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# Too much of a good thing?



**By S.E. RUCKMAN World Staff Writer**  
8/23/1999

**Richard Rich and Roxanne Snider, residents of the Owen Park neighborhood, pose Aug. 6 at the park's pond, which gets polluted with trash and cans allegedly left by homeless people who frequent the nearby social service agencies.**  
MICHAEL WYKE / Tulsa World

**A concentration of social services is blamed for Owen Park area ills.**  
Roxanne Snider is all for helping her fellow man. But she is fed up with the concentration of social service organizations near her north Tulsa neighborhood.

"I understand what the agencies are trying to do and all. I'm not against helping the poor and underprivileged," she said. "But the type of people who use their services are not friendly users."

Snider, who bought her home six years ago, said the Owen Park area is simply overrun with good intentions of agencies helping those who won't help themselves.

She believes nearby organizations mean more homeless people and prostitutes who leave a mark on her neighborhood.

Owen Park neighborhood watch groups said the problems include prostitutes working the area in and around Owen Park. And homeless people attack ducks in the park and try to eat them, say neighbors. That's not all, Snider said.

"They wander down into our park and through our neighborhoods. Anytime I go to

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the park, there's broken beer and whiskey bottles and things I wouldn't touch with a gloved hand," Snider said.

Snider lists the Day Center for the Homeless, Salvation Army, Catholic Charities and John 3:16 Mission as organizations too near to their neighborhood.

One nearby agency said it is aware of the issue, but social service agencies can't be blamed for a problem that had

its roots 20 years ago.

Maj. Ronald Busroe of the Salvation Army said it began with low property values in the 1970s.

Urban development was concentrated on the fringes of metropolitan areas. So, many social service agencies moved into locations near downtown.

"With the recent move to rejuvenate houses in older neighborhoods, residents suddenly find themselves neighbors with many social service organizations and their clients," he said. "It can be a very touchy subject."

When an evangelist recently asked to turn a nearby \$750,000 mansion into a mission for troubled youths, neighborhood associations from Owen Park and Brady Heights banded together to block efforts at City Hall. They believed one more service agency would adversely affect the quality of life for neighborhood residents.

"People get the attitude of `what's one more?' " Snider said.

The neighborhood president said the fact that Owen Park is the oldest park in the city makes them try that much harder to keep it clean.

Residents want to restore the park to its former glory, they said.

They have plans to replace sidewalks in the neighborhood using portions of a Community Development Block Grant.

Owen Park residents believe social service organizations attract the type who will reverse their attempts to change the park's public image.

Sandra Holden, director of the Day Center, said her clients try very hard to keep their area clean.

She said she had never been contacted by members of the Owen Park group with any complaints about the Day Center.

"We always try to be a good neighbor," she said. "It's a total surprise to me any of the neighborhoods had a problem."

Holden said while there is a cluster of social agencies in the Archer Street area, the overall number is not overwhelming.

"The mayor has a city map that shows all the social agencies in different areas," Holden said. "In my opinion, there are not that many at all on the north side."

The Salvation Army has been near the downtown area for decades, Busroe added. It has been at that location for a reason.

"If you're going to have homeless people and meet their basic needs, you have to be in close proximity to them," he said. "Our clients are very visible. People can see the disheveled person with all their possessions in a bag and it may be offensive to them."

Richard Rich, a member of the Owen Park Neighborhood Association, recalls a local woman

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who discovered a homeless person had taken up residence, complete with furnishings, under her porch.

He also recalls a recent hobo village just to the south of Owen Park.

"We're fighting to keep it a good neighborhood to be in," he said. "It's a struggle to keep it that way."

Owen Park residents said they have another reason for wanting to limit the number of helping agencies.

They want to market their neighborhood to incoming professors and employees at Oklahoma State University-Tulsa, without the extra baggage from the agencies.

"When my husband and I first bought the property, we were in love with the house," Snider said. "But we were afraid of the neighborhood. In six years it has changed in that people are starting to buy the houses."

Vigilant upkeep will also benefit residents directly, they said.

"If professionals choose to move in, it would help raise market values of the houses and of the neighborhood," Rich said. "Even now, the property values on my house have gone up by \$12,000 since we moved in."

Owen Park residents also claim social service agencies don't have any apparent beneficial effect on their clients. They said the clients see a good thing and take advantage of it.

"When they get everything handed to them (homeless), then they have no reason to better themselves," Rich said. "Although some might have an impact on Brady Heights. Every time we get a different social service in the area, the homeless population goes up and they stay right here."

Holden said her clients try hard to be conscientious. She proposed a neighborhood forum that consists of Owen Park residents and the Day Center.

She said she had seen a similar idea work when the Day Center was part of Tulsa Metropolitan Ministry.

"That was very helpful," she said. "It had positive effects that nurtured a positive healing process."

Despite the problems, homelessness remains a big problem in Tulsa and the Salvation Army is meeting a need, Busroe said.

"We're full every night, so there's obviously not enough services," he said. "Our shelters are being used but there are people still sleeping under the bridges."

Rich asserts that his neighborhood's attitude springs from agency saturation and not aversion to humanitarian efforts.

"None of us are opposed to these charities or services. We're just saying enough, we have enough already," Rich said. "It's kind of like the 1960s motto, 'If you're not part of the solution, you're part of the problem.'"

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**By S.E. RUCKMAN World Staff Writer**

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