

ABSTRACT

THE CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S SAFETY INITIATIVE

On 23 October 1997, Strathclyde Police, in partnership with the Local Authority, South Lanarkshire Council, introduced a pioneering pro active policing Child Safety Initiative into three housing estates within the South Lanarkshire town of Hamilton, namely:

- Whitehill
- Hillhouse
- Fairhill

The Initiative grew out of community concerns over the safety of young children within their communities and the desire by those communities to take positive action.

The main aims of the Hamilton Child Safety Initiative were to:

- Ensure the safety of vulnerable youngsters under the age of 16 with particular regard to those under 12
- Increase parental awareness of their responsibilities towards their children
- Reduce the incidents of juvenile crime and disorder
- Increase public safety and reduce public anxiety over crime

Two Sergeants and 10 Police Constables were allocated the specific responsibility for the front line policing of the Initiative during a 6 month pilot phase. The officers operated within the target areas at specific times on specific evenings. All were carefully selected and trained to meet the objectives of the initiative.

Given the uniqueness of the Hamilton Child Safety Initiative in Scotland and indeed the UK, Strathclyde Police, in consultation with the Scottish Office, arranged for a  based evaluation of the Initiative to be carried out by the University of Stirling. In addition, the Scottish Office commissioned a Research Consultant to conduct a small case — study within one of the target areas.

A brief synopsis of their findings is as follows:

- 87% of parents of children returned home by the police approved of the Initiative
- 96% of traders wished it to continue
- Crime and public complaints/disorder fell by 23% and 22% respectively

- Crimes associated with juveniles, theft and vandalism fell by 49%
- Crime fell by 40% in the Whitehill area alone
- 78% of 1,200 schoolchildren from the Hamilton area contacted believed the objectives of the Initiative were sound

The Initiative has developed and a strong partnership strategy is in place between Strathclyde Police and South Lanarkshire Council. South Lanarkshire Council have already committed £3 million to the establishment of state of the art youth facilities which have been designed by young people in the area, The pilot has now been enlarged and builds on the original concept launched by the partners and concentrates all resources in an even more focussed youth orientated way.

An interim evaluation carried out by Strathclyde Police Policy and Development Branch reveals that the results of the Initiative are still positive. A robust strategy document has been compiled by all partners for a long-term commitment to young people in the area.

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ESTABLISHMENT OF INITIATIVE

In October 1997, Strathclyde Police in partnership with South Lanarkshire Council set up the Child Safety Initiative within three housing estates in the town of Hamilton. The Child Safety Initiative grew out of community concerns over the safety of young children, especially those under 12, out alone in the streets after dark. Secondary aims of the Initiative were to reduce opportunities for juvenile crime and disorder and to reduce the fear of crime within the target areas. At this time crime and offence figures showed that there was a high level of juvenile crime and disorder in these areas which required urgent action. These statistics were supported by the numbers of calls for assistance received by the police--from local residents who complained about youth disorder in their areas.

The three housing estates chosen to pilot the Initiative were selected on the basis of locally expressed concerns in relation to community safety and a desire by the communities themselves to take positive actions. Councillor Tom McCabe, the then Leader of South Lanarkshire Council stated

"The decision to launch a Safety Initiative Pilot Scheme comes in response to concerns directly raised by the community. Let me stress that the pilot areas involved in the Initiative have been chosen not because they have any more problems than any other communities throughout the country, but because the community itself has called for action".

OBJECTIVES

It was established that a number of issues had to be addressed within the planning phase of the Initiative:

- South Lanarkshire Council's commitment to a comprehensive Community Safety Action Plan, including the development of "Good Neighbourhood Initiative" areas in co-operation with Strathclyde Police
- Public concern expressed through the police and local councillors over the safety of young children and youth disorder on the streets of Hamilton after dark
- A review of legislation relative to children and young people had to be carried out

As a result of robust consultation and strategic review, the main objectives of the Child Safety Initiative were established as:

- To protect the safety of children and young people ("children" were defined as being under the age of 12 years, while "young people" were defined as being over the age of 12 years but under 16 years of age)
- To decrease the opportunities for children and young people to become involved in juvenile crime and reduce the fear of crime among the public
- To increase parental awareness of their responsibilities towards their children

PROJECTED IMPACT

The main aims of the strategy were as follows:

- By a committed policing approach within the three intervention areas, it was hoped to directly influence the number of young children under the age of 12 on the streets unsupervised during the hours of darkness
 - To promote dialogue within the age group of 12 - 15 years who may not necessarily be at risk but who would benefit from speaking to the police regarding standards of behaviour which disturbs others and causes concern for other members of the community
- To continually promote through dialogue with parents, the aims and objectives of the Initiative and to increase parental awareness of their responsibilities in respect of their children's safety

STRATEGY

As stated, the Initiative took the form of a joint partnership approach between Strathclyde Police and South Lanarkshire Council, who committed the resources of the Education Department and Social Work Department specifically and other council agencies as appropriate to support the project.

It was recognised at the early planning stages how the Initiative was construed by those who were unaware of the whole strategy. Therefore communication *with* not only the target group, but those who lived in the target areas was essential, therefore a clear and concise marketing strategy was formulated, which comprised of:

- Police officers visited every school in the intervention area and briefed head teachers at every level about the aims of the Initiative
- Churches and Community Councils received presentations about the strategy
- 7,000 leaflets explaining the rationale underpinning the Initiative were distributed to every household in the intervention areas
- Press Briefings, which attracted local, national and international interest were held

- The mass media was also informed by way of press releases
- The local newspaper ran a front page story on the Initiative
- Elected council members were consulted and informed
- Children and young people were spoken to on the streets by Community Police Officers

OPERATIONAL PERSPECTIVE

An Action Plan was drawn up by Strathclyde Police which described the Hamilton Child Safety Initiative as follows:

"The purpose of this Initiative is two-fold: firstly to ensure that young children under 12 years found wandering the streets during the hours of darkness are safe and returned home to their parents. Secondly, while the main thrust of this Initiative is aimed towards young children, it should not **preclude anyone under** the age of 16 who is found unsupervised late at night on the streets".

Two Sergeants and 10 Police Constables were allocated the specific responsibility for the front-line policing of the Initiative during a 6 month pilot phase. These officers were selected on the basis that they possessed good interpersonal skills and Community Policing experience. They were divided into two teams, each comprising 1 Sergeant and 5 Constables, which policed the intervention areas on alternative weekends. The officers operated within the intervention area, every Thursday, Friday and Saturday evenings between 7pm and 11pm. However, flexibility existed within these time parameters to allow for seasonal fluctuations in terms of the changing "hours of darkness". Under normal circumstances, without the Initiative operating, the three housing estates would have been policed by 3 Community Police Officers, one in each area. In addition, 4 double-crewed police vehicles would normally operate from Hamilton Police Office responding to calls throughout the Hamilton area.

*what
did they
do?*

Prior to the commencement of the Initiative, police officers were fully informed of its aims and objectives and were briefed by a member of the local authority Social Services Department in relation to the provisions of the Children (Scotland) Act 1995. In addition, police officers were advised on the role of the Social Work Department in terms of the protection of children. That said, in terms of defining a situation which could be described as "unsafe" for a child it was appreciated that it would be impossible to account for every eventuality. Officers policed the intervention using common sense judgements and discretion on deciding whether a situation was unsafe and in identifying the appropriate action to take.

In circumstances where officers considered it appropriate, the following procedures applied;

- When a child was returned home to their parent/guardian the latter was to be fully informed of the purpose of the Initiative and the circumstances surrounding their own child's involvement

- When a child was returned home and the parent/guardian could not be traced, the child was to be taken to a place of safety, namely Hamilton Police Office, where an appropriate room was set aside for that purpose. Immediate enquiries would then be made to trace the parent/guardian
- The Community Involvement Branch at Hamilton Police Office were to be informed of every child involved in an intervention via a "Juvenile Contact Card" system which allowed a review of the circumstances and referral to Social Services

IMPACT ON CHILD SAFETY

Over the six month Initiative period, over 200 children were removed by the police from the "street environment" in what were perceived to be potentially harmful situations. The overwhelming majority were taken home to their parents with only a very small number 4 charged with a form of crime or offence. This clearly indicates that police interventions were for genuine child safety reasons as opposed to specifically targeting children engaged in disorderly activity or criminal behaviour. Indeed, the vast majority of interventions resulted from police officers own observations rather than complaints from members of the public.

Incidents in which police officers have intervened include:

- A 4 year old boy found out on the street at 9pm on a November night, two streets away from his home and inappropriately dressed
- A 14 year old girl found drunk and staggering alone on a footpath at 10.30pm on a dark December night
- An 8 year old girl found walking alone at 8.40pm on a dark October evening — she had been sent unaccompanied to a local shop on an errand for her mother
- A 5 year old boy found riding a bike on a street pavement — his mother had thought he was in her back garden
- + A 10 year old child selling newspapers outside a bingo hall in freezing conditions while wearing inadequate clothing
- A 13 year old was returned home after running away, threatening to hang himself
- A 12 year old was returned home to a mother frantic with worry as to his whereabouts and who had been searching for her child. The child had been rollerblading on the roadway when police officers stopped to speak to him

INVESTMENT IN THE INITIATIVE

All partners equally invested substantial resources, both in financial terms and in human resources. Strathclyde Police have committed:

- 2 Sergeants and 10 Constables for three hours per day, three days per week for six months
- Senior Management time to progress strategic and policy issues
- Senior Management time to make press statements and undertake press briefings
- Local Management and other officers to progress the day-to-day running of the Initiative
- Increased local police activity in relation to raising awareness of the Initiative in schools and community forums
- The resources and expertise of the Policy and Development Branch in co-ordinating a rolling evaluation of the Initiative and assisting the Scottish Office and University of Stirling to progress a full and final independent evaluation of the Initiative
- The resources and expertise of Media and Information Services in providing and co-ordinating matters relating to our partners and the mass media
- Facilitating after-school development Initiatives with Council Education Department

South Lanarkshire Council have committed:

- The Executive Director of Social Services to plan, co-ordinate and progress the council's strategic response
- The full range of services offered by the Social Work Department
- The resources and expertise of public relations in providing and co-ordinating matters relating to their partners and the mass media
- The support of the Education Department, Head Teachers and their staff, both in the briefing process and the distribution and collation of evaluation questionnaires completed by students
- Facilitating after school development issues with Strathclyde Police
- The council brought forward a planned £3 million investment in services for children and young people to compliment the timescale of the Initiative

The Scottish Office have committed:

- £5,000 to fund the final evaluation of the Initiative
- Human resources to pursue, progress and support the final evaluation process
- Funding and support for a case study in the Hillhouse area to evaluate the impact of the Initiative

EVALUATION

Given the uniqueness of the Hamilton, Child Safety Initiative in Scotland and indeed the United Kingdom, Strathclyde Police, in consultation with the Scottish Office, arranged for a comprehensive research-based evaluation of the Initiative. The University of Stirling was commissioned to assist with the research. This study involved the collection and evaluation of a wide range of demographic and attitudinal data from several sources including: children who were the subject of a police Hamilton Child Safety Initiative intervention, their parents, local schoolchildren, local business people and police officers. Data on crimes and offences and incidents reported to the police was also collected for both the intervention areas and for a control area. The control area was made up of housing estates in Hamilton with similar social demographic profiles to the intervention areas.

In addition, the Scottish Office commissioned a Research Consultant, Janice Meikle, to conduct a small-scale case study within Hillhouse, one of the three housing estates which made up the intervention area. This study used "before and after" community surveys and focus group interviews to ascertain the opinions of local people on the Hamilton Child Safety Initiative and its impact on their perceptions of community safety and fear of crime.

The main findings of the evaluation of the Child Safety Initiative over the period were as follows:

- Over the period October 1997 to April 1998, Strathclyde Police carried out 229 interventions with vulnerable young people within the intervention area. Of these – 161 (70%) were male, 48 (21%) were alone at the time of the intervention and 31 (14%) were aged under 8
- As a result of police intervention, 200 (87%) young people were taken to their homes and only 4 (2%) were charged with a crime or an offence; 220 (97%) said they were aware of the Child Safety Initiative and 109 (50%) approved of the Initiative. Only 29 (13%) registered disapproval of the Child Safety Initiative
- Approval of the Child Safety Initiative was also strong among parents of the young people who were the subject of an intervention. 166 (87%) parents approve with only 14 (7%) disapproving
- A survey of 981 schoolchildren in the Hamilton area age 12-15 years found that 91% were aware of the Child Safety Initiative and 42% approved of it compared to 37% who disapproved. Three quarters (78%) thought that the police were right to take vulnerable young children home
- Half of all schoolchildren questioned (52%) thought that the police did not understand young people and half (51%) thought that the police stopped young people for no reason
- During the Child Safety Initiative crimes normally associated with juveniles, eg theft, vandalism, show a marked reduction – down 49%
- The most significant fall within the intervention area took place in Whitehill which recorded a 40% fall between these periods; an Estates Management Initiative targeting housing related problems, which ran concurrently with the Child Safety Initiative in Whitehill may have contributed to the greater reduction in crime in this area

- The incidence of complaints or disturbances reported by the public fell by 22% in the intervention area compared to the six month period prior to the Child Safety Initiative; reported incidents also fell by 14% in the control area over the same period. For both the six month period prior to the Child Safety Initiative and the corresponding period in 1996/1997, reductions were greater in the intervention area than the control area
- In a survey of 100 residents of Hillhouse carried out by Janice Meikle (one of the three housing estates which made up the intervention area), 44% of respondents said that they felt safer since the Child Safety Initiative began; the survey also found that more people would avoid areas of Hillhouse (86%) after the Child Safety Initiative began than before (77%). This may be the result of high media coverage of the Initiative
- The main findings of the Scottish Office/Strathclyde Police Study revealed significant backing among parents, children and local traders who have seen the Initiative at first hand in the three communities where the pilot was launched a year ago

POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE ASPECTS OF THE INITIATIVE

Outwith the formal evaluation structure, many issues were raised in both areas. They are listed below and are in no particular order.

POSITIVE ASPECTS

A closer liaison now exists between the local police and children and young people
 Police have now a greater understanding of children and young people 's issues
 Experience will assist and inform future planning and police formulation
 Closer links established with schools
 Closer links established between police and parents
 Affirmation and reaffirmation of political support
 Public demonstration of commitment to fulfill Force Goals
 Public demonstration of intent to consult communities
 Reinforces aspects of community safety strategy
 Closer liaison with police and local authority departments

NEGATIVE ASPECTS

Media scrutiny
 Viewed as an attack on young people
 Criticism from Civil Rights Groups
 Curfew label
 No strong focus on council activity
 Criticism of intense police activity
 Effect on resource availability
 Labelled as an attack on young people's Human Rights

Worthy of special mention is the role of the media throughout the six month period. The launch of the Initiative attracted intense local, national and international media interest and scrutiny. The fact that the focus of the Initiative was on children and young people's conduct during the hours of darkness, prompted the media to immediately label the Initiative as a "curfew". This label stuck, despite robust denials and rebuttals from police and council sources and stimulated public debate on the subject.

The officers involved were uncomfortable with the level of media representatives who accompanied them on patrol and influenced the perceptions of the public in these target areas. Many residents also took offence at the way in which their areas were being portrayed on a nightly basis on national television.

Local and national politicians, local parents and perhaps, unexpectedly, the children and young people locally, supported the Initiative. This was supported by polls in the local press where 1447 out of 1556 callers were in favour of extending the Initiative.

The result of this was much of the time spent by everyone involved in the Initiative explaining what it was not, as opposed to what it was trying to achieve. However, the word "curfew" remains a media driven phrase, although the residents in the areas affected have a clear knowledge of what the Initiative is attempting to achieve.

The Initiative was also evaluated on a limited basis by the Scottish Human Rights Centre who published their findings in a document entitled 'Time To Go Home — Says Who?'. Although critical of the Initiative, their comments have been considered as it has developed.

Most important of all has been the commitment and dedication of the officers involved, without which the successes achieved would have been minimised. Each one is an ambassador for the initiative and drives the principles within their areas on a daily basis.

LOCAL AUTHORITY COMMITMENT

At the outset of the Initiative, consultation with young people in the areas revealed that there was a perceived lack of diversion schemes which they could access. The Local Council Leader committed his resources to working with young people and designing state of the art youth facilities and committed a £3 million budget. It was apparent that for the Initiative to succeed involving the youth in the areas was one of the corner-stones of the strategy. This reinforced that it was not about curtailing their rights on the streets at night, but returning civil liberties to communities and reducing fear of crime.

Five hundred young people were split into teams and spent considerable time in discussion with council architects considering chair designs, layouts, fabrics and colour schemes to create the initial

facilities which were called "Universal Connections". These facilities were intended to create a cool, "dry pub" atmosphere and custom made areas for party nights, discos or raves for the 12 - 25 age group. They include interne cafes with the latest equipment for surfing the net, playing computer games or printing school assignments: The centres also include access to information and advice to help 14 - 25 year olds with problems associated with careers, training, housing and healthy living. Five of these facilities in a diversity of areas were designed, staffed and resourced during the evaluation period.

THE FUTURE

On receipt of the evaluation report, the success of the Initiative was obvious and the Chief Constable intimated that the Initiative would be extended throughout the whole of the seven areas of Hamilton. It was realised however that the partnership approach had worked very successfully and that for long-term success to be achieved, a clear strategy required to be established between partners.

Representatives from Education, Social Work and Strathclyde Police drew up a strategy document which is monitored by the Assistant Chief Constable (Community Services) and Directors of the appropriate local authority departments. A Working Group meets on a monthly basis to streamline processes between the partners relative to children and young people and to continually review and change the strategic direction where required. A programme of activities is now in place.

The whole Initiative had developed and was given a new strategic focus and the enlarged project renamed The Children and Young People's Safety Initiative (ChYPS). On 2 November 1998, the Initiative was extended throughout the whole town of Hamilton for a period of 12 months. The enlarged project builds on an original concept launched by Strathclyde Police and South Lanarkshire Council and concentrates all resources in an even more focussed youth orientated way.

Interventions have now been broken into direct and indirect:

- A direct intervention is where officers are satisfied that given all the circumstances, a child or young person is at potential risk or in danger, then that person is taken home and the circumstances surrounding the incident are related to the parents or guardian
- An indirect intervention is where officers have contact with a group of children or young persons, who by virtue of their age and numbers, may not necessarily be at risk, but due to their actions other social issues may need to be addressed. By speaking to them under these circumstances, officers hope to promote an awareness and instill a sense of responsibility for their actions which may give cause for concern

INTERIM EVALUATION

A six month evaluation has been carried out by the Policy and Development Branch of Strathclyde Police which revealed that support for the Initiative was still positive throughout the intervention areas.

Additionally, youth disturbance fell by 4.8% and complaints about youth behaviour fell by 7.4% when compared with figures for the equivalent six month period in the previous year. The Chief Constable said

"The early indications are that this extended Initiative has translated well into the wider community in Hamilton and is proving to be a winner with parents and children alike. I am heartened by the continuing local support for this sensitive but positive mode of ^Policing"

STRATEGIC SUPPORT

Throughout the whole of this Initiative public support has come from the Chief Constable of Strathclyde Police, the Head of South Lanarkshire Council, the Directors of each appropriate department involved and the former Scottish Minister for Home Affairs, Mr Henry McLeish.

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