

# THE YOUTH POD SCHEME

Within the work of the  
Youth Strategy Unit



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# The Youth Pod Scheme

## NATURE OF THE PROBLEM

The problem is twofold:

1. Reports from members of the public to the Police concerning young people's public anti-social behaviour.
2. Response from young people, when moved on by the Police, in that there was nowhere for them to go.

## EVIDENCE TO DEFINE THE PROBLEM

Analysed as evidence to devise a strategic response was:

- The computer recorded control room logs of 'Youth causing Annoyance' as recorded by Police call takers;
- Anecdotal evidence of Police Officers;
- Public consultation through community forums;
- Youth consultation through school based forums and youth conference;
- Audit of leisure facilities/activities provided by public and private sector.

## RESPONSE TO THE PROBLEM

With the establishment of a Youth Strategy Unit, responding in the early days was confined broadly to established policing methods. It soon became apparent however through continued analysis that the main effect was that of displacement, an inadequate solution to the problem.

Still remaining was the question of what was expected of young people and where was there for them to go. The Youth Pod Scheme was the response. Basic but functional this specially designed and equipped 'portacabin' could be deposited in a hot spot area and used as a base for outreach youth work. The idea was taken to a multi-agency group and the council based youth service agreed to provide the staff for the pilot scheme. The success of this unit now means there are now 8 pods and 24 youth workers employed full time throughout the Borough.

## IMPACT OF THE RESPONSE

In the early days the work of the Youth Strategy Unit was measured by comparing before and after incident reports. As the significance of the Pod scheme became apparent and the realisation that the unit, in the way they were using the Pod, were working within a POPS model, other factors came into play. Detailed evaluation was commissioned from an independent body. The result was the identification of an achievable goal: a long term reduction of 'youth nuisance' through properly placed, properly targeted, and properly delivered youth provision.

## DESCRIPTION OF THE PROJECT

### IN THE BEGINNING

The phrase from small acorns large oaks grow' could never be more relevant than when applied to the Tameside Youth Strategy Unit (YSU), which began it's work in November of 1995. Initially a three-month project, headed up by PC Martin Hague, the unit of 4 officers, started with the knowledge that there was enough being done to combat the growing disquiet over the anti social activities of young people. The disproportionate number of incidents connected with this behaviour was set, not only to rise, but to be of increasing concern both locally and nationally. This added momentum to the project; it created a desire to address the upward trend.

In parallel, the increasing number of questions being raised at community consultation groups, asking not only what was being done by the Police but what was being done to provide young people with activity and support. When the activity of the local authority youth service was examined historically in the years leading up to 1995 there had been a move towards the closure of long established youth clubs on the evidence of poor uptake. In reality the underlying reason was the character of provision, which followed the traditional approach to activities and fitted stereotypes like The Famous Five. Provision for young people at that time was moving more in favour of outreach work and this became the mainstay of activity.

The YSU saw the key objectives, as;

- Reducing the risk of young people becoming involved in criminality;
- Responding to the public demand to deal with youth related incidents;
- + Acknowledging the effect on public satisfaction with Police performance

"Discouraging young people at risk from becoming involved in crime is an important part of any strategy for tackling youth crime"

It was thought to be a straightforward task to look at the numbers of 'youth nuisance calls' their locations and frequency to see where to place officers. This data was useful and to this day remains the cornerstone of the intelligence gathering. Closer scrutiny however opened up other avenues. Other Police information generated further relevant Statistics. The most recent activity survey of the time revealed more time was spent dealing with complaints about nuisance than any other type of crime or incident. In detail:

- 12% of the time spent by uniform patrol and local beat officers dealing with crimes of incidents was spent dealing with complaints of nuisance;
- 10% of all the incidents recorded on the Division during the activity sampling were complaints regarding nuisance.

The work in this one area was accounting for a considerable proportion of Police resources and availability of resources impacted greatly on public perception of performance. This was corroborated by 13% of respondents to a Greater Manchester Police survey who cited 'speed of response' as a major cause of their satisfaction or dissatisfaction.

Conversely the key areas that determined satisfaction of Police response from a young person's point of view are:

- How the young person considers they have been treated by the Police.
- + How the young person's parents family and friends consider that they have been treated.

"Some Police are fair, but some are big headed and talk to young people as if they are nothing"

Identifying the key problem of youth nuisance and seeing the broader picture of it's impact on resource and public satisfaction raised the priority of this work to a level that saw the unit set up as a 2 year project. The task now was how to deliver the promise effectively with such a small resource and how to set in place the long-term agenda.

### DEFINING THE PROBLEM

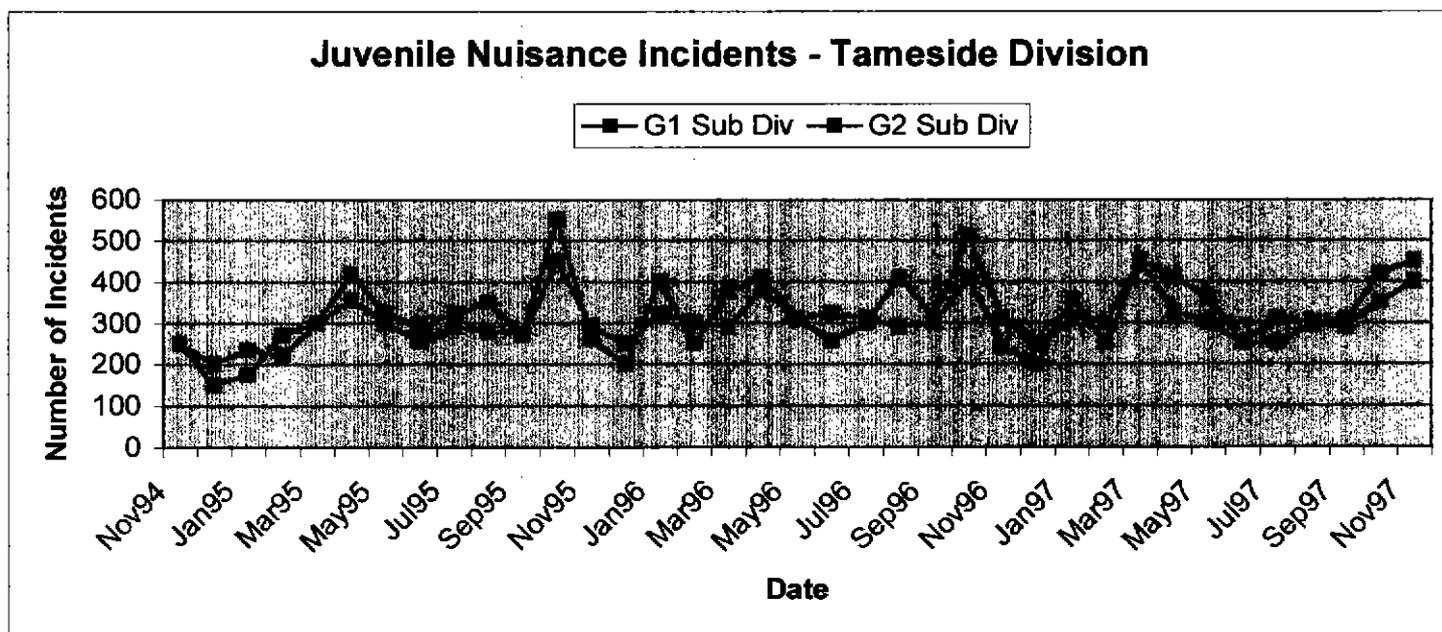
It was clear from the beginning that correct interpretation of the data was key to the most effective use of such a small resource. Correct analysis would properly inform the response stage although examination of the available Police incident data soon revealed a problem.

Typically a member of the public would ring a Police control room to report an incident and cause the generation of a computerised log with a unique Force Wide Incident Number (FWIN). On this log would be recorded every detail concerning the handling and result, with the end task being completed by a supervisor in the control room. During the end task a numeric code is added to categorise the incident to enable future examination and statistical evaluation. It was via this code, 81 for youth nuisance, that the unit began their **analysis**.

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Initial searches found everything from youths with cars, underage drinking, Public Order, uses of air weapons and suspicious circumstances were being put under the umbrella of code 81 if there was any mention of youth involvement at all. So, the YSU set about a daily re-coding of incidents to give a better indication of where they should be concentrating their efforts and enable them to start **an ongoing evaluation** of trends and youth movement.

This process more clearly defined the divisional hot spots but further examination of the incidents was required to weed out 'false clusters' resulting from say one individual being responsible for a high number of calls. The officers in the unit overlaid information from contacts in the council relating to complaints, contacted complainants for more detail and liased with local beat officers for knowledge of individuals. Visits would be made to the area so officers could familiarise themselves with the geography and read graffiti. All these factors taken together led to deciding where to concentrate effort.



**Fig 1.** *'Juvenile Nuisance' - Incidents on the Tameside Division.*

Throughout all of this process the underlying message was still clear. There were a lot of young people out on the street who finding themselves with no place to go to and nothing to do, resorted to the kind of antisocial behaviour that the public continued to complain about wherever it started or was moved to.

The main theme that the analysis highlighted was that whilst the police in their everyday duties were good at finding young people most in need of help, nevertheless could not provide any facilities. Ironically the local authority Youth Service could provide what was needed but found it difficult to find anyone to deliver it to.

"Two major peaks in the numbers of recorded 'juvenile nuisance' incidents within the area occur annually around the Easter holiday and Bonfire Night Period"

## A TARGETED RESPONSE

In the early days of the YSU's work the responses were focused squarely on the traditional policing methods. Briefly these were:

- *INTRUSION UNDECLARED* - Overt uniform presence in an area where a target group congregate. Stand, watch and listen without declaring the background reasons for patrol in the area.
- *INTRUSION DECLARED* - Approach an identified group; engage them in discussion around the reasons for intrusion. Outline what would be required to make their behaviour more acceptable.
- *OBSERVATIONS, FOOT OR VEHICLE* - Covert during times of activity. Using video or still cameras gather evidence of anti social behaviour to show to parents or use at court to prove offences.
- *OBSERVATIONS FROM PREMISES* - Covert observations from premises for evidence gathering. Used mainly where criminal offences are the major complaint.

Coupled with this was a system of warnings administered orally and later in writing to the young person's parents and ultimately the council neighbour nuisance department should the behaviour continuing.

Other tactics employed relied on importing specialist departments. Not only Police departments such as mounted officers, off road motor cycle units or specials, but other resources: e.g.:

- Bus companies that could re-site bus shelters used as meeting places;
- Council engineers to alter the geography of 'rat runs' or raise low walls;
- Park Rangers to help Police open spaces;
- Voluntary groups, such as the Portman Group to educate about alcohol.

All these tactics whilst effective in the short term they contributed little towards the longer-term objectives of the unit. Displacement was still a factor in the ongoing analysis. A new idea and some lateral thinking were required.

Activity	Number
Names and addresses taken	5,590
Warning letters sent	1,761
Arrests	50
Cautions	41
Summons	21
Alcohol Seizures	109 litres (435 seizures)

**Fig: 2 Recorded activity of the YSU November 1995 to May 1998**

The Youth Pod Scheme was seen by PC Hague as the solution to the problem. Young people when asked expressed a desire for nothing more than 'somewhere to hang out'. They wanted something local as they didn't want to travel far and they wanted something quickly.

The Pod was a movable cabin that could be deposited from a flat wagon straight into the areas of greatest need. Developing the idea of movable police stations placed at major incidents the 20-ft by 8 ft anti vandalsteel galvanised units can be easily sited in the hot spots. The Pod immediately provided a base for the youth workers to act as a conduit between young people and the services that are best placed to provide a service.

The Pod was quickly recognised as a good medium term solution and for the first time the YSU began to address the underlying conditions that precipitated the problem. The scheme was an effective precursor to long term main stream provision and quickly became the primary tool for intervention in areas experiencing youth nuisance. The scheme offered an opportunity to provide diversion ahead of enforcement and was designed to allow young people to communicate effectively with their service providers.

In practice the pod is placed in the target area for a 4 to 6 week period. The unit is large enough to accommodate about 20 people and acts as a focal point to draw young people away from areas of friction. In addition the activity in and around the Pod is monitored by both Police and the youth service.

Month	Site	Affect on Juvenile
		Nuisance calls
April 1997	Site 1	27% decrease in calls
	Site 2	38% decrease in calls
May 1997	Site 3	47% decrease in calls
	Site 4	32% decrease in calls
June 1997	Site 5	40% decrease in calls
	Site 6	46% decrease in calls
July 1997	Site 7	30% decrease in calls
	Site 8	40% decrease in calls

Fig: 3 Number of 'juvenile nuisance' calls within 1/2 mile radius whilst pod on site

In every case the response is determined by thorough analysis of the problem. If alcohol is brought to the Pod then the youth leaders know the YSU will respond in an **appropriate** way. This may be by way of explanation of the rules, confiscation of intoxicants or even prosecution; all options are considered. The question of inter-gang rivalry has been addressed not by banning or arresting them for public order offences but by gaining agreement that one group will have access on a particular night and stay away on another thus each district 'gang' has is treated equally and fairly. The constant three-way communication between the YSU officers, youth leaders and local authority managers ensures constant review and the establishment of a Pod steering group has further enhanced the review mechanisms.

"I like coming to the Pod because it's warm and we can meet up with our friends, draw or play games or go on trips".

Police effort is concentrated in the area whilst the Pod is in place with close scrutiny of incident data and community feedback. The initial response from young people was positive and this message was reinforced by the surprising drops in complaint calls. All areas experienced significant drops far and above what had been expected. Figures from 1998 show decreases of between 13% and 64% in the areas Pods have been placed.

The initial pilot project went well and joint funding between the local council and the Police ensured the project would continue for at least another year.

There were however some difficulties. Some tension was experienced in the early days as youth workers responsible for manning the Pods felt they had not been sufficiently involved in the early development of the initiative, there were also distinct differences in what the two services saw as measures of success. The youth service seeing themselves as an education service, the Police measuring the reduction of incident numbers.

The scheme was intended as a medium term solution but was seen by some as a long-term solution. Difficulties arose when the Pod was removed after its allotted 3-month stay. Young people complained bitterly when they were removed without any idea about what if anything would replace the unit. Problems with siting the units close to power supplies yet away from residential areas were experienced. During the winter months youth workers were working in cold conditions and in some cases feeling vulnerable and isolated.

Some of the difficulty lay in the councils reluctance to speedily commit funds to long term provision. This was seen as something that could be subjected to very little influence from a Police point of view and so the response was to devise a model process that would formalise a directed set of activities to combat the problems.

These activities would ensure:

- Proper consultation regarding the siting of the Pod;
- Ensure the completion of Health and Safety checks and risk assessment;
- Identify staffing and opening times;
- Publicity and neighbourhood consultation;
- Initial outreach work to inform young people;
- Police liaison;
- Open the Pod and carry out questionnaires;
- Exit strategy;
  - Inform young people of other facilities in the area,
  - Introduce young people to ongoing outreach work,
  - Wind **down week**,
  - **Close Pod.**

## A MEASURE OF SUCCESS

Two years soon went by and the 'so what' question was being asked by Police managers. All that had been produced to that point were figures reflecting the drop in incident calls at specific locations for the period. These although useful to the Police service did not fully examine and measure any outcomes relating to the original key objectives.

Revisiting the key objectives of the unit:

- Reducing the risk of young people becoming involved in criminality.
- Responding to the public demand to deal with youth related incidents;
- Acknowledging the effect on public satisfaction with Police performance.

It was no easy task for untrained Police Officers to properly measure the outcomes resulting from all the output.

The idea of detailed evaluation was seen as important to the force as a whole and money from central budget was allocated to enable an independent study to take place. Crime Concern were commissioned and in early 1998 completed the 5 month project. The result was a 50 page document which detailed:

- The nature of youth problems;  
The Tameside youth strategy;
- Incident data;
- Views of young people;  
Views of parents;
- Views of local residents;
- Conclusions;  
Recommendations.

On the whole the evaluation saw the work of the YSU as very positive. The main success highlighted was the development of the inter agency working relationships which had permitted the continued progress towards the objectives. The report listed 42 recommendations and identified gaps, which pointed to how the YSU could develop the project.

"Parents and young people considered that the YSU officers treated young people more fairly than uniformed officers".

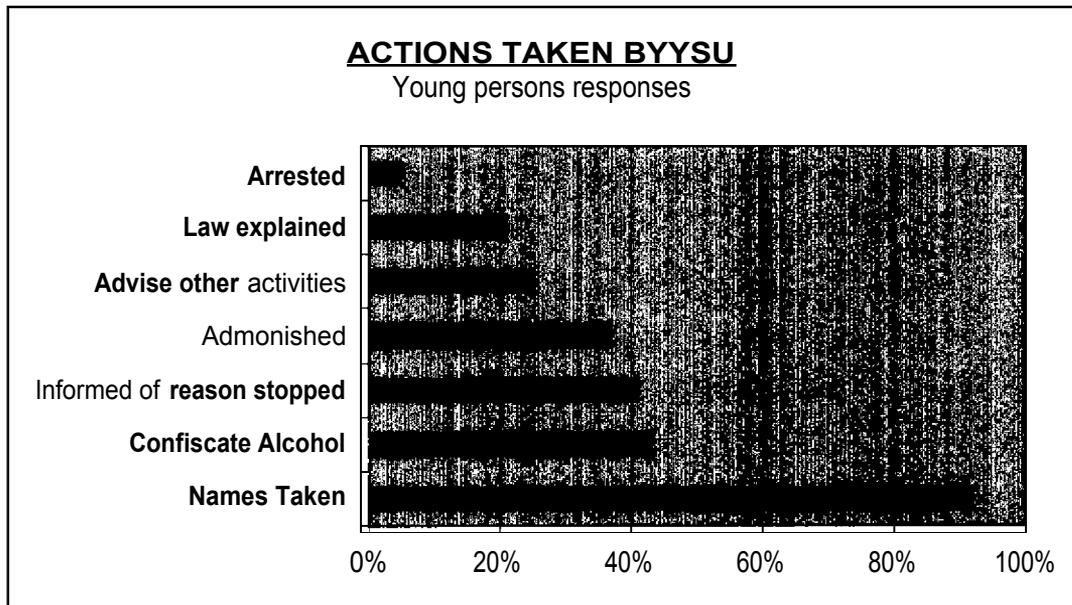


Fig: 4 Actions taken by the YSU officers according to the young people that responded to the survey.

The major shift came with the realisation that the work done so far, particularly the Youth Pod Scheme had been conducted within a POPS model. The report identified this fact as a whole. This has been done along with modifications to IT support, reworking the internal information systems and warning letters, standardising terminology and linking the work more closely with school liaison activity.

There were some recommendations that were not taken up. The idea that some form of youth work training for police officers would enable them to play a more active part in the running of the Pod was resisted as this was seen as a youth service activity and not something police resources could be committed to. The report also highlighted some changes to be made a force level to allow better dissemination of good practice.

It is currently 12 months on from the publication of the research material and owing to the changes made the Youth Pod Scheme has **developed** to its current level of 8 units staffed by 24 youth workers. This represents a solid financial commitment from the local authority and is gradually leading towards permanent youth provision in more areas.

"The development of strong links with the local authority has been one of the outstanding successes of the Tameside initiative "

## CLOSE

The tried and tested work of the Pods has been continually promoted throughout the Borough of Tameside. Each District Assembly now has access to its own unit and the promotional information has been distributed far and wide. A colour brochure is sent to enquiring police forces and visiting officers are taken out to see working units in situ. What has happened since the publication of the Crime and Disorder Strategy is an interesting manifestation. Moves are afoot to widen the consultation audience when deciding on placement of Pods and as yet unresolved the management of this area will have to be handled carefully if the project is to stay within its original objectives.

What has been the most positive outcome is the mainstream provision that has been established. Most recently a new youth centre has been opened not 50 metres from where a Pod stood only 6 months ago. Using the ground rules from the Pod, and to prevent territorial conflict, the centre opens on different nights for different geographical areas.

There is no doubt that a medium sized oak tree is now growing in Tameside but what is certain is that without the POPS model the project will not continue to grow as it has nor could it have achieved so much.

**END**

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