

OPERATION CRYSTAL CLEAR

IN AN EFFORT TO REDUCE GLASS RELATED STREET VIOLENCE, THE MESSAGE REMAINS 'CRYSTAL CLEAR'

MERSEYSIDE POLICE, ST. ANNE STREET POLICE STATION, ENGLAND, 2001

SUMMARY:

1997 Police from St. Anne Street Police Station which covers Liverpool City Centre, Merseyside Police became increasingly aware that the number of glass related injuries occurring on the Streets of the City was increasing.

Analysis showed that for a 6 week period over the Summer of 1997 of 31 serious assaults 15 or nearly half involved the use of a bottle or glass. This could be attributable to the ever increasing number of licensed premises outlets opening up across the City at this and also the social culture to drink from bottles rather than the traditional glass.

As a result of this the Police launched Operation Crystal, which was a Police initiative designed to stop bottles and glasses being removed from licensed premises by use of Police notices and to put extra Police Officers in areas designated defined as 'Hot Spots' where it had been established that incidents involving bottles and glasses were more likely to occur i.e. Mathew Street between 1.30 a.m. and 2.30 a.m. Saturday and Sunday mornings.

Although successful the operations were costly and manpower intensive. Therefore a multi agency panel was established with Liverpool Health Authority, Liverpool City Council, Liverpool Vision and the Brewers and Licensed Retailers Association. Through generating their own funding of £20,000 they launched an initial Crystal Clear in the Summer of 1999, which was co-ordinated by a National Health awareness Company HIT.

Because of HIT's Social Marketing experience the campaign was extremely effective and independent evaluation of the campaign showed that admissions into the main hospital that covers Liverpool City Centre were reduced by over 50% during and after the campaign. Hospital admission figures being a better source of the true extent of the problem than Police recorded crime.

From Crystal Clear a brand new piece of legislation in the form of a bye law was introduced that gives Police Officers powers to seize open bottles and glasses from any person walking around the City Centre carrying them. This now means that Liverpool officially has one of the lowest crime rates of any metropolitan City in the Country with the total number of reported crimes in the City now decreasing (Liverpool's Community Safety Partnership citysafe Annual report 2000-2001). The Message remains Crystal Clear.

SCANNING

In 1997 Police Officers from St. Anne Street Police Station, Merseyside Police including myself, who are responsible for policing Liverpool City Centre became increasingly aware of the rising number of violent assaults taking place in and around licensed premises within the City Centre which involved the use of bottles and/or glasses.

An analysis of the crime figures for the City Centre foot beats for a 6 week period during the Summer of 1997 from 01/07/97 to 20/08/97 showed:

- Violent crimes 93
- Serious assaults 31
- Bottles/Glasses used 15

These figures show that at this stage nearly 50% of all serious assaults within the City Centre involved the use of bottles and/or glasses.

These increasing numbers could be easily attributable to a number of factors. Firstly the steady increase in the number of licensed outlets opening within the City Centre and secondly the social culture to drink from a bottle. Interlink these 2 factors and you have large groups of people moving from one new venue to another carrying the latest designer drink in a bottle.

Inevitably tensions rise fuelled by drink, and fights and disturbances occur. The fact that these people may be carrying a bottle or glass turns a fist fight into a potentially serious wounding.

Further analysis of the problem showed that the majority of these type of incidents and assaults were occurring at specific locations during speck times i.e. Mathew Street between 1.30 p.m. and 2.30 a.m. on a Saturday night/Sunday morning. We termed these areas and times 'Hot Spots'.

Objective

This problem of glass related injuries was flagged up at the Area Tasking & Coordinating Group, of which I was a member.

Through the Group an Area Goal was established:

- "To Substantially Reduce Violent Crime Within the City Centre Involving Persons Leaving or Having Left Licensed Premises With Either A Bottle Or Glass: Which are then Used as a Weapon in Assaults, Particularly During 'Hot Spot' Times and Places."

Method and Approach

It was agreed to implement a series of late night initiatives named Operation Crystal to achieve the objective.

This involved:

- Placing large numbers of Police Officers in the Hot Spots, stopping people with bottles/glasses and taking them off them.
- Police warning notices inside all City Centre licensed premises, asking people not to take bottles and glasses from the premises.
- More Pro-Active use of City C.C.T.V. systems during the Hot Spot periods.
- Press and Media attention to the problem.

Results

3 initial Operation Crystal campaigns were run over Summer 1997, Christmas 1997 and Summer 1998. When it can be clearly seen that reported crime figures from those periods were substantially reduced compared to times when the campaigns were not running.

During this period the Police City Centre Licensing Office had made a presentation to the Licensing Sub Committee of Liverpool City

Council, recommending that it become a new condition on all Public Entertainment Licences within the City that licensees should be made responsible to stop bottles and glasses being removed from their premises. This was agreed by the Committee and the condition was implemented on all PELs.

Evaluation

From the results it could be seen that the Operation Crystal idea was a huge success and was showing significant reductions in recorded crime figures.

However it was also obvious that this type of Police operation had a number of flaws and drawbacks:

- It was labour and manpower intensive
- It was costly in Police resources
- Did Officers removing bottles/ glasses from people have lawful authority to do so?
- Without lawful authority it was confrontational

It was obvious that as successful as it was, Operation Crystal in its present format was not a long term achievable strategy. A new solution based on the existing was needed.

ANALYSIS

Based on the figures and general success and positive feed back from the licensees and door staff. I set about evolving a long term sustainable solution to glass related injuries. Bearing in mind the Crime & Disorder Act 1998 certain questions could be asked:

- Was this just a Police problem?
- Could other agencies have some positive input?

With these questions in mind a meeting was arranged at St. Anne Street Police Station and the following agencies were invited:

- Liverpool Health Authority
- Liverpool City Council
- Liverpool City Partnership (now Liverpool Vision)
- Merseyside and Cheshire Alcohol Services
- North West Brewers and Licensed Retailers Association
- CID and Licensing Police Officers

It was obvious from the very first meeting that glass related injuries are not just a problem to the Police Service. It had always been acknowledged by the Police that one of the aims of Operation Crystal was not just to reduce glass related injuries because of the quantity of that type of crime but also because of the mental stress and trauma association with that type of injury that can physically and mentally change a person's life forever.

This was even more evident when discussed with the Local Health Authority. The cost to the Health Service when dealing with such cases is in fact immeasurable when you take into account such things as: Ambulance, x-rays, triage staff, pharmacy, hospital doctors, plastic surgery, social work, counseling and after care, alcohol specialist nurse, follow up outpatients services, Police liaison, Support and clerical staff, and more.

Figures from the Home Office in 1999 showed that 125,000 facial injuries a year are sustained in violent circumstances - in 61% of cases either assailant or victim have been drinking.

These are figures that persuaded the Secretary of the North West Brewers and Licensed Retailers Association to take an active part on the panel.

This was a major coup for the creditability of the group to have a trade representative on the panel. Immediately it stops any campaigns from declared authoritarian or 'Big Brother'. Suddenly the trade realise that there is a problem that if not addressed could have a negative impact on their trade.

Add to this that in 1997 the total cost of hospital services to the National Health Service was £23.4 Billion; whilst total consumer expenditure on alcoholic drinks for the same year was £29.1 Billion (Lyn McIver LHA 2001)

In some small way the drinks trade could be said to be supporting the Authorities in reducing alcohol related crime.

Home Office Figures compiled by Professor Jonathan Shepherd from Cardiff Violence Prevention Group showed that only 25% of those violent offences resulting in NHS treatment are recorded by the Police. Only 10% of assaults in licensed premises *which* resulted in NHS treatment are recorded by the Police. 30% of those injured in assaults who receive NHS treatment develop serious psychological problems.

It can be clearly seen that in dealing with recorded alcohol related crime the Police are only dealing with the 'Tip of the Iceberg'.

Liverpool Vision are an organisation set up by the current Liverpool Council to promote the positive aspects of Liverpool, particularly the City Centre.

Objective

Having established the panel the objective was easy. Based on the Police success of Operation Crystal it was to maintain the significant reductions seen during the Police operations into a more long term sustainable strategy and solution, which is an answer to the question raised in the Home Office publication, 'Alcohol and Crime: Taking stock' (Ann Deehan 1999)

What makes a successful alcohol-related crime reduction initiative? Answer: Sustainability.

RESPONSE

It was generally agreed that up to this point the majority if not all the licensees and door staff in the City were aware of the objectives of the Police operation to try and stop bottles and glasses being taken out onto the streets.

The way forward now was to have a major launch and a media and public intensive campaign to raise the public awareness of the problem.

In order to do so 2 important hurdles had to be cleared. Firstly there were financial implications and secondly any campaign would have to have 'street creditability' to appeal and be noticed by the target group.

I became chair of the steering group and I opened a sponsorship account with the Force's financial unit.

Initial funding was raised by various members of the panel which included:

- £3,000 Liverpool Health Authority
- £1,000 Merseyside and Cheshire Alcohol Services
- £6,000 Bass Brewers
- £10,000 Safer Merseyside Partnership

The funding from Safer Merseyside Partnership included £3,000 which was for Liverpool University to independently evaluate any campaign that was run.

Having cleared the first hurdle the second was to make the campaign 'street cred'. This was done by employing HIT. Which is not an acronym, but is a Nationally recognised health awareness company that specialise in drug awareness and health campaigns.

Through their proven record HIT could make any campaign instantly recognisable and noticeable to the target group, which had been

identified as predominately male, under 25 years, single. This profile coincidentally can be applied to either the victim or perpetrator.

That keen to be part of the campaign and acknowledging its potential HIT agreed to co-ordinate the campaign free of charge.

It was agreed by the panel that an 8 week Summer public awareness campaign would be run in Liverpool City Centre launched from the trendy Metz Bar in Liverpool's Cavern Quarter, Mathew Street on 1ST June 1999. The campaign was to be launched under the banner 'The Message is Crystal Clear' to give it a more recognisable name and move away from an obviously Police jargon title in Operation Crystal.

The campaign would take the format of:

- Posters - 4 different images inside licensed premises, youth clubs, doctors waiting rooms
- Adverts on Liverpool's independent radio station Radio City
- Beer mats
- T - Shirts
- Taxi and Bus advertising
- Information leaflets - Appendix 4.
- Billboards in prominent street locations
- Bus stops

Posters and story lines on local soap operas Brookside and Hollyoaks

It was also agreed by the panel that the Police would distribute the campaign materials in and around licensed premises so that the industry knew there was a message attached and they were not just trade promotional packs.

The campaign materials were of a far higher quality than those previously used by the Police.

They had been produced by a local design company called Splinter, who had used images of people actually injured in glass related incidents and also featured Dr. Chris LUKE consultant surgeon from the Royal Liverpool University Hospital.

Also at this stage I was attempting to address the lack of Police powers in taking bottles and glasses from people in the public streets of the City.

I looked at the model standard bye law that had initially been adopted by Coventry in the early 1980's which prohibited the drinking of alcohol in designated areas of the City. It was felt that this was not what Crystal Clear was about. This bye law was introduced in Coventry to try and combat the problem of vagrant drinkers in the City Centre. This was not an aim of Crystal Clear. Crystal Clear is about reducing glass related injuries by preventing bottles and glasses being taken out onto the streets.

Based on this and in accordance with Home Office guidelines for the application of model standard bye laws I prepared a detailed presentation to the Executive Committee of Liverpool City Council.

The presentation received overwhelming cross party support from the City Council and application was made to the Home Office for the granting of a bye law within the City Centre which gave Police Officers powers to seize bottles and glasses which contain or have contained intoxicating liquor.

After careful consideration the Home Office refused the application on the grounds that they believed that there already existed police powers with respect to offensive weapons to deal with the problem and that it may infringe the forthcoming Human Rights legislation.

Disappointed as we were with this decision we did proceed with an application for the existing model standard bye law which prohibited the drinking of alcohol on the streets. This was approved and came into force across the City on 27th March 2000.

However just prior to this date in February 2000, through my association with the North West Brewers and Licensed Retailers Association established with the Crystal Clear campaigns I was invited to a regional seminar at Thwaites Brewery in Blackburn were also present would be the local M.P. for Blackburn the Right Honourable Jack STRAW M.P. Home Secretary.

During the course of the seminar I had chance to raise with the Home Secretary the refusal of the power to seize by law and in particular the reasons for refusal. The Home Secretary then asked me to forward all the relevant information to him via his Constituency. This I did.

After further consideration the Home Secretary contacted me direct informing me that he had instructed the Home Office lawyers to redraft the bye law and invited Liverpool City Council to reapply for the bye law containing the power to seize when it would receive favourable consideration.

This was done and on Friday 14th July 2000 the very first bye law of this nature anywhere in England or Wales came into force within the City Centre of Liverpool.

An offence is only committed by a person if they refuse to dispose of or hand over the container to a Police Officer.

As such I designed a dedicated stand alone bottle bank which has a reduced aperture, which is just big enough to allow bottles or glasses to be deposited in.

I raised funding from Local Brewery Cains for an initial 12 bins to be made and these are now in strategic locations across the City Centre.

ASSESSMENT

The initial Crystal Clear campaign, as stated was independently evaluated by Liverpool University both statistically and using social marketing methods. A detailed evaluation was produced however the most significant item in

the report is a chart showing that during and following the Summer 1999 Crystal Clear campaign the admissions to the Royal Liverpool University Hospital of glass related injuries showed a reduction from nearly 12 per 1000 to a rate of less than 3 sometimes under 2 per 1000.

These figures are extremely encouraging bearing in mind the immense differential between Police recorded figures and Health Service numbers, as previously illustrated.

Such is the impact of Crystal Clear campaigns Merseyside wide, not just in Liverpool City Centre, were run over the Christmas and Millennium period 2000 and again over the last Christmas and New Year Season 2001.

Both North and South Cheshire also run identical Crystal Clear formats identical to the initial Liverpool prototype.

Manchester City Centre in partnership with Greater Manchester Police based their anti binge drinking campaign on the power to seize by law and the social marketing aspects of the original Crystal Clear campaign.

It would also appear that the latest Criminal Justice and Police Act announced in the last Queen's Speech will have a consolidated form of the bye law within it. Were in local authorities will still have to prove a need for the legislation but once granted it may interestingly carry a power of arrest, as opposed to being just summary as the bye law is at present.

Levels of Police recorded glass related incidents on the streets of Liverpool City Centre are now less than 2 per month and such is the overall subliminal message from the campaign then it would appear that even glass related injuries inside licensed premises are reduced, although this is hard to quantify because the number of licensed premises opening up within the City is still increasing.

The best method of actually evaluating the success of the overall campaigns is to walk

around Liverpool City Centre in Police uniform and although there is hardly any person with a bottle or glass when you do see one they try to hide it from you behind their back or under their coat. This speaks volumes for how successful the public awareness side of the campaign works.

In quantitative nature the Crown Prosecution Service in Liverpool are currently prosecuting an offender for breaches of both bye laws, proving that the bye laws are not just a deterrent but are there to be utilised to their full extent if abused.

THE FUTURE

Crystal Clear is now an expected part of Policing what is a vibrant and busy City Centre. Liverpool's initial problems in respect of glass related injuries were no more significant than any other City of its sort in the Country. Yes the idea is to reduce the number of glass related injuries but as previously stated if just 1 injury of this nature is stopped then the associated trauma and effect on that person's life is immeasurable, as is the cost to the public through the Health Service and other public services.

Crystal Clear forms the basis of Merseyside Police's CityBeat and StreetSafe initiatives. Even the Chief Constable takes part in 'High Visibility' weekends when he walks around Liverpool City Centre and takes bottles and glasses from people he sees holding them.

Crystal Clear is part of the Liverpool Drug and Alcohol Action Team's Template plan for 2000/1 as it was for the previous year.

Crystal Clear is part of Liverpool's Community Safety Partnership Citysafe plan and is featured in its latest annual report.

Crystal Clear is on a National Database run by Jane's in respect of good practises for Crime Reduction.

I have been interviewed live on Sky television to discuss the crime reduction values of the power to seize by law.

I was recently asked to deliver a presentation to the Lancashire Community Safety Partners sponsored by the Regional Crime Director, to show how effective multiagency partnerships can be in practise.

I have also recently been contacted by the Social Issues Research Centre, who have been commissioned by the Portman Group to look into Alcohol-Related Disorder and Violence.

Crystal Clear has recently received £40,000 funding from the 4 Health Authorities across the Merseyside Area to fund further campaigns over the next 2 Christmas and New Year periods. This is in obvious response to how much this initiative alone saves the Health Authorities in time and money. This funding is hoping to be matched by funding from the private sector.

In fact it would appear that for the Future "The Message Remains Crystal Clear"

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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