

THE ANSWER HAS BEEN AROUND FOR YEARS.

Adelaide Sunday Mail, March 17, 1996

Council wins war on graffiti gangs



A typical wall in Happy Valley before the clean-up campaign.

By CRAIG CLARKE

A southern council has won a two year war with teenage graffiti vandals, who were costing rate-payers thousands of dollars annually.

Happy Valley Council has slashed the cost of attacks from almost \$2000 a week to "virtually wiping out the problem."

"A couple of years ago you couldn't go into a public toilet or drive down a street without graffiti tags covering walls - it was terrible," said council building works co-ordinator Roger Saltmarsh.

But a 10-point plan including employing security guards to patrol vandal hot-spots and a 24-hour graffiti removal service has beaten the teenagers.

Mr Saltmarsh said the district was now graffiti free. "There has not been a tag on a council building for 30 weeks," he said.

Two years ago graffiti tags

Council's anti-graffiti strategy

HAPPY Valley Council's anti-graffiti strategy comprises:

- Removing graffiti on public or private property within 24 hours.
- Applying anti-graffiti paint to buildings, playgrounds.
- Installing vandal-resistant lighting to public buildings and increasing security lighting.
- Planting shrubs to hide areas where attacks continue.
- Co-ordinating volunteer clean-ups
- Developing relationships with schools and police to identify owners of tags.
- Surveillance by security agents in high-risk areas to identify and apprehend offenders.
- Recovering full cost for graffiti clean-ups.
- Establishing a graffiti telephone hot-line.

littered walls, park seats, toilet blocks, bus seats and street signs.

"Nothing was sacred, not even churches or children's playgrounds." Mr Saltmarsh said.

The high cost of repairing the damage forced council to develop the plan, based on a model to clean up Barcelona before the 1992 Olympic Games.

Every graffiti tag is pho-

tographed and filed in giant albums for police and council workers to track down the offenders.

Surveillance by hired security guards has resulted in 22 youths, mostly aged 14 to 16, "caught in the act."

Council then hits the vandals with the bill to clean up their own mess.

And 100 volunteers have been recruited to alert council to new attacks.

Police have praised the plan saying it should be applied elsewhere.

"Graffiti was rife three or four years ago and now it's pretty well non-existent," said sergeant Brian Farmer of Darlington police.

Mr Saltmarsh said the post-Christmas/New Year period was normally council's busiest for cleaning graffiti but this year "we didn't have one call-out".

The council was held up as a crimefighting model at a Local Government Association conference.

Delegates from SA's 118 councils visited Happy Valley as part of Local Government Week to hear how it solved the problem.

"If other councils follow our strategy there will be a 70 percent drop off within a few weeks and if they maintain it the problem will go within 15 to 16 weeks," Mr Saltmarsh said.