective, suitable and age-appropriate programmes to roll out in pre-schools, primary, intermediate and secondary schools. Also included in the workstream will be internal and media education.

Future Developments

In recognition of the Auckland regional response to graffiti vandalism, the Crime Prevention Unit allocated a one-time payment of \$160,000 from the funding package targeted at graffiti vandalism announced by the Prime Minister (15 February, 2008). It has been agreed that part of this funding will provide for an evaluation of the ARGF project. Rossi, Lipsey and Freeman (2004) define evaluation as "the systematic application of social research procedures for assessing the design, implementation and utility of social intervention programmes." Evaluation is concerned with achievements made through interventions (Munck, 1997) and an external outcome evaluation would investigate whether the project has achieved the outcomes sought and caused a demonstrable effect in the community. Thus, an evaluation would ensure firstly, the effectiveness of the project; secondly, the utility of the interventions; and thirdly, the accountability requirements of the Sponsors.

Current legislative amendment before the select committee reinforces the work of the ARGFP but will not alter its focus. The ARGFP has representation on the Ministry of Justice Steering Committee who are currently preparing the national Graffiti Strategy, expected to be approved by Government in August.

With Government focus now firmly behind solving the problem of graffiti vandalism, the ARGFP project has been able to place metro Auckland in a strategically strong position with many stakeholders. That relationship will be a platform for future partnerships.

Concluding Remarks / Reflection

According to the Audit Commission (2005) local partnerships are crucial to bring about improvements in the quality of life for citizens, yet one of the toughest challenges facing public sector managers is making partnerships work effectively. Whilst they can deliver significant benefits partnership relationships need to work well at the strategic and operational levels to be successful. The strategic direction may be well intended, well articulated and well scoped but without the nut and bolts of well defined, well resourced and a willing capable implementation team the chance of a fruitful partnership is limited.

The Auckland Region Graffiti Free Project has been fully supported by the Sponsors and the Crime Prevention Unit and has been guided by both the Steering Group of policy makers and practitioners in the field. Their knowledge and experience, enthusiasm and commitment to the aim of the project have resulted in a cohesive and integrated multi-partner project.

Significant milestones were achieved within six months of the ARGFP beginning and these can be partly attributed to the exigency in holding regular action-oriented meetings, developing a Terms of Reference, the development and approval of the Project Charters and the appointment of the Project Co-ordinator.

The achievement and effect on the community and offenders will be formally assessed in the proposed evaluation.

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