

PROBLEM SOLVING ABSTRACT

An aging fifty unit motel, the Tropicana is nestled along a busy commercial street in Yuma, Arizona. Relatively nondescript, the motel probably goes unnoticed by most residents and travelers. The adjacent city block consists of a mix of businesses and homes. Despite its seemingly simple existence, the Tropicana Motel has been the site of an alarmingly high number of calls to the Yuma Police Department. In 1997, police officers responded to 772 calls for service to the Tropicana and its surrounding area.

In early 1997, selected Yuma Police Department supervisors and officers attended a three day course on problem-oriented policing presented by members of the Seattle (WA) Police Department. In mid-1997, the staff of the police department decided to test the SARA problem solving methodology on the Tropicana Motel.

In the scanning phase, the motel was clearly the centerpiece of criminal activity for the area. Crime analysis data confirmed a high number of suspected drug-related crime in the vicinity. Police officers involved in the project did not limit themselves in their attempts to determine those groups affected by the problem. Along with the traditional crime triangle components of victims, suspects, and location, officers examined controllers, guardians, and managers. Many entities were identified in the process.

During the analysis phase, police officers learned they would need to partner with various state, county, city and federal agencies to significantly impact the problem. The surrounding businesses and residents would also play a role in the project. Police officers and the city prosecutor borrowed techniques used successfully in another county to solve a similar problem.

Our response used a three-pronged approach. The first prong focused on nuisance abatement. Entities involved in this aspect were City Fire Department, City Zoning and Licensing, County Health Department and public utility companies.

The second prong consisted of crime prevention. Police department members brought the property owners, managers, and residents together in an effort to develop block and business watch programs. Also, Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design principles were explained and emphasized. ,

The final prong focused on traditional enforcement. The police department was the catalyst in this *effort*. Included in this phase were members of the regional multi-agency drug task force, US Border Patrol, State Department of Economic Security and the City Prosecutor's office. Jointly, they coordinated pro-active enforcement efforts directed at the Tropicana Motel and its surrounding area.

The problem solving partnership began in October 1997. By the end of April 1998, our calls for service and number of written reports had decreased by over fifty percent. The results were impressive. Additionally, self-initiated police activity increased in the target area. Our assessment has shown the effort to be an overwhelming success.

In early 1998, the Tropicana Motel was sold to a motel owner in Canada. The new owner has already met with police department representatives to further improve the conditions at the motel.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Project Description Tropicana Motel

A. Scanning

The Tropicana Motel is an old, forty unit motel on Business Route 8 in Yuma, Arizona. In recent years, the motel has fallen into disrepair and has become the source of a disproportionate number of calls for service to the Yuma Police Department. It was owned and managed by an elderly couple until the husband died several years ago. It is now owned and operated by the elderly widow who has as partners her daughter and son-in-law who live out of town. The motel property borders both residential and business districts. There is a drive-thru liquor store adjacent to the motel.

The business district in which the motel is located is known for Sunday night "cruising". Employees of the adjacent liquor store have been cited for selling liquor to minors. Also, police and probation officers noticed an inordinate number of known offenders and probationers using the motel as home. Informants living at the motel reported drug dealing and usage and prostitution among the motel residents. In addition, the motel was home to many migrant farm laborers during the winter months.

An analysis of calls for service from the motel and surrounding area showed a sharp increase from 1992 through 1997. In 1992, there were 55 reports taken from the surrounding area, twelve of which showed the motel address as the primary location. In 1993, a total of 59 written reports were completed, 13 of them coming from the motel. In 1994, activity consisted of 107 reports and 39 of them were motel-related. The following year showed a small decrease with 93 reports of which 31 were related to the motel.

In 1996, activity rose at the Tropicana. There were 106 criminal reports in the block surrounding the motel and 44 reports were from the motel itself. In 1997, sixty-eight criminal reports from the motel were completed of the total 114 reports from the surrounding block. There was one death due to a drug overdose and one serious shooting-related injury during 1997. The majority of the remaining reports were drug-related. Many others involved assaults, burglaries, thefts and disorderly conduct. In most cases, responses to the motel for other than drug-related crimes led to some degree of drug involvement. Some patrol officers ignored or avoided the motel during tours of duty thus little police-initiated activity occurred.

In 1997, a total of 772 calls for service were made to the Tropicana and the block surrounding the motel. Of that total, 437 calls were handled at the motel. Police, neighboring businesses and residents, including some law abiding motel residents, noticed the activity increasing year after year. Because of the large number of drug-related crimes associated with the motel and the increasing drain on police resources, the motel was chosen as the object of a problem solving effort.

B. Analysis

In order to determine there was a problem at the motel, police compared calls for service from the motel to those from nearby businesses. Specifically, call statistics from three motels within a block of the Tropicana were examined. The Tropicana was found to be a ten-fold greater customer for police service than any other business in the area. In addition, police officers developed a one page citizen questionnaire (example in supporting documents section). Police bicycle officers canvassed the surrounding business and residential district using the questionnaire. The result was the neighbors viewed the motel as a problem..

Interviews with the motel manager/owner confirmed to police that the owner had little control of the business and was renting to whoever she could. Some police officers received information from confidential sources that the motel owner was taking food stamps and/or stolen property in return for rent. During some contacts with police officers, the elderly owner appeared mentally ill or disoriented.

Other parties determined significant to the problem were identified as: **Victims/Guardians:** homes and businesses and their occupants surrounding the motel; and law abiding tenants of the motel. **Suspects/Controllors:** offenders living at the motel; police, probation, and parole departments; and potential offenders visiting the motel. **Locations/Managers:** the motel itself and surrounding properties; the legal owners of those properties; City of Yuma Zoning office; City Prosecutor; County Health Department; and public utility companies.

According to all stakeholders, the harms resulting from the problem were multifaceted. The motel property was becoming a blight due to lack of maintenance and upkeep. There was an empty, unfenced swimming pool on the property. Three mobile homes had been located on the property, possibly in violation of zoning regulations. Also, electrical problems and natural gas leaks were a concern.

The run down condition of the property led to low rental rates attracting potential offenders, transients, and migrant laborers. US Border Patrol agents investigated several instances of illegal aliens being harbored in rooms at the motel. Transients who used the motel were found to be drug and alcohol addicted. As previously stated, the majority of reports taken at the motel were related to drugs and alcohol.

Some thefts and burglaries in the surrounding neighborhoods were many times discovered to be the work of motel residents. Occasionally, stolen property and evidence were found in some motel rooms. Never before a criminal problem in this area, prostitution seemed to be rooting itself in this neighborhood when police officers identified several motel residents as prostitutes.

Litter, discarded drug paraphernalia, and increased vehicle traffic became problems associated with the motel. These events and circumstances combined with an increasing demand on police resources contributed to a multitude of harms for the neighborhood and community.

Before we identified this problem, police had responded to calls for service surrounding the motel as isolated, unrelated incidents. Traditional law enforcement tactics alone were simply unable to significantly impact the problem. After receiving problem solving training from members of the Seattle (WA) Police Department, we were confident that we could identify and treat this issue as a problem using the SARA method. A structured problem-solving approach was necessary since past police responses to the Tropicana Motel had no effect in abating the problems.

C. Responses

In the latter part of the Scanning Phase, we identified over forty possible entities which might have a role in the response phase. Those entities included principles identified as either victims or guardians, offenders or controllers, locations or managers. After analyzing the problem and the potential entities involved, those personnel responsible for this problem solving initiative chose a three-pronged approach. The approach involved: 1) Determination that the motel was the source of the problem and using all means available to abate the problem source, 2) Traditional enforcement of laws pertaining to illegal activity associated with the problem, and 3) A proactive partnership between the business, police and other concerned entities for the purpose of crime prevention.

Included in the range of response alternatives were the following:

Abatement: Contact all entities with some form of control over the business, determine history of violations, if any, and re-open any cases of violations not closed with appropriate solutions or open new cases where new violations could be found. Those entities included the City of Yuma Zoning Department, the Fire Department, the County Health Department, the City Business License office, public utilities departments, the State Tax Department, the legal owner of the problem property, and the Police Department. Representatives of these entities met on a continuing schedule beginning in October, 1997 for the purpose of sharing information and strategic planning.

Traditional Enforcement: Bring together all whose responsibility included enforcement of laws associated with illegal behavior documented at the problem site and coordinate enforcement activities. Those entities included the Yuma Police Department; the local multi agency drug interdiction task force (SBA), Department of Economic Security investigators, US Border Patrol, and the City Prosecutors Office. These groups met on a continuing basis from October, 1997 for the purpose of coordinating law enforcement activities on and near the problem property.

Crime Prevention: Bring together the property manager/owner and the police department for the purpose of developing a crime prevention strategy based upon a proactive partnership. Those entities included the motel management, owner, the business district, nearby residential housing, and the

Police Department Community Policing Unit. This facet of the approach included uniting nearby residential areas into Block Watches, bringing the business district together in a Business Watch program, and encouraging the problem property to use such crime prevention tactics as Crime-Free Hotel/Motel, Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design principles and other crime prevention strategies.

These responses were chosen because they appeared to be most capable of affecting change. The goal of the response plan was to either close the business or reduce the criminal activity and thus the calls for service. If it was determined that closing the business was not appropriate or feasible, the goal was to decrease by at least 50% the number of criminal reports and calls for service taken at or near the Tropicana Motel.

During the response phase, we found nearly all of the critical entities named during the scanning phase to the problem were available and willing to assist. Only the State Department of Economic Security was unable to help when we asked for undercover investigators to look into food stamp fraud.

D. Assessment

The problem solving effort succeeded on several fronts. In December 1997, the response phase was implemented and continues today. Some of the identified problems have been corrected or eliminated with a positive impact on the motel and surrounding neighborhood. All the described problems have been positively impacted to some degree.

The Yuma Fire Department made the motel life-safety issues a priority. Fire department personnel were instrumental in making safe an empty, inoperable swimming pool on the motel property. They ensured the motel was up to standard regarding room smoke detectors and fire extinguishers. Also, they addressed their concern about electrical wiring hazards. Today, fire department personnel continue to monitor the motel for compliance.

The City Zoning Department addressed the issue of improperly zoned mobile homes on the motel property. Maximum room occupancy regulations were stressed to the motel owner. The County Health Department addressed the issue of vermin and basic cleanliness.

The City Prosecutor wrote a warning letter to the motel owner advising her of her responsibility to abate the criminal nuisance aspect of her property. During the analysis phase, we learned that the Maricopa County (AZ) Attorney's Office developed a seldom used, powerful abatement tool. Prosecutors were using Arizona Revised Statutes 12-991 through 12-994 to legally force property owners to take steps to rid their property of repetitive crime. Failure to abate the criminal nuisance could subject the property owner to seizure of the property and criminal charges. This tactic proved to be very effective in generating positive results from the motel owner.

Public utility companies investigated and addressed reported natural gas leaks and electrical problems on the motel property. The City Business License Department verified the motel possessed a current, valid business license. The State Tax Department investigated the possibility that the motel owner was not reporting all earnings/income.

A Yuma Police Department Neighborhood Resource Officer spoke to the motel owner and maintenance man to advise them of available crime prevention programs. Also, the owner was told about the recent criminal activity by some of the motel tenants. The owner promptly evicted many problem tenants. The motel owner agreed to screen long term renters more closely in the future.

Based on the concerns of nearby residents, neighborhood watch groups were formed in the surrounding residential areas. Also, Business Watch groups were organized.

The police department coordinated law enforcement efforts among several law enforcement agencies for the purpose of proactive crime prevention. Beat and bicycle patrol officers closely monitored activity at the motel and its surrounding area to learn who was involved in criminal activity. Several arrests or field contacts were made to maintain a high police presence.

Finally, in March 1998, the Tropicana Motel was sold to a motel owner from Canada. The new owner plans to take control of the motel in October 1998. Prior to purchasing the motel, the new owner met with police department members to find out some of the past problems and form partnerships to keep the motel crime-free.

We were able to demonstrate several accomplishments in this problem solving initiative. First, monthly calls for service to the motel and adjacent area dropped dramatically from 104 calls in November 1997, the first month of our effort, to thirty one in April, 1998. Correspondingly, criminal cases decreased from sixteen to seven during the same period. If the effort is sustained, the motel and surrounding area will generate fewer than half the calls for service in 1998 than the number of calls logged in 1997. In 1998, written reports are projected to be less than half of the number of reports completed in 1997.

Crime analysis data showed that officer initiated activity in the project area increased from the time of our response implementation to present. The increase can be attributed to two factors. First, the coordinated law enforcement effort and problem solving initiative forced some of the activity. Second, when officers realized there was a concern by the department to deal with this issue, many officers wanted to become part of the solution.

When response goals were first established, our priorities were to either close the motel or drastically reduce the criminal activity and service demand associated with the motel. We determined that we would use every means possible and necessary through the City Prosecutor's Office to file criminal charges against the owner or begin forfeiture proceedings if we were unable to get results in abating the criminal nuisance. We agreed upon at least a fifty percent reduction in calls for service and

reported criminal activity in the project area within the first year. Our data has shown we have surpassed that objective in six months.

One of our concerns was the displacement of the problems associated with the Tropicana Motel. We feared the people causing the criminal activity would simply move to other low rent motels in the city. We have monitored activity at some other motels in the city. Although some former tenants of the Tropicana Motel moved into these other motels, we have not seen any significant increase in criminal activity at the other motels.

In this project, we confirmed one indisputable truth about problem solving. If you do not maintain your efforts, you simply will not have a viable, lasting impact on the problem. We realized that monitoring the response phase, continual analysis of crime data and maintenance of the *effort* and partnerships were crucial to the success of this problem-solving endeavor.

E. Agency and Officer Information

This problem-solving initiative was developed by concerned beat officers and their sergeants when calls for service in the project area reached a critical level. The effort was carried out by patrol officers and detectives under the direction of a lieutenant.

Many of the participating officers received formal problem-solving training from members of the Seattle (WA) Police Department. The remaining officers on the project team received on-the-job training in the SARA methodology.

The police *officer* who coordinated and led this initiative was considered a department expert in problem solving methods. He was among the original police officers hired under the Department of Justice COPS AHEAD grant in 1995. He has developed other problem solving projects and has presented one of those projects at the International Problem Oriented Policing Conference in San Diego, California. He has read extensively in the field of problem solving and teaches its principles to new police officers.

During the course of this initiative there were no problems encountered with the SARA Model. Finally, no additional resources were allocated to the project.

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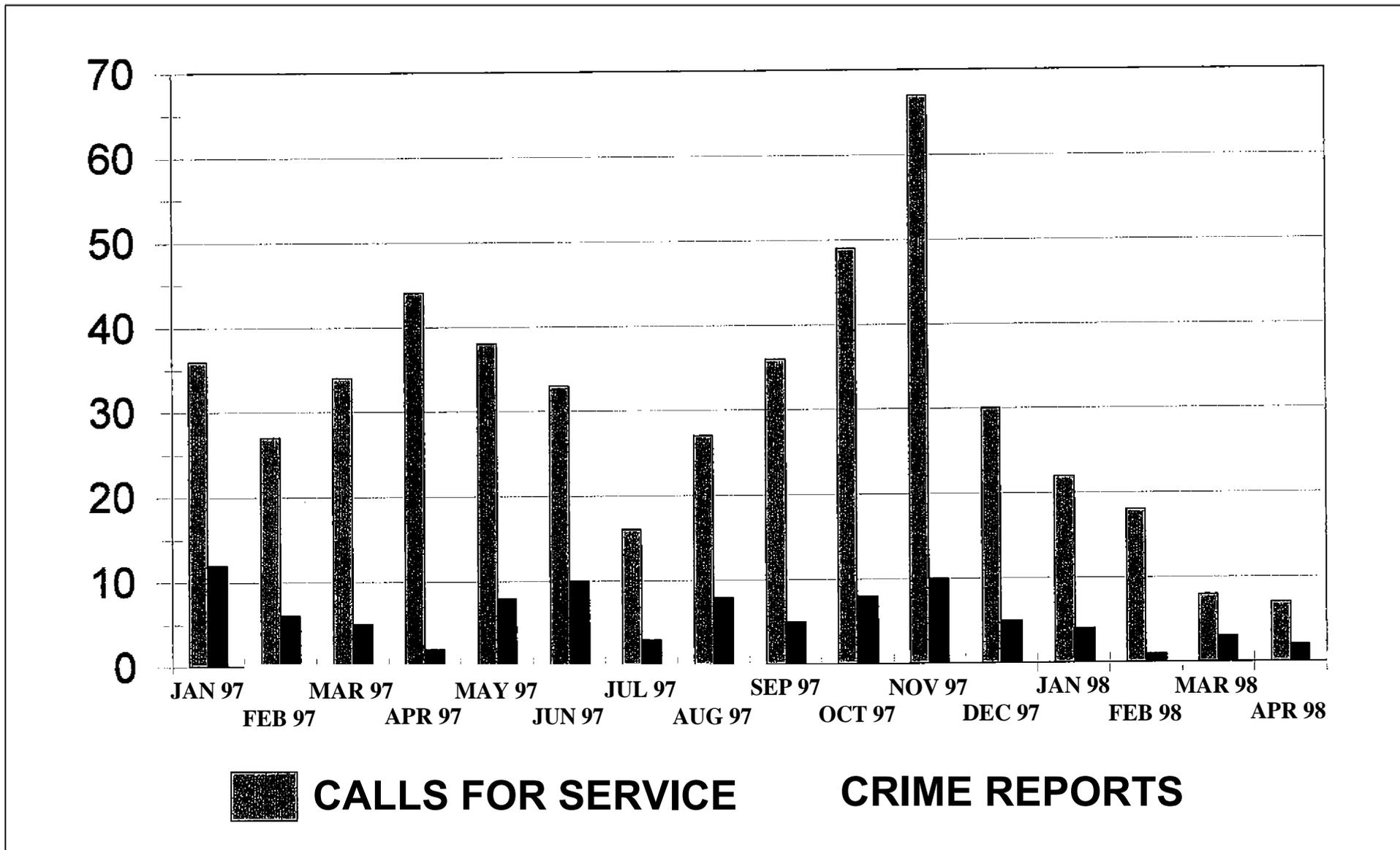
SUPPORTING DOCUMENTS

- **Statistical Summaries (2)**
- **Examples of Citizen Questionnaires and Surveys**

Copy of Related Newspaper Article

TROPICANA MOTEL CALLS FOR SERVICE AND CRIME REPORTS, 1197-4198

	JAN 97	FEB 97	MAR 97	APR 97	MAY 97	JUN 97	JUL 97	AUG 97	SEP 97	OCT 97	NOV 97	DEC 97	JAN 98	FEB 98	MAR 98	APR 98
CALLS FOR SERVICE	36	27	34	44	38	33	16	27	36	49	67	30	22	18	8	7
CRIME REPORTS	12	6	5	2	8	10	3	8	5	8	10	5	4	1	3	2



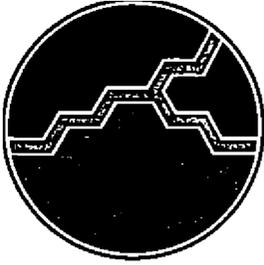
TROPICANA & SURROUNDING BLOCK CALLS FOR SERVICE/REPORTS TAKEN -1197-4198

	JAN 97		FEB 97		MAR 97		APR 97	
	CALLS	RPTS	CALLS	RPTS	CALLS	RPTS	CALLS	RPTS
2115 S 4TH AVE (TROPICANA)	36	12	27	6	34	5	44	2
2100 BLK S 4TH AVE	14	1	24	5	21	4	21	21
2100 BLK S 3RD AVE	3	1	1	0	1	0	1	0
300 BLK W 21ST ST	1	0	2	0	2	1	3	1
TOTALS	54	14	54	11	58	10	69	24

	97		N 97		JUL 97		AUG 97	
	CALLS	RPTS	CALLS	RPTS	CALLS	RPTS	CALLS	RPTS
2115 S 4TH AVE (TROPICANA)	38		33	10			27	8
2100 BLK S 4TH AVE	24		i				26	3.1
2100BLKS3RDAVE	6		i			1	5	WIN
300 BLK W 21ST ST						0	2	
TOTALS	70	13	~i	14	46	7	60	16

	SEP 97		OCT 97		NOV97		DEC 97	
	CALLS	RPTS	CALLS	RPTS	CALLS	RPTS	CALLS	RPTS
2115 S 4TH AVE (TROPICANA)	36	5	49	8	67	10	30	5
2100 BLK S 4TH AVE	23	6	6	1	28	3	36	9
2100 BLK S 3RD AVE	3	1	1	0	5	2	3	0
300 BLK W 21ST ST	3	0	4	0	4	1	3	3
TOTALS	65	12	60	9	104	16	72	17

	JAN 98		FEB 98		MAR 98		APR 98	
	CALLS	RPTS	CALLS	RPTS	CALLS	RPTS	CALLS	RPTS
2115 S 4TH AVE (TROPICANA)	22	4	18	1	8	3	7	2
2100 BLK S 4TH AVE	24	2	28	4	17	3	21	3
2100 BLK S 3RD AVE	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
300 BLK W 21ST ST	1	0	1	0	0	0	2	2
TOTALS	48	6	47	5	25	6	31	7



City Of YUMA
POLICE DEPARTMENT
1500 SOUTH 1ST AVENUE
YUM.A, ARIZONA 85364
(520) 782-3236

Dear Resident:

I am Officer Dale Bums of the Yuma Police Department. I am working with other officers on a project which includes you as a partner and which will, I hope, reduce crime and disorder in your neighborhood. Part of that project is asking your help in reducing some of the most visible manifestations of crime and disorder.

One way in which you can help is by volunteering to be part of a Block Watch program. If you would like to invest about an hour of time some evening in a meeting with your neighbors, please call our Neighborhood Resource Officer at 329-2842.

You may be aware that you can leave a recorded message on a city phone line in order to report graffiti and have it painted over within seven days. That number is **329-2828**. You do not have to give your name.

You can report junk cars on streets or on private property, vacant houses which are not secured, and anything else which is a hazard to public health or safety by leaving a message on the Anti-Ugly Hotline. That number is **329-2814**. You do not have to leave your name.

Or you can leave a message for me at **783-4421**. Please do leave your name, because I would like to speak with you, by phone or in person.

Please help me to help you make our city safer, one neighborhood at a time.

Officer Dale Bums
Yuma Police Department

City of YUMA
POLICE DEPARTMENT
1500 SOUTH 1ST AVENUE
YUMA, ARIZONA 85364
(520) 782-3236

NAME: _____

LOCATION: _____

YUMA POLICE DEPARTMENT
NEIGHBORHOOD CRIME SURVEY

1. Do you feel there is a crime problem in your neighborhood?
YES / NO (circle one)

A. If you do, what do you feel is the cause? _____

2. Do you feel problems in your neighborhood are caused by any particular groups of persons?
YES / NO (circle one) (If the term gang is used by the citizen, use that term; if not, use the term
he or she uses to ask the following:)

A. What are the ages of those involved in the activity?
_____ to _____ years old.
B. How many group participants are under 18 years old? (what percentage)

C. What percentage of individuals do you think are involved from your neighborhood?

3. ONLY ASK THIS IF THE CITIZEN USES THE WORD "GANG!"
What gangs are in the area? (names of gangs)

4. Do you feel there is a solution to the problems your neighborhood is experiencing?
YES/NO (circle one)

A. If yes, what?

5. Do you feel a solution to the neighborhood problems can be found if the police and
neighborhood citizens work together? YES/NO (circle one)

A. If yes, would you be willing to come to a meeting to work out solutions to the crime
problems, if the meeting was held in your neighborhood? YES/NO (circle one)

City of YUMA
POLICE DEPARTMENT
1500 SOUTH 1ST AVENUE
YUMA, ARIZONA 85364
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NEIGHBORHOOD SURVEY

There have been several recent incidents in this neighborhood in which weapons have been fired into houses and cars. Are you aware of those incidents?

Do those types of incidents cause you to be fearful to use your neighborhood to socialize or exercise? _____

What do you think causes those types of criminal activity? _____

Is there other criminal activity in your neighborhood that you know about or would like help in stopping?

What other problems do you see in the neighborhood which could be addressed by police or other agencies?

Would you be willing to help police or other agencies to stop criminal activity or solve other problems by 1) Attending a Neighborhood or Block Watch meeting?
2) Forming a Neighborhood Association? _____ 3) Assisting police in identifying problems? _____, i.e. blight, unsupervised juveniles, abandoned autos, vacant buildings.

ADDRESS: _____ FAMILY NAME: _____

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