

Lancashire Constabulary

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PROBLEM ORIENTED POLICING COMPETITION**THE TILLEY AWARD 1999****THE BURNLEY YOUTH SHELTER - A PURPOSE BUILT STREET CORNER****ABSTRACT**

Harle Syke is an area of Burnley, which adjoins the rural parish of Briercliffe. Both areas consist of good class housing and enjoy a village atmosphere. This part of Burnley is about 2 miles away from the town centre and the recreational amenities for young people, which such an area provides. In Briercliffe, children up to the age of 12 have been provided with a play area containing swings, climbing frames etc, however the park is subject to a local bye law which legally excludes older children from entering or using it. There were no facilities available for the older children to use, which resulted in them congregating in places where they caused nuisance and offence to residents. 13 of the young people were arrested on one evening for causing a public nuisance after many complaints were made to the local beat *officer* over a period of time..

The result of neglecting the 12 to 18 year age groups has been felt not only in Burnley but in many other parts of the country as well. It has been established that 20% of police time is spent in dealing with repeat nuisance which mainly originate from this older age group. Complaints of anti-social and criminal behaviour abound, such as gathering in large intimidating groups in residential areas, making noise, drinking alcohol, swearing and causing damage. Elderly people in particular are likely to complain about these young people and feel the most threatened by them. The groups invariably congregate in areas near to places where there is some sort of shelter from the elements available such as a shop doorway. The police response to these complaints is usually the same all over the country. It normally consists of the group being moved on to another area only to return soon after, then another officer moves them on again. Our response to the problem, after consulting with the young people, was to provide them with their own facility where they could congregate lawfully. This response was greeted enthusiastically by the young people as unusually, they were being consulted about their needs. The concept of the shelter was unique and required widespread consultation with the local community, businesses and councils before it could be progressed. Since the shelter has been open, nuisance complaints to the police in the area have dropped and continue to decrease significantly.

THE PROJECT

The problems associated with a large group of youths congregating as described, began in Harle Syke about 2 years ago. The young people began initially to meet near to some shops on the main road. People were hesitant when it came to walking past such a large group or going through their numbers in order to get into the shops. Complaints about the youths came not only from the residents but also from shop keepers whose business was being affected as a result of the youngsters congregating in that area. Night after night uniform police officers were deployed from the centre of Burnley to deal with the problems which the group were causing. The local community Constable tried everything from contacting the parents directly to making pleas in the local and parish newspapers asking the children to keep away from the area and posing the question to the parents. "Do you know where your child is and what he/she is doing?" The idea was to try and impact on the parents the effect that their children's anti social behaviour was having on the community as a whole.

The efforts of the officer were to no avail and his advice went unheeded. The situation became so acute that eventually, a plan to take more drastic action was initiated by the community Constable using officers of the local Special Constabulary in support. Observations were kept on the group and on one evening thirteen of them were arrested for offences ranging from damage to public disorder. They were responsible for tearing the wing mirrors off cars and destroying plants in people's gardens. Most of the young people eventually received official police cautions as a result of their arrests and tainted their otherwise unblemished records.

The effect of the police action was immediate. The group no longer met at that location and peace returned to the community. This idyllic situation was however, short lived as within a few weeks the young people began to gather again in a new location very close to residential property most of which was inhabited by elderly people.

It was at this stage that it became obvious to us as police officers, that as an organisation we could not be expected to deal with this problem on our own and accordingly the first example of inter agency co-operation associated with the project was put into place. The community Constable approached a detached youth worker who associates with young people of this age all over Burnley. He also spoke to the young people in Harle Syke directly and asked them what the police could do to stop them congregating and causing problems. What did they want? How could we work together? Their response was unanimous. What they wanted was a place where they could meet in safety, keep dry in wet weather and "do their own thing." They did not want to be supervised but they wanted somewhere they could meet without causing alarm or suspicion in older people. Somewhere that was acceptable to both sides i.e. the young people and the residents. A radical approach was required, something innovative and different which had not been tried before.

Using the youth worker as a go between, youngsters from different areas of Burnley were approached and asked to design a structure which could be used for the purpose which they had requested. Burnley Borough Council were approached and they agreed to provide an architect to help draw up the plans for the building based on the suggestions and design of the young people themselves. The ultimate plan featured a three sided, metal framed brick building with a sloping roof, exposed to the open air but having seating and lighting, which the young people could use to congregate in lawfully. Their own street corner.

The cost of the initiative was initially worked out at around £9,000 and a series of meetings then began involving representatives of the police, local community and organisations with an interest in the project. A steering group was formed. There were obviously many hurdles, which had to be overcome if the intended outcome was to be achieved. One of the main problems was finding a site, which would be acceptable to everyone. Somewhere the locals knew that the young people would be congregating and meant that they would not complain to the police as a result.

Much dialogue took place at public meetings in the village where concerns were expressed and issues discussed. Eventually a location was agreed upon. The site chosen belonged to the Parish Council which showed its willingness for the project to proceed by allowing the structure to be built on their land thereby obviating the need for an application for planning permission for the structure and the associated costs with that process. With two difficult hurdles overcome, now began the more complex task of raising money necessary to initiate and complete the project

During the early month of 1996, the Lancashire Police Authority, through the Chief Constable of Lancashire, Mrs. Pauline Clare made available a pot of money to be competed for by divisions throughout the force based on Community Safety Initiatives. Burnley Division made a bid for £7,500 to kick-start the shelter project. The judges from the Police Authority were impressed with our application and agreed to provide the sum of £5,500 for the project on condition that further funding was made available by other organisations. This sum of money gave the steering group the impetus it needed to raise the remaining cash required for completion of the plan.

In the meantime the original idea of a shelter on its own was amended by the steering group and it was decided to construct a play wall near to it. The space in between the wall and the shelter would be tarmaced. If the young people **wanted to kick a ball** about then they could do so against the purpose built wall rather than another area, which might lead to complaints from the public. The wall would have goalposts and cricket wickets painted on it and a basketball hoop attached. At the same time, the shelter would have hang bars for the young people to swing on if they wanted to. The idea was to make the shelter and associated playwall an attraction rather than just an amenity.

The fund raising had now begun but as the original concept had altered, so had the cost, which had now risen to around £13,000. The most expensive part of the project was obtaining an electricity supply to the shelter. Burnley Borough Council agreed to

dig out the foundations for the buildings and to do the other digging required to provide the electrical supply. They also agreed to maintain the shelter after completion.

The Parochial Council of Briercliffe donated £1000 to the project, as did the Parish Council. The local Constable started local fund raising initiatives such as a lottery where many of the householders and businesses in the area donated prizes for the winners. The officer also visited local factories where he obtained commitments to provide further cash donations. One of the members of the steering group made it her business to go around builders merchants in the borough asking for help. As a result of her endeavours, all the brickwork for both the shelter and the playwall was provided free of charge. A further example of the partnerships, which were forged during the course of the project, was in our approach to Burnley College. This organisation agreed to build the playwall free of charge by allowing young people on building and bricklaying courses at the college to construct it as part of their training exercise. With the necessary funds rolling in we were now in a position to start building the shelter and the playwall. Construction began in January 1997.

The steering group met on a regular basis and dealt with problems as they arose. The shelter and playwall began to take shape and even in those early days, there was evidence that the young people, as intended, even though it was skeletal, were using the shelter. I visited the location on many occasions to see how the work was proceeding and the empty beer cans on the floor inside the shelter was evidence of its occupancy. The search for funding continued. The publicity generated by the project enabled us to obtain further funding.

The media got to know of the initiative and a camera crew from Granada Television put together a story about the shelter, which appeared on the "CRIMEFILE" programme. Local newspapers carried the initial story and followed it all the way through to the completion of the structure and the official opening. Articles about the shelter have appeared in the Crime Prevention Digest and the Police Guardian. As a result police officers, Council Officials and Youth workers from all over the country have visited Burnley to see the shelter for themselves with a view to adopting the idea in their own areas where they are currently experiencing similar problems with young people. Councillors and community groups from other areas of Burnley have also expressed a desire to see similar constructions in their areas of the town. I have provided written details about the concept, costs and also the plans for the shelter to numerous forces in England and Wales and the Channel Islands as well as to the police in Jerusalem in Israel. Their Chief Officer recently wrote asking for information about this and other initiatives, targeted at dealing with repeat nuisance, which we have in place in Burnley.

On a beautiful Sunday spring morning in February 1997, the youth shelter was **officially opened by one** of the local football stars. Civil dignitaries such as the Mayor and Mayoress of Burnley were invited as well as representatives of all those organisations and individuals, who had contributed to the fund raising. The shelter has been in use continually by the local young people and they can be found around it on most evenings. Nuisance complaints and crimes in the area have fallen and this has freed up the time of not only the local officer but the other officers from Burnley who had to deal with the troubles which the young people were causing during his days off,

leave etc. They are now able to deal with more important matters as a result and can concentrate on serious crimes such as burglary. It was a requirement of the Lancashire Police Committee in granting the initial funding for the initiative, that a full assessment of the effects of the shelter on these repeat nuisance figures would be carried out after a 12 month period. That assessment follows this initial narrative. Public opinion in the area shows that the residents are very pleased with the shelter and the effects it's presence has had on their quality of life.

Young people in the area now know that they can have no excuse for causing problems. We have given them a place where they can legally congregate with the blessing of the local community and "do their own thing" as they requested. The shelter is a permanent structure and is practically vandal proof.

The intention has always been that this shelter would be a model for other to adopt, raise funding for and place in other suitable locations around the town and elsewhere. We believe that the Burnley Shelter is the best design and has the best facilities available. It can easily be replicated elsewhere.

The shelter is a glowing example of what can be achieved by the partnership approach to dealing with problems and Burnley Police are very proud to have been involved in this project from inception to completion.

ASSESSMENT

The Youth Shelter at Briercliffe in Burnley has now been open for use by young people of all ages for some time. The morning after the metal skeleton was erected at the initial stage of construction back in January 1997 there was evidence that it had been used as a gathering place on the previous evening. It has now become a regular venue for young people to meet and do their own thing, which was what they themselves suggested when they were asked what the local community and the police could do to reduce complaints about their behaviour. Up to a few weeks ago, the shelter was covered in graffiti. The surface of the brickwork has been coated with a substance which makes the removal of graffiti a relatively simple task and there are long term plans for graffiti boards to be erected on each of the walls for the budding artists amongst the shelters users to practice upon. Just recently,. the young people together with residents, members of the parish council and the local community officer, spent a Saturday morning removing the graffiti and painting the shelter.

What started as a partnership project is continuing in that manner, involving all sections of the community including the commercial sector. A business near to where the shelter is located has seen a significant drop in nuisance and minor damage since its erection. In the past, the youngsters would kick a football against the walls of the factory or play cricket, causing damage to windows and paintwork on the building or to cars parked nearby. Now there is a purpose built facility, namely the play wall next to the shelter, where such activities can take place lawfully without the fear of complaint or damage. The owner of the factory was one of the people who contributed

funds to help build the shelter and he is now seeing a positive response to his investment.

The complaints generated by the actions and presence of the youths of vandalism, noise, and other quality of life issues which were being experienced by the residents in the area prior to the concept of the shelter, encouraged the police to seek a longer term solution rather than legal enforcement or continual displacement of the group. Only by working together, were we able to produce the concept, design and eventual construction of the shelter.

The interest, which the shelter has generated amongst other police forces, continues to be exceptional. Most police forces in England and Wales have asked for written information or have visited Burnley to see the shelter for themselves. Recently a police officer from Belgium came to see the shelter. He was most enthusiastic about the project, as were police and civic visitors from Dordrecht in Holland who also came to Burnley recently. In the middle of March 1998 a coach containing 30 people from Staffordshire descended on the shelter. They included police officers, youth workers, civic leaders, councillors and visiting police officers from Ghana. A group of youth workers, police officers and children from Bristol, recently visited the site. The idea of the shelter is one, which can be easily replicated in other areas and provides an activity location for the 12 to 18 year age group which is largely neglected when it comes to recreational facilities.

Since the shelter has been opened, the police have not received one single complaint from the public about the activities of the young people who use it. Nuisance still continues of course, I don't think it can be permanently eradicated but it has been substantially reduced resulting in more free time for the police to deal with more serious matters.

Between March and September 1996 the police attended 56 nuisance complaints on the Briercliffe police beat

Between March and September 1997 we attended 40 such calls. We dealt with 16 fewer complaints, which represents a 29 % reduction in nuisance calls.

In the streets immediately surrounding the complaint area, we dealt with 8 complaints during the first period and 4 in the second. A reduction of 50 %.

The local Clerk of Works has provided **figures**, which show that between January 31st 1996 and the date that the shelter opened on February 23rd 1997, vandalism costs to playgrounds in Briercliffe amounted to £ 595.50p. Between March 1997 and February 1998 the costs amounted to £ 76.90p a reduction of £518.60 since the erection of the shelter. This represents a reduction in vandalism costs of 87 %.

A recent evaluation has also provided us with the following figures: -

YEAR	NUISANCE CALLS TO THE TOWN OF BRIERCLIFFE	-1+
1994	10	
1995	91	-11.65%
1996	98	+7.7%
1997 (Shelter opened)	60	-38.77%
1998	32	-46.66%

Over the 4 years from 1994 to 1998 there has been an overall decrease of 68.93%, whilst over the 2 years from 1996 to 1998 there has been a 67.34% decrease in nuisance calls.

Plans are afoot to erect more shelters of a similar design in other areas of Burnley. The local authority has made some funds available from various sources. Local community groups in other areas of the town are also keen to erect shelters for their young people and have raised the money themselves. The foundations are in place for one in the local village of Sabden in an adjoining division.

The shelter is a splendid example of how the police, in partnership with the community and other organisations can *try* to adopt a problem solving approach to community problems and provide an alternative to short term answers such as arrest and prosecution which is costly, time consuming and unproductive.

James Masterman