

**GRAFFITI VANDALISM:  
THE CURRENT SITUATION IN  
CHRISTCHURCH AND  
POTENTIAL COUNTER-  
MEASURES**

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Prepared for:

Lesley Symington  
Team Leader, Recreation and Arts  
Christchurch City Council  
P O Box 237  
Christchurch 1

Prepared by:

Sarah Wylie  
Social Research Consultant  
38 Victors Road  
Hoon Hay  
Christchurch 2

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## **1. INTRODUCTION**

Graffiti vandalism, the tagging of property without the permission of property owners, is a crime, a nuisance, and a social problem. Financially, it places considerable costs on private property owners, schools, and local and central government. While New Zealand estimates are not currently available, a recent government estimate undertaken in Australia put national clean-up costs of graffiti vandalism in the region of \$100 million per year.

As well as imposing substantial financial costs on property owners, illegal graffiti costs the community in other ways. James Q. Wilson, a prominent US criminologist and framer of the "broken windows" theory embraced by cities like New York and Washington DC, suggested recently that signs of disorder in society such as graffiti, abandoned cars, broken windows, and litter encourage legitimate users to avoid public places, leaving them prone to further criminal illegitimate activity. Research evidence strongly supports the notion that the presence of graffiti vandalism encourages urban decay if left unchecked. Because it fosters an impression that crime is rife, the seemingly trivial offence of graffiti vandalism has been associated with damaged civic pride, increased criminal activity, decline in property values and heightened fear within the community (Queensland Department of Justice, 1998).

## **2. THE ORIGINS OF GRAFFITI**

Graffiti is a general term for wall writing, something that people have been doing since pre-historic times. Early cave drawings and the street art and markings of today's city youths both stem from a basic human need to communicate with others. For youths who may not feel able to express themselves through other media, graffiti offers an easily accessible and effective way to communicate with a large audience. Anyone can obtain a can of spray paint or marker pen and "make their mark; US researchers estimate that around 80 percent of young people do at some time.

Graffiti varies in type and purpose, from political, racial, threatening or obscene messages (known in the US as "junk graffiti), to personal or group identification, or "tagging".

### **USA**

Modern graffiti has its origins in New York in the 1960s. At that time, gangs in the city began writing their names to mark their territory and teens started writing their nicknames on walls. To identify the author, writers often added their street number after their name. Following this formula, in 1970 a 16 year old named Demetrius started writing his tag wherever he could. Working as a

messenger, he covered much of the city, spreading his tag, TAKI 183, widely. The young artist was tracked down in 1971 by a reporter from the New York Times and an article on him gave him celebrity status. This attention spurred heavy competition among youngsters and tagging began in earnest, and particularly in the subways, with folk hero status achieved by those with the most frequent tags or those in the most inaccessible places. Widespread introduction of aerosol spray paint and permanent markers at this time heightened the problem.

In 1984, a book on New York subway art was published and circulated globally. *Subway Art* glorified graffiti and was a major catalyst to the international spread of graffiti vandalism, alongside the spread of “hip hop” music and culture from its origins in the Bronx throughout the globe. Graffiti has become an integral part of this youth sub-culture, regarded as one of its five elements alongside breakdancing, MCing (rapping), DJing and hip hop philosophy.

## **NEW ZEALAND**

People have long made their mark in New Zealand - the ancient Maori rock drawings of South Canterbury and the adjacent scribblings of 19<sup>th</sup> Century site-seers and explorers are testament to that. Political, obscene, comic and other messages have long been painted and scratched onto surfaces in public spaces too. However it was the introduction of New York - style tagging and street art that has changed the face of graffiti in our country in recent years. This type of graffiti vandalism started to emerge in Christchurch in quantity in the mid 1990s, later than in the Auckland and Wellington regions.

## **3. THE NATURE OF MODERN GRAFFITI VANDALISM**

### **TAGGING**

Tagging has been the most common form of graffiti vandalism for the last decade. While the label is often applied generically, those involved in the graffiti scene in Christchurch identify a number of different names for the various styles of graffiti currently in use. The hip hop graffiti culture includes the following types of graffiti text:

#### ***Tags***

Today, tags are most commonly written with marker pen onto surfaces, although some are spraypainted. Text of a tag is usually fairly basic, single lined, in one colour and comprising a single word or group of words or letters. Some tags are very hard to read, and may include invented letters and

symbols. Tags are usually quite small. A tagger is someone who adopts a nickname, or tag, and then writes it on as many surfaces as possible, usually in highly visible locations.

The reasons why young people tag vary widely. Some tags, such as the loosely gang-based Eastside - Westside markings around Christchurch, are used to mark or claim territory; more serious gangs may also use tags in this way, as can individuals. Tags on another rival's graffiti can show disrespect or threat. However taggers who have talked about their motivations often reveal a deep desire to be known, to create a strong identity, and to communicate it to others. The thrill of risk taking also appears to be an underlying motivation for many taggers. The more often their marks appear in different locations, the more publicity they receive. As a consequence, a small number of taggers can cause a disproportionate amount of property damage in a community.

Tagging is currently very popular among pre-teens and early adolescents. While all taggers have their own tag, identifying them by a nickname, those more entrenched in this behaviour usually belong to a crew, a group of other taggers, who also have their own collective tag, often including the initials of its members. Crews usually have between 3 and 7 members and members know each other well and spend time tagging together. Some taggers have more than one tag, often keeping one for legal graffiti and another for their illegal vandalism.

### ***Throw-ups***

A throw up is normally bigger than a tag, and uses bubble-shaped letters, usually using a single colour. Throw-ups are used in the same way as tags, but take longer to put up, consequently exposing the artist to more risk of being caught.

### ***Bombs and Pieces***

These are large, colourful throw-ups, usually with a list of the crew's tags beside them. Bombs and pieces are an opportunity to demonstrate artistic ability to others and bring great status. They are closely aligned with the hip hop culture and are more likely to have been undertaken by those motivated by artistic exposure rather than by territoriality or the desire to do something illegal.

### ***Burner***

A burner is even more elaborate than a bomb, in full colour, using hard-to-read text with a background and portraying a character. Like bombs and pieces, these are placed on walls and buildings in public spaces.

## **4. THE CURRENT SITUATION IN CHRISTCHURCH**

In compiling the present report on graffiti, interviews were undertaken with a broad range of informants involved in the graffiti scene (N=12), including a former tagger, a 16 year old currently serving community service for the offence, community workers and council workers involved in the removal and / or prevention of graffiti and the Police officer with responsibilities relating to the issue. Interviews placed particular focus on determining the characteristics of people who currently commit graffiti vandalism in the city, their numbers and any groupings which exist. Interviews also focused on motivations behind graffiti for those involved in Christchurch and on identifying the target areas for graffiti vandalism in the city. Potential counter-measures were also discussed with all informants.

### **WHO DOES IT?**

People who commit graffiti vandalism are by no means a uniform group. Strong hierarchies exist within the graffiti culture, with “toys” the beginners, then taggers, and artists at the top of the hierarchy. The graffiti in Christchurch has been committed by a broad range of young people, including the following:

#### ***Those that Give it a Try / “Toys”***

Key informants suggested that a large majority of young people in the pre-teen - 17 year age group have committed minor acts of graffiti vandalism, mostly with marker pens and at school or in playgrounds and other public spaces. Remember scribbling your name on a school desk or carving it into a tree? The wide availability of permanent marker pens has changed the nature of the childish pursuit of ‘leaving your mark’. The young person completing community service for extensive graffiti vandalism offending expressed astonishment at the number of very small children he saw tagging while he was working on a legal piece in Aranui. The range and type of tagging on school and park play equipment suggests that many children of primary school age have had a go at tagging. Community workers involved in graffiti removal believe that children are now getting involved in tagging at a younger age than was the case a few years ago.

#### ***Taggers***

Best estimates by the taggers and Police interviewed suggest that around 200 young people in the 10-17 group could be called casual taggers, with a tag or tags that they have written in a number of places around the city, but not involved in the hard core scene of seriously participating in a crew or being very prolific in their tagging. Maori and Pacific Islands young people are

over-represented in this group, and approximately 90 percent of young people involved in graffiti to this level are male. Most are aged 13 to 17 years. Taggers span all socio-economic groups. While some taggers are truants or early school leavers, others continue to attend school regularly.

### ***The Hard Core***

Between 30 and 50 young people are currently “hard core” graffiti artists, prolifically tagging, and/or doing throw ups and pieces. Most of the hard core, are Pakeha males in the 15-17 age group. Artists, those most respected in the graffiti scene and committed to the more serious works are almost all Pakeha males. A few females exist within the hard core, and the current tagger interviewed noted a recent rise in female involvement in the scene.

## **MOTIVATIONS**

Taggers become involved in the behaviour for a number of reasons and through different youth sub-cultures. Once involved, many young people find the activity addictive in nature.

### ***Hip Hop***

Hip hop culture does attract the bulk of young people towards tagging, although according to the former tagger interviewed, the important thing in true hip hop is to do bombs and pieces in public spaces, and not merely to get your tag in as many places as possible. However it is the latter which some “misguided” hip hop followers have latched on to. Those motivated by hip hop tend to follow a strong code of ethics which does not support the theft of art materials or the tagging of private property. In the hip hop culture, it is disrespectful to tag over another’s work, and especially when it is large-scale work. Again, many younger taggers are not aware of such hip hop ethics.

### ***Skateboarder Culture***

While skateboarders are often involved in the hip hop culture, a skateboard culture has emerged within its own right, bringing with it its own graffiti.

### ***Fame to Address Low Self Esteem***

From the origins of tagging, fame was an important motivation, with the number of tags one had painted increasing fame. While putting up large works is now the more important source of mana in hip hop culture, proliferating one’s tag has attraction to those young people who lack any opportunity to excel in other aspects of their lives, and who may lack the artistic skill to compete with the skilled artists who put up bombs and

burners. For young people performing poorly at school and at sport, and with poor employment prospects, the fame from tagging is a way of boosting self esteem. According to a former tagger interviewed, those motivated by fame are some of the more “dangerous” graffiti vandals, often having no respect for private property or for the codes of ethics strong within many groups of graffiti artists, and often involved in other forms of vandalism and theft.

### ***Gangs***

Graffiti is a part of the youth gang culture, marking territory. As with those motivated by fame, graffiti vandals who are involved because of gang affiliations are more troublesome because of a lack of respect for private property, for others’ work, and a greater tendency to also be involved in other forms of offending.

### ***Crime***

A small group of taggers are involved in graffiti vandalism because of a desire to be involved in illegal activity. Chances of detection are low, yet the profile of their offending is high. Tags have been photographed by Police featuring taunts such as “Police - catch me if you can”.

## **CREWS OPERATING IN CHRISTCHURCH**

Of those committing graffiti vandalism in Christchurch on more than a very casual basis, most are part of a crew, or gang of taggers. Membership of the crews fluctuates over time, ranging in size from 2-3 members to over 20 members. Each gang usually has a leader or, in the case of larger crews, a collective leadership. Leaders are usually graffiti artists with skill, and tend to be the elders of the group, in their later teens. The most prominent crews in Christchurch include the following:

### ***CFC - The Christchurch Fat Cappers***

This group followed on from an earlier crew, UAC, the Urban Artists’ Club. Most of the UAC originals are now rappers and DJs and no longer tag illegally. CFC refers to the wide-tipped markers used by this crew. CFC is one of the biggest and most organised crews currently operating in Christchurch. While it had a membership of about 20 for some time, membership has recently dropped to around half that number. Those involved are mostly male hip hop - supporting skateboarders in their mid - late teens, and are predominantly Pakeha and from the eastside of the city, Woolston, Linwood and Waltham.



The crew was apparently “taught” by a male in his 20s, no longer living in the city. He helps them buy specialist graffiti supplies, although his influence has not been all good, teaching the crew to tag in places where true hip hop artists wouldn’t. The crew do not steal supplies. While they are the most talented artists of those currently doing graffiti in the city, they are very prolific in their tagging. They are currently led by a pakeha male operating under the tag Koder, who is extremely prolific in his tagging. The other four main CFC members are also pakeha males.

### ***THC - Too Hard Core***

The membership of the THC crew has strong youth gang links, although as well as “gangsters”, membership is also composed of some skateboarders. The founder of THC had a history of other offending besides graffiti vandalism, including theft. Many of the original members of THC, now in their early 20s, are now in prison. According to one of the young people interviewed, the original crew has become more of a crime organisation than a tagging crew, involved in car conversion and burglary. While the original THC crew now do very little tagging, many younger people have joined THC and the group is now quite big, and very prolific in their tagging. Many young taggers write THC and CFC beside their tags even though they are not members of these crews.

### ***Other Crews***

The young person on community service had been a member of *511*, a small crew of 3 members. While he reports that he and the others are no longer tagging illegally, the tag is being copied by others. Other crews in the city include *DPG*, *FPG*, and *TMF*. While *Eastside* and *Westside* are not crews, the names appear on many tags in the city, reflecting the area of the city where the tagger lives. In some cases, the words also express youth gang ties.

## **COMMONLY TARGETED AREAS**

Most informants interviewed noted a trend of increase in the amount of graffiti vandalism and in the number of different tags around over the last 6 months or so. However because tagging is a very faddish behaviour, this trend was not seen as necessarily continuing upwards for a long period of time; tagging could lose popularity of its own accord, although it is unlikely to disappear.

The majority of the hard core taggers currently reside in Woolston, Linwood, and Waltham, and both young people involved in the scene and interviewed agreed that hip hop tagging was currently more popular among young people living on the “eastside”. Graffiti vandalism is also of particular

concern in Hornby and Rowley / Hoon Hay, although this was mostly gang-motivated rather than by hip hop artists. According to the informants interviewed, tagging is currently especially popular among groups of students at Linwood High School and Hagley Community College. However taggers do not limit tagging to the area in which they live, often giving a distorted impression of a community through their work.

The bulk of graffiti vandalism in the city consists of tags and throw-ups. Bombs and burners tend to be limited to areas such as the railways, industrial buildings and public places like the underpass to Kyle Park in Hornby. Tagging is a particular problem for the Council in Linwood Park, Woolston Park, the New Brighton shelter and toilets by the pier, Parklands Reserve, Hoon Hay Park, Washington Park, the Kyle Park tunnel, and Wycola Community Centre. In terms of graffiti vandalism on private property, areas worst affected are south-east of Washington Park, Linwood, Waltham, Woolston, the south-eastern corner of the city bordered by Cashel St, Colombo St, Moorehouse Ave and Madras St, and Hornby. While graffiti vandalism is still prevalent in Aranui and Wainoni, the young people interviewed felt that these areas were less hit than before as community pride had grown in these communities. Schools are common victims of graffiti vandalism, the worst affected being Linwood High and Hagley Community College.

## **SCALE OF THE PROBLEM**

Graffiti vandalism in Christchurch is far less endemic than in some other cities in New Zealand. According to the young people interviewed, there are considerably fewer hard core taggers in Christchurch than in the Wellington region or in Auckland and South Auckland. Few have earned the kind of respect that is shown to artists in cities where graffiti has a longer history. However graffiti vandalism does seem to be on the increase for the time being, and the problem brings with it substantial costs for Council, the business community, private property owners, and schools. It also takes up considerable Police and youth justice sector time and resource.

## **5. COUNTERMEASURES**

In considering countermeasures, it is important to remember that graffiti itself is not a crime - if graffiti art is undertaken with the permission of a property owner, it is a legitimate art form in itself. It is when it is undertaken without permission that it becomes vandalism, and a crime of wilful damage under the Crimes Act.

## **MEASURES USED TO COUNTER GRAFFITI VANDALISM**

A number of strategies have been used internationally to address the problem of graffiti vandalism, with varying success. Strategies include the following:

### ***Rapid Response Removal***

Probably the most popular countermeasure for graffiti is its rapid removal, either via cleaning or paint-out. This is frequently cited in the literature concerning graffiti reduction as the most successful of all strategies, and the key to countering graffiti because it nullifies the notoriety or “fame” sought by taggers and shows taggers that the site is being watched (eg. Powell, 1997, Bentley, 1997). Rapid removal schemes usually involve paid and/or unpaid workers removing graffiti on public and sometimes private property, with removal from private property undertaken at little or no cost to the owner. Paint-out/removal within 24 hours of a new tag appearing is widely suggested in the literature as the most effective response to graffiti vandalism, although the criticality of the 24 hour time period has been the subject of debate in recent times (Bensemam & Sutton, 1997). In areas where permission from property owners must be sought before paint-out occurs, as is the case in New Zealand, the 24 hour target is rarely achievable.

Research undertaken in Australia suggests that rapid removal is more effective when the policy covers both public and private property to avoid displacement, when all public agencies and service companies such as Telecom and power companies agree to adopt similar rapid removal policies, when assistance is provided to private property owners, such as provision of free removal services or paint-out kits, and when community groups and offenders on community service are involved in the implementation of the policy (Queensland Department of Justice, 1998).

### ***By Laws for Removal***

In an effort to make rapid graffiti removal more likely, some communities overseas have legislated to make it an offence to permit one's property to become a graffiti nuisance. In practice, that makes it illegal not to remove graffiti on one's property, effectively turning the victim into an offender. Such legislation is particularly common in the USA, although it is currently being considered in the ACT, Australia (Durr, 1997). As examples, in Salem Oregon and in Milwaukee, owners respectively have 5 and 10 working days to remove graffiti following its notification to Police. Failure to do so results in penalties ranging from fines to 30 days imprisonment. Legislation such as this is typically coupled with free paint depots, high-profile graffiti reporting phonelines and rewards for information leading to conviction of graffiti vandals. While highly effective at ensuring graffiti removal, they do have victim-blaming overtones and do little to address the issues of why tagging

occurs in the first place. They also disadvantage property owners in the least affluent areas of a community, the places most commonly the target of tagging.

### ***Paint Treatments***

To make rapid removal of graffiti vandalism easier, paint treatments are becoming increasingly common, particularly on public property and properties owned by large corporates. The battle against graffiti has spawned a booming industry in anti-graffiti treatments and graffiti removal products. Many of these allow more environmentally friendly removal than is possible on untreated surfaces. However the products are only effective in keeping an area graffiti-free if people clean graffiti off; they don't stop an area being tagged.

### ***Penalties and Enforcement***

The law enforcement strategy employed since 1994 in New York and commonly known as the "broken windows" policy is the clearest example of using enforcement and harsher penalties as a counter-measure for graffiti vandalism. Following the notion that signs of urban decay create a climate where other offending is more likely, broken windows policy enforces the law with a "no crime is too small" approach. Effort is made to prosecute all offending, including that which might otherwise be considered as minor. The approach uses strengthened police resourcing and harsher penalties, including much greater use of custodial sentences. Since the policy's introduction in New York, the amount of graffiti vandalism has dropped by 85 percent. However while the approach does produce significant drops in offending, it has been criticised for its strong social control elements, the heavy burden it places on the criminal justice system, and the high number of offenders it introduces into the prison system.

### ***Retailer Education / Sales Bans***

One approach to reduction of graffiti vandalism used in various forms in New Zealand and overseas involves controlling access to the materials used in graffiti, the same approach used to address the problem of solvent abuse. In Chicago, New York and Paris, sale of spraypaint and etching tools is illegal to persons under 18 years of age. Recognising that young people may have legitimate uses for what are essentially art materials, other cities have focused on educating retailers to restrict the likelihood of young people stealing paint, pens and other equipment. Common strategies include storing the materials and implements used by graffiti vandals behind the counter or in cabinets, or displaying "dummy" products. Where adhered to, retailer codes have shown positive results in reducing graffiti vandalism as well as petty theft (Powell, 1997). Reducing opportunity for theft of theft-prone goods such as spraypaint

may also prevent young people involved in graffiti from getting involved in other forms of theft by removing their likely entry point into this kind of offending.

### ***Surveillance***

Surveillance of various types is commonly employed as a counter-measure to graffiti vandalism. In Western Australia, Neighbourhood Support groups have been supported in looking out for this type of offending, and are encouraged to report graffiti to the Police (Bentley, 1997).

Security Cameras are commonly employed on graffiti-prone sites, and where these are connected to closed circuit televisions which are under real-time surveillance, they can successfully lead to prosecutions. Use of hidden cameras connected to closed circuit television under full-time surveillance on the Adelaide bus system has resulted in prosecution of many of the major graffiti offenders, and publicity of the security operation had a strong deterrence effect, with the incidence of graffiti dropped significantly since the commencement of the operation. However it appears that to be effective, camera surveillance needs to be under full-time surveillance. Feedback from one of the young people interviewed in the present research suggested that if taggers see a camera, they just wear their hoods and pull the down to hide their identity. This would make prosecution from video tape evidence very difficult, reducing the deterrence effect of the cameras.

### ***CPTED***

Building design is recognised in the literature on countering graffiti as playing a major role in either encouraging or preventing graffiti vandalism. Designs which place a large, smooth, light-coloured surface next to a footpath or road invite graffiti, especially when the area is poorly lit. In contrast, rougher surfaces, walls with vines and creeping plants growing over them, and well-lit surfaces painted in darker colours which would show off tags in only a limited range of colour choices discourage taggers from defacing them. Providing Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design guidelines to builders and architects and actively encouraging the application of these principles in new building works is an important countermeasure against graffiti vandalism.

### ***Legal Sites***

Public display of graffiti is an integral part of hip hop culture. Recognising this, many programmes to address graffiti vandalism include the provision of legal, controlled sites and graffiti workshops in an effort to effect behavioural and attitudinal change among taggers. Where these are used as the main counter-measure against graffiti vandalism, they have invariably failed, glorifying graffiti and being associated with increases in illegal graffiti.

However as part of a comprehensive strategy to address the problem, legal arts programmes play an important part in reducing graffiti vandalism.

Legal Arts programmes work under the assumption that vandalism will lose its appeal and appear amateurish alongside the legal works. Young people are redirected away from criminal activities towards more positive pursuits which still allow them an outlet for their creative impulses and respect their skill. They also offer the possibility of becoming a paid artist through commissioned works. Legal Arts programmes aim to increase public acceptance of graffiti in appropriate sites as a legitimate art form, and rather than controlling young people and disenfranchising them, they encourage young people to feel part of the community.

Considerable work has been undertaken in Queensland in developing effective Legal Arts Programmes within comprehensive strategies for addressing graffiti vandalism. This work is discussed later in this report.

### ***Education and Awareness Programmes***

As with any crime prevention strategy, in order to make any lasting impact on the problem behaviour, in this case, graffiti vandalism, it must be recognised as a crime and the community involved actively in addressing it. Education and awareness raising at many levels is important in countering graffiti, targeting children before they start tagging, taggers themselves, members of the public and property owners. Such approaches have been widely employed as components of anti-graffiti programmes elsewhere, and as part of comprehensive strategies, education has proved successful. Popular educational initiatives relating to graffiti vandalism include the following:

- Letter/pamphlet drops, media releases and advertising encouraging members of the public to report incidences to the Police, and to remove it as soon as possible. (Research suggests that use of the media in addressing graffiti should not commence until other measures are already in place to counter graffiti, to prevent media being seen as a challenge to attack via more graffiti by taggers.)
- Schools-based programmes, such as school pride awards rewarding schools which actively work to reduce graffiti on their property, and curriculum-based programmes concerning the illegality of graffiti vandalism and the impact it has on victims and aimed at creating attitudinal change among students regarding graffiti. Examples include a comprehensive set of curriculum modules developed by the Education Department in Perth Australia, and units taught in Avondale, Auckland in 1996 (discussed later in this report).

- Education targeted at taggers not at school. This can be achieved via poster campaigns targeting youth centres, skateboarding facilities and other popular hang-outs for young people.

### ***Summary***

While a broad range of countermeasures have been applied to the problem of illegal graffiti, the literature is clear that no one counter-measure offers long-term success in addressing the problem on its own; there is no one battle plan for graffiti vandalism, and when certain strategies are used in isolation, such as legal graffiti sites, they can contribute to increases in illegal graffiti activity. While limited success can be expected from singular approaches, graffiti vandalism can be significantly reduced when addressing via a combined or integrated approach.

## **GUIDELINES FOR SUCCESSFUL GRAFFITI REDUCTION PROGRAMMES**

Recognising the need for community action against the problem of graffiti vandalism, the Queensland Department of Justice supported an evaluated pilot project in Ipswich City in 1997, based on the research literature and utilising the expertise of those involved in a very successful graffiti reduction programme undertaken on the Gold Coast. From this, a manual was developed, assisting communities to develop local graffiti crime prevention plans. This resource offers valuable knowledge for communities seeking to implement comprehensive, coordinated approaches to addressing graffiti vandalism. While these guidelines have been drawn on heavily in this section of the present report, they have been supplemented with the findings of an independent evaluation of an integrated approach to the issue in the Avondale Ward of Auckland, on the recommendations from a graffiti working party established in Western Australia in 1993 and from the research literature. Case studies of the programmes operated in Perth, Avondale and the Gold Coast are included later in the present report.

## **THE IMPORTANCE OF AN INTEGRATED, MULTI-FACETED APPROACH**

Experiences in Australia, the US, Europe and New Zealand make it clear that to successfully reduce graffiti vandalism beyond the short-term, a comprehensive strategic approach is necessary. While such an approach involves more players, the benefits are worth it. A carefully developed, comprehensive and planned approach to graffiti vandalism will produce significant costs savings for local government, corporations, the local business community and property owners. Tackling graffiti vandalism in a positive,

permanent and rational manner will help restore community pride and feelings of safety and create safer, healthier environments for all. Properly implemented, it will redirect some young people from criminal offending.

A graffiti vandalism prevention strategy should incorporate the following components:

#### ***A. Community Involvement***

Graffiti is an emotive issue with many individuals and groups holding strong views on the issue. Building community involvement and consultation into the planning stage of a graffiti crime prevention strategy will increase ownership of the strategy and support in its implementation. Recognising the complex motivations behind graffiti for young people involved in it, it is vital that their voice is heard in the planning stage along with that of business people, property owners, the Police, Councillors, Council staff and other key stakeholders.

#### ***B. Resources***

In order to be implemented in a truly integrated fashion, the role of graffiti prevention plan manager should be established, with this person responsible for coordinating the plan, liaising with media, establishing consultative networks, overseeing recording systems and seeking sponsorship for project components as required.

#### ***C. Strong Law Enforcement Base***

The problem of illegal graffiti can be dealt with more effectively when it is clearly viewed as an offence and treated as such. Cities which have successfully reduced graffiti vandalism rates often have special Police teams addressing the issue and coordinating intelligence regarding the problem locally; their Police treat the matter seriously. In many cases, greater efforts have been made to prosecute known offenders, to hold offenders and often also their parents accountable. Having officers focused largely on the issue of graffiti gives them the time needed to really get to know who the offenders are and to successfully prosecute.

#### ***D. Graffiti Vandalism Audits***

Before the integrated approach to graffiti reduction is implemented, it is important to obtain some idea of the extent of the problem, in order that the success of the countermeasures can be monitored and evaluated. Before implementing countermeasures, it is important to take the time and effort to undertake local audits of graffiti vandalism. These do not need to include all areas of the community, but rather, just a few representative areas. With the



boundaries clearly recorded, all graffiti vandalism in the defined area should be recorded in as short a period as possible (ie 2-3 days). Auditing all sample areas at the same time gives a snapshot of the extent and nature of the graffiti vandalism problem prior to implementation of a reduction/prevention strategy. Follow-up audits over time allow success of interventions to be measured.

### ***E. Establishment of Effective Reporting and Recording Systems***

Graffiti vandalism is a crime which causes high costs to property owners, yet it is much less likely to be reported to the Police than property crimes involving theft. As a consequence, many crimes go uninvestigated and only a fraction of offenders are caught. While New Zealand estimates have not been made, it is estimated that in Australia, only one offender in 1000 is prosecuted by Police (Queensland Department of Justice, 1998).

In order for the Police to better address the problem of graffiti vandalism, they need to know when and where it is happening. To achieve this, the public need to know who to report graffiti attacks to. Reporting can be made easier when communities have publicised hotlines where a person can ring in and report the graffiti directly to someone who can act on the information. These are usually Council-based, but could work in partnership with large corporations with graffiti-prone property such as railways, power and phone companies. Hotlines should pass information on to Police or encourage callers to do so.

As well as increasing reporting rates, it is important to enhance recording systems for graffiti that it reported. Computer databases offer many advantages in tracking graffiti, organising removal and identifying trends and costs over time. The Parks Unit of Christchurch City Council currently operates an effective recording system; Queensland Department of Justice has developed a computer package for this purpose which is available free on request.

### ***F. Implementation of a Rapid Removal Policy***

Rapid removal is a vital component of a successful graffiti vandalism prevention programme. For greatest success, this needs to span private as well as public property. Involving apprehended offenders in removal of illegal graffiti has worked well in some communities, although this can require high levels of supervisions.

### ***G. Education Regarding Graffiti Prevention***

Preventive education is an important component of any successful graffiti vandalism prevention strategy. Public education, school-based programmes,

and promotion of design concepts which reduce the likelihood of a property being tagged need to be promoted and undertaken to achieve lasting reduction in the problem. Education aimed at recognising it as a crime, developing intolerance of and action against illegal graffiti, stopping young people from starting such activity and preventing graffiti on one's property or removing it soon after it occurs all helps reduce vandalism in the longer term.

#### ***H. Legal Arts Programmes / Constructive Alternative Activities for Young People***

As mentioned, while legal arts programmes have not proved effective when used in isolation, they are an integral component of a strategic approach to graffiti vandalism, and are associated with success when used in combination with effective rapid removal, education and a strong law enforcement base. While these will rechannel graffiti from illegal sites for some young people, and especially those entrenched in the hip hop culture, they are less effective for those motivated to tag by fame and/or the desire to break the law. For these young people, greater publicity and support of other constructive activities for young people is also important in contributing to reduced graffiti crime. Extensive guidelines on developing legal arts programmes have been provided in the Queensland graffiti vandalism prevention resource.

## **CURRENT APPROACH TO ADDRESSING GRAFFITI VANDALISM IN CHRISTCHURCH**

The current approach taken to address graffiti vandalism in Christchurch involves a large number of players, although the strategy in addressing the problem is fairly limited in scope, mainly focused on graffiti removal.

### **THE POLICE**

The Christchurch Police District has mandated one of its Constables, Dean Stevenson, with addressing the problem of graffiti vandalism. The Constable also has normal policing duties on a half-time basis, allocating around 20 hours per week to the task of coordinating intelligence regarding graffiti vandalism and working on inter-agency approaches to the problem.

When a complaint of graffiti vandalism is received by Police, the tag is photographed, the location recorded, and in most cases, the records are forwarded to the Constable responsible for graffiti. In some cases, the person responsible for the tag is known and in those cases, he forwards that information back to the investigating officer. Folders have been compiled of tags, but in many cases, the offenders are unknown. Where evidence can be gathered to enable a prosecution, or where a tagger is caught in the act,

charges of Wilful Damage are made and the matter followed up through the appropriate legal channels, the Children and Young Persons and their Families Act provisions for those under 17 years and via the courts for those 17 years and over. On average, around 10 prosecutions per month are made by Christchurch Police in response to graffiti-related offending.

## **CHRISTCHURCH CITY COUNCIL**

The removal and prevention of graffiti on Council property involves a wide range of units and positions within the Council structure.

### ***Property Unit***

Property Unit - managed properties are coated with paint treatments that make graffiti easy to remove. The Property Unit contracts the Works Department of Council to remove graffiti from their properties, the costs of this addressed within their budget.

### ***Parks Unit***

Graffiti on buildings and fences in parks are dealt with in a different way than that undertaken on playground fixtures. Complaints of graffiti on buildings and fences from Council employees or members of the public are entered into a database by the Parks Unit and a report filed to Plant and Building Services indicating priority for action. Offensive material is given highest priority and is removed the same day. Most clean-up occurs on a reactive basis only. Their painting team removes the graffiti and charges costs back to the Parks Unit. Costs for the 15 months to the end of May 1999 for this work were over \$18,000.

Problem areas such as Washington Park are checked daily under the contract between Works Operations and the Parks Unit. Tiling inside the toilets aids clean-up in that site, keeping costs of graffiti down. Some high-target parks are monitored and graffiti removed or painted out by the Sulufaiga Trust, discussed later.

Graffiti on play equipment is removed as a usual part of the Works Operations contract. Each playground is visited on a regular basis and clean-up undertaken.

### ***Street Signs and Bus Shelters***

The Council and the Regional Council respectively have contractors who are responsible for patrolling and removing graffiti from street signs and bus shelters.

### ***Community Technical Officers***

The Christchurch City Council employs six Community technical Officers, based in the service centres. Part of their role is to take reports from members of the public on graffiti in public places, including those painted on private property in public view, and arrange removal. While this originally meant providing the labour for removal, paint is now supplied in a basic colour range. The CTOs inspect the graffiti vandalism and arrange for its removal. In the case of graffiti on private property, TCOs attempt to gain authorisation for graffiti removal, using a permission form. However this is often a difficult and lengthy process, since owners do not always live or work at the address. Once located from rates records, some are still reluctant to permit graffiti removal, either because they want a professional job or because they think that it will only happen again. Graffiti cannot be removed by Council or any party on its behalf without permissions.

Once permission has been obtained, the CTOs arrange removal. For simple jobs, the Sulufa'iga Trust paints it out or cleans it off. For more difficult jobs, such as those up high or on heritage sites, Works Operations undertake graffiti removal on contract, the funds coming from the TCOs' Emergency Response Fund. An information sheet is given to property owners who have been targeted by taggers explaining the need to promptly remove graffiti. The Council's CTOs have investigated the prospect of using PD gangs to paint out graffiti but this has proved difficult to arrange, requiring an area with toilet and cooking facilities and enough work to keep 10 people busy for a day.

### **SULUFA'IGA TRUST**

In response to concern that some Pacific Islands young people were getting into trouble in the city and in line with the crime prevention focus of their organisation, the Sulufa'iga Trust approached the Christchurch City Council in 1994 with a proposal to clean up and paint out graffiti in the city. Since that time, the Trust has operated a graffiti removal service, in which 6 Pacific Islands men in their mid - late 50s work 5 days per week on the community wage. In a van supplied, maintained and fuelled by Council and using Council-supplied paint and materials, the team patrol the city's 24 worst graffiti trouble spots and paint graffiti out. Council funds the Trust \$20 per week per team member. The Trust also responds to calls from the Council's CTOs and from the Parks Unit. The Trust gains permission from property owners in the same manner as do the Council staff. The Trust believes that

one of the reasons that graffiti in Christchurch is not as much of a problem as in some other centres in New Zealand is the fact that they responded to the problem at an early stage.

## **LARGE CORPORATIONS**

Large corporations with tagging prone facilities in the city including Telecom, Tranzrail and Orion have their own contractors to remove graffiti vandalism. Some real estate companies routinely remove tagging from properties that they are selling or letting, while Housing New Zealand has contractors who remove tagging from their properties.

## **CHRISTCHURCH SAFER COMMUNITY COUNCIL**

The Christchurch Safer Community Council has promoted the concepts of Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design, including the principal of painting graffiti out as soon as possible to prevent further graffiti occurring. In line with this interest, the CSCC held a forum in 1998 on graffiti, discussing the issues in the city and whether or not graffiti vandalism was on the increase. From that forum, a working party was established involving staff from the Police, the City Council, the Sulufa'iga Trust and Community Corrections. This group initially worked towards the goal of rapid response removal (within 24 hours) of graffiti. However because the main workforce for graffiti removal, the Trust, uses essentially volunteer labour and because of the difficulties in obtaining owner permission to paint out graffiti vandalism, this proved unrealistic.

The group was considering other options to addressing the broader context of graffiti vandalism at the time that the present research commenced. The working group has been suspended pending the outcome of the City Councillor to be held in late July 1999. However the Safer Community Council and other working group parties are keen to work together with Council on addressing the issue in the future.

## **COUNTERMEASURES SUGGESTED FOR CHRISTCHURCH BY KEY INFORMANTS**

The current approach was discussed with all informants in the present research, as were countermeasures used successfully elsewhere. The researcher was interested in gathering ideas on what might work in Christchurch, over and above the existing strategy which focuses mostly on removal of graffiti.

The need for a range of countermeasures and an integrated approach was widely recognised among those interviewed. Young people and community representatives interviewed were keen that any coordinating committee or group established to oversee new graffiti reduction initiatives in the city should include a respected graffiti artist among its membership. This was seen as likely to increase the chances of success for any new interventions.

Particular emphasis was placed on education. Educating the public that graffiti vandalism is a crime which should be reported was seen as important in Christchurch by the Police and by Council Technical Officers interviewed. These informants also felt that the benefits of rapid removal and ways of achieving this also require wider publicity than is currently being undertaken.

Potential for involving more offenders on community service in rapid removal of graffiti was recognised by the graffiti Police officer and the representative of the Sulufa'iga Trust; this is occurring under Community Police supervision in other cities and towns in New Zealand. Involvement of respected graffiti artists in graffiti removal was seen as having greatest impact in preventing further tagging.

As well as greater public education, a need was recognised by both young people and all community representatives interviewed for education targeted at young people preventing entry to tagging behaviour and encouraging existing taggers to stop doing illegal graffiti. One person suggested that posters stressing the impact of graffiti offending on victims could usefully be displayed in schools and youth facilities, while others believed that a programme in schools offered considerable promise in addressing the problem in Christchurch. Several informants believed that this held greatest promise if a respected young person from the hip hop scene in Christchurch took the message that illegal graffiti is uncool into schools. It was suggested that breakdancing demonstrations could be used to gain students' respect, to be then followed by a presentation on the impact of graffiti on victims, the consequences if caught for this crime, and positive ways of channelling graffiti skill without breaking the law.

Legal sites and commissioned works were seen as an important element in a combined approach to graffiti reduction in Christchurch, although these were widely acknowledged as only offering hope for the more "arty" taggers. Publicity of existing activities for young people and expansion of the range of activities available were also seen as important by the young people and youth workers interviewed.

## **APPROACHES IN OTHER NEW ZEALAND CITIES**

The approach currently taken to address graffiti vandalism in Christchurch is similar in its components to that taken in some other main centres in New Zealand. However it is not the only approach that can be taken. Examples of strategies employed in other cities in New Zealand and Australia include the following:

### ***Manukau City***

With a very young population structure and a strong youth culture, Manukau has one of New Zealand's worst graffiti vandalism problems. However like Christchurch, the strategies employed to address the issue are largely limited to graffiti removal. Similar to Christchurch's Sulufa'iga Trust, the Rangatira Trust operating in Otago involves 30 community wage workers in a semi-voluntary capacity, painting out graffiti on a daily basis across the Otago Ward. As well as addressing graffiti, the group acts on illegal rubbish dumping and other forms of vandalism. Manukau City Council employs a graffiti coordinator and operates a graffiti hotline, through which members of the public can report graffiti. A fulltime painter is employed by MCC to paint out graffiti in public view, and extra contractors are brought in as required. Thus like Christchurch, graffiti paint out is undertaken using a mixture of volunteer and paid labour.

Individuals and groups within the community are encouraged to adopt a bus shelter, park etc. and paint out, remove or report to Council any graffiti on the property. Community Police involve young offenders, and especially school bullies in removal of graffiti.

### ***Tauranga***

Tauranga District Council implemented a vandalism and graffiti control programme in late 1995 in response to rising problems of graffiti. A graffiti and vandalism coordinator was appointed by Council and a hotline set up and publicised widely within the community. The coordinator receives information on all vandalism and graffiti reported via the hotline, through the main Council phone line and via Council staff. Information is passed on to Police whenever it seems likely to lead to a prosecution. In response to all reports of graffiti, the coordinator arranges a painting contractor to remove the graffiti or paint over it, in the case of private property, with the permission of the owner. The Council is billed separately for each job by the contractor and from this, a letter is generated and sent to property owners concerned letting them know how much the clean-up cost and requesting a donation towards costs. The painting contractor costs the Council \$60,000 per annum, of which \$15,000 is recouped via the donation system.

As well as responding to complaints of graffiti on public and private property, a key role of the graffiti coordinator is public education, focused both on preventing graffiti and increasing public willingness to report it. The coordinator also supports two Night Owl patrols staffed by volunteers and covering Tauranga and Mt Manganui. These have proved very successful in reducing the incidence of graffiti and vandalism and since the programme has been in place, TDC report a “substantial” drop in graffiti vandalism in the district.

## **INTEGRATED APPROACHES**

### ***Avondale Ward, Auckland***

A six month pilot graffiti management strategy was implemented from July to December 1996 in the Avondale Ward by the Works and Services Committee of Auckland City Council. This programme was independently evaluated by AJ Associates, a reputable programme evaluation agency in Auckland and has been one of the more comprehensive strategies employed to address graffiti vandalism in New Zealand.

The pilot was intended to provide a sustainable approach to graffiti via a partnership between Police, the Council and the local Community Board. It utilised a free graffiti removal service for residents and businesses using a mixture of paid and unpaid workers including young people apprehended for tagging, coordination with building owners and business associations to gain commitment to remove graffiti, liaison with large commercial organisations and public property owners to increase graffiti removal rates on their properties, sponsorship appeals for graffiti removal and the support of education initiatives and development of murals.

Results of the evaluation of the Avondale initiative were promising. While it took approximately four months to reduce the amount of graffiti significantly, once this impact had been maintained, it became easier to maintain high levels of graffiti-free sites. Most new graffiti was painted out within a reasonable period, although this was often longer than the 24 hours that some stakeholders hoped for. Most areas repainted were not re-tagged. Analysis of the Anti-Graffiti Officer’s workload showed a gradual reduction in graffiti report-response work over the period of the pilot. Prevention work became more important to the officer’s role over time.

As well as the workers doing painting out, two depots were set up in the community with paint and equipment that residents could utilise at no cost to paint graffiti vandalism out for themselves. These were not utilised, due to poor publicity and introduction after the incidence of graffiti vandalism had already reduced.



The planners of the Avondale project recognised from the initial stages that a dual strategy was important in addressing graffiti vandalism, working on prevention as well as graffiti removal. While the latter role was not seen as appropriate to them by many of the Community Board members, feedback gathered in the evaluation strongly supported this component of the project. Police and other key players recognised that the project could only achieve long-term results if public attitudes were addressed, just as they are in the fight against any other crime.

Prevention initiatives included a number of educational programmes run in local schools and using a locally made video emphasising the damage caused by graffiti vandalism. While this was well received by teachers and children, an assessment of its effectiveness in preventing tagging was beyond the scope of the evaluation. A number of murals were painted in areas commonly targeted by taggers. However before each was put up it had to go through an approval process over mural content, a process which created conflict because of a lack of transparency. Other preventive aspects of this multi-faceted programme included partnership with businesses and building owners to support their efforts in countering graffiti vandalism, and encouragement of responsible retailer practices in selling spraypaint and the like, reducing opportunities for petty theft. The work undertaken in identifying taggers and involving them in graffiti removal also proved promising in preventing further graffiti.

### ***Graffiti Alert, Gold Coast, Queensland***

The Graffiti Alert Project was established on the Gold Coast, Queensland in 1993. The project was community-driven and led by an experienced community worker. Based on extensive literature and community research, the project utilised a total approach of free graffiti removal, preventative measures, education and legal arts venues. Audits were undertaken to benchmark the problem, and to convince the local authority to provide graffiti remover free of charge to residents of the city. Removal is undertaken by members of the project or by residents themselves. Corporations and the local authority operate their own removal systems similar to cities in New Zealand.

Public education has been undertaken via a range of media, including a series of pamphlets distributed to all businesses, schools and victims of vandalism, consultations for residents and businesses victimised by graffiti vandals, and advertising on local television. A legal arts team has been established to undertake legal murals following a strict code of conduct and with controls over access to materials and close liaison with Police.

The Graffiti Alert Project has noted significant reductions on graffiti vandalism in its monitored sites; reductions have been particularly strong in areas of highest tourism use.

### ***Western Australia***

In response to community concerns, the State Government of Western Australia established a graffiti working party in 1993. From this, a ten part programme was implemented soon after. This comprised the following:

- Increased penalties for graffiti over those which already existed for wilful damage, and legislation to enable parents to be held more accountable for the actions of their children;
- Placement of Police responsibility for graffiti with the anti-theft squads and establishment of a graffiti management office within Police;
- Establishment of a graffiti hotline to give technical advice on clean-up;
- Mobilisation of local government, property owners and community groups to look after their localities;
- High use of volunteers in graffiti clean-up through a volunteer programme;
- Wide distribution of a guide for building owners, designers and the construction industry on preventing graffiti through design;
- Development of a code of practice for paint and marker retailers in consultation with the relevant business associations;
- Development and introduction of school curriculum resources relating to graffiti for Years 4, 7 and 10;
- Initiation of a School Pride Award to recognise school's individual efforts to counter graffiti;
- Introduction of an efficiency dividend by the Education Department, returning maintenance cost savings to schools;
- Public Education via a range of media including television advertisements and fact sheets; and
- Government funding provision for urban arts initiatives targeting graffiti artists and seeking to divert their illegal graffiti.

For the first couple of years of operation, the programme achieved good reductions in illegal graffiti, halving graffiti levels in Perth. However from that time onwards, the programme has worked to keep levels at a static rate rather than achieving further reductions. New strategies were being investigated to address this pattern. Experiences in Western Australia have highlighted the need for anti-graffiti vandalism strategies to target whole communities rather than just certain areas to avoid displacement of offending.

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