

# SAPD SURVEY: Signs of improvement for beat high in crime

## City police aim to collar crime in Beat 35

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SAN ANGELO, Texas — Sally Ayana said her neighbors feel safe enough to sit on their porches after nightfall — something that hasn't always been the case.

Her block has been quieter in the past year than it has in the 25 she's lived in the area.

"I think that's a great improvement," she said.

At her 18th Street home she keeps on the porch light — joking her house is the best lit on the block — and has only experienced a few attempted break-ins.

In the past, Ayana has seen police chases, what she believed were drug deals and had strangers knocking at her door looking for a name she didn't recognize.

Several months ago when she filled out a satisfaction survey for the San Angelo Police Department, she gave positive scores to the officers she knows have made the streets safer.

"It has improved tremendously within the past five years and more so in the past year," Ayana said. "It's much quieter. I don't have to fear people coming up to my door."

Her high score on the officer satisfaction portion of the survey contrasted sharply with overall scores that ranked her area, Beat 35, the least satisfied among the city's beats.

Beat 35 was the smallest area examined in the police satisfaction survey, conducted recently by the San Angelo Police Department and Angelo State University's Community Wellness, Engagement and Development program.

The survey was meant to give residents a chance to voice their concerns, criticisms and compliments and express what they would like to see in the future.

Responses were broken down into six categories measuring residents' concerns, fears, satisfaction with officers, the department, crime prevention techniques and what services they see as essential.

Beat 35, an area in the upper section of central San Angelo with 19th Street and

Washington Drive as the main borders on the north and south, reported the lowest number of college graduates, according to a demographic appendix in the survey results. It is the most racially diverse beat, includes the highest black population, and was the group with the most respondents 65 and older.

Ayana, who raised five children as a single mother and now has five grandchildren, wholeheartedly agreed with the survey's question on increasing police interaction with children — especially with youth labeled "at risk." She appreciates programs like DREAM that invite officers into classrooms to talk about the consequences of their actions.

It could also shed a positive light on officers and portray them as someone who can help, rather than someone to be feared.

Lt. Les Bird, who has patrolled the area for the past five or six years, said that children with parents in prison could have negative feelings toward police whom they see as the reason their parent is gone.

"Will that ever change?" Bird said. "I don't know. I think you can have the same discussions with different kids, and it'll have different impacts."

Aubrey Todd, who described his neighborhood one with older "church people," said his experience with officers has shown them to be cordial and supportive.

"I just try to abide by the law," he said, adding that since his neighbors do the same there's no reason to call officers.

Todd said he, too, has noticed the decrease in drug-related crime in the past year or so.

Overall the area showed violent crime and drug-related crime were still the highest concerns — both of which still had scores equal or lower than the citywide average. Respondents took more issue with gang violence than any other beat surveyed.

Bird said the area is one of the higher drug-trafficking areas of the city, something officers have been aware of and work to alleviate. One thing that made a marked difference over the past several years is the intelligence-gathering the department, specifically the narcotics division, has done.

What Todd described as "sweeps," the department sees as a list of major drug arrests by serving search warrants at locations it has followed for months. Investigators aren't the only division chipping away at drug crime.

"It seems like over the last few years we've made more drug arrests in patrol from (traffic) stops," Bird said.

Making more traffic stops and asking to search more vehicles may seem like a nuisance to residents, Bird said, but it increases the likelihood officers will find methamphetamine, marijuana and cocaine. Although a direct correlation between crime and low-income neighborhoods cannot be established, Bird said he thinks it can come into play. Fewer college graduates could lead to lower paying jobs, and people may look for other ways to make money.

"I think all of it goes in line with each other," he said. "People could get into crime to help, so to speak, supplement their income."

Bird said the low opinion of police officers reflected in the survey could come from innocent motorists' frustration at getting pulled over, searched or questioned. If residents want safer neighborhoods, the persistent work of officers should be welcome.

"Those who aren't in the wrong, I hope, would appreciate the more diligent work in the area," Bird said. "Because that's the only way you're going to help reduce the drug-related crime in the area. That and doing more searches."



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