

# Best Practices For Graffiti Reduction

## Stellar Examples –

- The *UNTAG (Uniting Neighborhood to Abolish Graffiti) initiative* was spearheaded by Councilmember Eric Garcetti of the 13<sup>th</sup> District. The goal of this neighborhood-based campaign is to reduce graffiti & vandalism. In one year, graffiti was reduced by 62% in the whole council district. The strategy consisted of a combination of “block captains” to monitor & report graffiti, surveillance cameras installed in key locations, and stakeouts to catch taggers in action. NC’s play a key role by volunteering to be block captains and working with the Council office to remove graffiti as soon as it is put up.
- The Harbor City Neighborhood Council (HCNC) worked in collaboration with Tim Kephart, *creator of a graffiti reduction program that tracks graffiti as intelligence*, who worked in collaboration with the criminal investigation unit of the LAPD. Also includes:
  - Purchasing software & training police officers (approx. \$9,000/police division)
  - Volunteers going out and taking photos of all graffiti tagging
  - Requires an officer in each police division to input data (approx \$5-6,000)Tim was hired for one year for \$15,000 and graffiti was reduced by over 50%. The underlying ideology is that there is tendency for graffiti taggers to tag around where they live and in a similar style. This very program was adopted by the City of Carson and resulted in a 44% reduction in graffiti in the first year.
- The Mid City West Community Council (MCWCC) implemented a “*Graffiti Free Zone project*.” Neighborhood Council board members and community volunteers assume responsibility for areas of the community to monitor new graffiti. About 120 graffiti reports were removed in 48 hours! Graffiti was reduced by more than 50% in the first 2 weeks of the program.

For all of these communities, a deeper goal beyond the aesthetic appeal of fighting graffiti is rooted in the “broken window” theory. By taking care of minor offenses, potential offenders will be less conducive to greater crimes. The underlying thinking in fighting graffiti with an abatement program is that taggers will be less likely to tag if their work is eradicated immediately. Quick graffiti removal indicates to taggers, who are often gang affiliated, that the community has zero tolerance for such community defacing actions. NC’s are able to come together as one and as a group to fight the defacement of their community with a myriad of solutions.

**Greatest lesson:** a graffiti reduction program needs to be done on a more broader scale than NCs. The GVGNC area in the Harbor area did not have enough graffiti to warrant the continuation of the graffiti program. Tim suggested that if Neighborhood Council’s came together and got the city as a whole behind the effort, it would take only \$60,000.

**Sizeable challenge:** the ideology of graffiti removal only works if graffiti is eradicated as soon as it is put up. Turnaround time of over 48 hours is not ideal, even on weekends! (Joselyn)

**Word of advice:** At the very least, have “all board members go out in an orderly fashion to record and report all graffiti in their assigned area!” (Robert)

## Best Practices for Graffiti Reduction

- ❖ **Assign people to specific areas**
  - “block captains” will be responsibility for monitoring & reporting graffiti
  - requesting about an hour of patrolling each week
- ❖ **Create a graffiti hotline**
  - Through a local community beautification organization, the City’s non-emergency hotline: 3-1-1, or your Council office
  - Create a hotline that’s connected to the Neighborhood Council or Council office website
- ❖ **Advertise the hotline**
  - Radio announcements, Neighborhood Council & Council office websites, article in regional newspapers, placing advertisements, creating flyers, informing schools...
  - Let everyone know that it is free & can be reported anonymous
  - Make sure to *ALWAYS* get exact location, type of surface, and color of wall tagged!
- ❖ **Consistent marketing**
  - Make it a marketing & awareness campaign – sell the goal & the means!
  - Design a logo, developing a catchy phrase...cost MCWCC about \$2,800
  - Most importantly, let the community know that graffiti removal is only one call away!
- ❖ **Constant graffiti reporting**
  - Cannot “drop the ball” because the graffiti will return (Robert)
  - Report graffiti even if it is not your designed area!
- ❖ **Get permission to remove graffiti**
  - Have property owners to sign release forms
- ❖ **Remove Graffiti Immediately**
  - Work with your graffiti abatement partner to remove obstacles that would lead to graffiti removal to take more than one day
  - Train volunteers to paint out graffiti themselves
  - Request more funding from your Council office or Neighborhood Council
- ❖ **Take pictures**
  - Whenever you catch a tagger in the act! (Rusty’s actions resulted in an arrest!)
- ❖ **Install surveillance cameras in graffiti hot spots**
  - Advertise its presence & taggers will be less reluctant to tag the location

*“Painting out graffiti is a lot like brushing your teeth: you have to do it every day to make a difference, but the result is clear: my neighborhood has a great big smile!”*

*Joselyn Geaga-Rosenthal*

### **Special thanks & acknowledge to those interviewed:**

Tim Kephart, creator of Graffiti Reduction Program software, (310) 261-8163  
JoseIn Geaga-Rosenthal, Board member of Greater Echo Elysian NC (GEENC)  
Rusty Millar, former Chair of Silver Lake NC (SLNC)  
Joeann Valle, Stakeholder, former VP for HCNC  
Robert Nieto, Board Member of MCWCC

Interpretation of interviews & creation of ‘best practices’ by DONE intern: Helen Leung