

Tilley Awards 2003

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THRILLSEEKERS CLUB

SUMMARY

The Thrillseekers Club is based in the town of Blairgowrie within Perth and Kinross. The project aims to work in partnership with voluntary, statutory, and private sector partners to provide positive alternatives for young people aged from 12 to 18 years of age (secondary school pupils) within the area.

Blairgowrie, with a population of some 12000 people is situated within a rural area with the major cities of Perth and Dundee, being some 16 miles away. The area also has a number of outlying villages including Alyth and Coupar Angus.

The area itself is very indicative of most rural settings with very little facilities for young people, difficulties with transport networks, and occasional tensions between the younger and older generations. Youth calls within the area were a particular issue, with Friday nights being highlighted as a peak time. The calls included alcohol-related annoyance, vandalism, and anti-social behaviour.

Recent research within the Perth and Kinross area (2002 - Schools survey) around drug and alcohol use amongst under 16's has also shown a higher than national average (Scotland) of illicit drug use and alcohol consumption amongst school pupils in the area. A large part of the problem had been attributed towards a lack of credible, accessible, and affordable alternatives within rural areas, and the fact that younger and older teenagers often mix together within smaller villages so allowing for greater access to 'risk taking' practises for younger children.

The local police in Blairgowrie formed the Thrillseekers club in the first instance, and this led to a much wider and relevant working group.

The working group identified a group of some 70 young risk takers in the area, and after surveying these youngsters it was identified that sport and music based projects may be the best diversionary activities to offer them.

A bid was then submitted to the Scottish Executive's 'Making our Communities safer' awards by the group, and a grant of £17000 per year, for 3 years, was secured. The money has now been used to support music, and sport related activity within Blairgowrie for the target group of 70 youngsters, this running every Friday night from 8 to 10 p.m.

The result has seen a dramatic fall in youth calls on Friday nights when the project runs, with only **two** youth calls being reported anywhere in the area between 8 and 10 p.m. from 24 January, to 25 April, 2003. (a total of 13 Friday nights, this compares with 22 calls in total for the same period the previous year)

DESCRIPTION OF PROJECT

The problems that were apparent in Blairgowrie and its surrounding areas were very similar to those seen across rural areas of Scotland. The area itself was only serviced via bus routes, with services running at regular times, but expensive for young people and their families if they wished to access facilities out with the area. The town has no cinema, ice rink, or any other sporting facility other than a recreation centre, which often caters for more adult led services at night due to demand and cost effectiveness.

The area is well provided for by youth clubs, but these often run on weekdays, are staffed by volunteers, and all would be heavily dependent on additional funding to increase any further provision. The youth clubs would however attract young people who would often not attend normal mainstream provision, and as such were good places to interact and work with young 'risk takers'

After initial **scanning** of the problems inherent within the area, local police also found a familiar pattern of youths causing annoyance calls. Friday nights between the hours of 7 and 10 p.m. showed a greater proportion of calls than at any other point of the week. Young people who had consumed alcohol often fuelled these calls, but others could simply be a group of youngsters meeting at a point to 'hang out'. All these issues required police response, which deferred police away from more important calls.

It was also apparent that these problems were attributable to a lack of any services being offered at these times within the area, and young people not being able to afford travel out with the area to access the cinemas and ice rinks within Dundee and Perth.

The local police in Blairgowrie initially approached the management at the local recreation centre and inquired into the use of the centre to run a diversion project every Friday night. The centre warmed to the idea, as they too could be the target of youth related issues with young people hanging about outside and using the car park as a gathering area.

Liaison Officer Constable Keith Sutherland then approached a number of different partners within the area to look at the formation of a working group to tackle the issues. These Included -

Blairgowrie Youth Club, Coupar Angus Grove (Youth Club), Alyth Youth Partnership, Social Work Department, Community Learning, Perth Connect Project (Drug and Alcohol Service for under 16's), Blairgowrie High School, and private sector including the owner of a local night-club. Each of the partners agreed to come on board and the Thrillseekers Working group was formed.

The working group set themselves some very challenging targets, these included -

- **To reduce youth related calls within the area at peak times on Friday nights.**
- **To provide positive alternatives for young people aged from 12 to 18 years of age at peak times.**
- **To provide a localised approach, that formed a relevant partnership between the police, voluntary, statutory and private sector.**
- **To form and sustain a working group that could manage the Thrillseekers club and sustain funding for the project.**
- **To reduce the fear of youth related crime in the area.**
- **To increase good working relationships between young people and the local police.**

Most of the partners were able to identify young people from their respective areas, who would be classed as 'risk takers' and likely to be involved in trouble at weekends. They then took it upon themselves to consult with the youngsters as to the most appropriate forms of activity, which may divert them away from negative behaviour. The young people were quick to identify sport and music related projects as the most likely things they would become involved in. Issues around transport and affordability were also discussed.

During April, 2002, a bid was submitted by the group, to the Scottish Executives 'Making our Communities Safer Award'. The bid, which looked to secure £51000 over a three-year period, was designed to provide sports activity in the local recreation centre, which would also include staffing and other services, which may have to be bought in. The bid also looked to secure money for a separate music and dance project, which would take place at the local YWCA hall in Blairgowrie.

The funding also looked to secure money for transport, so allowing young people to travel into Blairgowrie from Coupar Angus and Alyth.

The Scottish Executive accepted the bid and Thrillseekers could now swing into action.

The working group agreed to work with private sector providers so a number of taster workshops could firstly be run to 'hook' young people into the concept of the project. Taking the activities identified by the young people into account, the group arranged for localised workshops to run in Alyth, Coupar Angus and Blairgowrie. These included workshops on boxing, dance, and football.

The workshops were all very well attended and details of young people attending were kept so as to identify prospective candidates for the more formalised Thrillseekers Club once it started. The dance workshop, which involved about 25 young people from the three areas, also went on to perform a small show at the Blairgowrie Town Hall which was attended by Primary 7 pupils, with some of the dance based work concentrating on issues such as bullying and drug use.

Finally and on 24 January this year, the Thrillseekers club started officially. The club utilised the Blairgowrie Recreation Centre for sport, and YWCA Hall in Blairgowrie for dance/music. All events run from 8 to 10 p.m. every Friday and young people attending from Alyth and Coupar Angus are provided with free bus travel.

Young people who attended the workshops and others identified by other partners, attended the Friday night sessions, with as many as 79 young people coming along to the Recreation Centre each night, and 25 attending the dance and music project.

Local Liaison Officers from Blairgowrie Police Office have been tasked to attend the sessions when they are on duty and this adds to the developing good relationships between young people and the local police. Agencies have also been invited to attend certain sessions to provide workshops for the young people on issues such as drugs/ alcohol; vandalism and other youth related subjects.

Both the activities within the Recreation Centre, and YWCA, are staffed by professionals such as sports coaches, dance teachers, etc, and further to this staff are also provided by the working group, usually on a voluntary basis thus adding to the localised contribution to the project.

Young people have also developed a cinema club, which runs a bus to Dundee, so young people can watch up to date films. This service is now running once per month on a Saturday. The/

The involvement of young people has also realised the involvement of them on the working group, which meets every month, thus allowing for a young voice to be heard and relevant policy and actions developed.

The project also reflects accreditation and career opportunities for young people with links to Duke of Edinburgh Awards Scheme, Junior Sports Leader Awards, and relevant sports and music related qualifications. One young man from the music/ dance project has already been inspired to go onto a full time college course at Dundee College through his involvement with the project.

HAS THE PROJECT SOLVED THE PROBLEM?

It is interesting to the numbers of youths calls within the Blairgowrie and surrounding areas on Friday nights between 8 and 10 p.m. currently sit at two since the 24 January, 2003, through to 25 April, 2003, (when the current sports phase of the project came to an end.)

The participation of the working group, and it's local bias, has resulted in information about the project and it's aims being fed back to the local communities. It is very evident through the local press (*see attached press cutting*) and general talk in the area that the project has made a definite impact on the area. This has also gone some way to reduce the fear of crime and tensions between younger and older generations.

The project is funded until 31 March, 2005, and the working group has already spoken about the formation of a charitable organisation, which can lead to more opportunities for funding.

The working group now has representation from the young people who take part in the Friday night sessions, with four young people attending regular monthly meetings with the other partners from the working group.

The local police and some of the young 'risk takers' from the local area, have already attended a day's 'team building' day at the Compass Outdoor Centre. This continues to build the good relationships with young people and local police. (Pictures at Appendix B)

CONCLUSIONS AND FUTURE PLANS

At this time it is fair to say that all the objectives are very much on course and careful planning had resulted in a very successful and worthwhile project which is well backed by both the local community and young people themselves.

The fact that only two youth calls have been noted on Fridays between 8 and 10 p.m. since the beginning of the sessions on 24 January, until 25 April, 2003, would suggest that the consultation with young people and targeting of specific 'risk takers' by the working group has worked.

The accreditation elements of the project also provide the opportunity for young 'peer educators' to come through and take responsibility for youth issues within the area.

Plans for the working group will be very much dependent on future funding, but it is hoped that additional money and resources can be found to extend the project to other nights of the week so providing a diversionary tool at various points of the week. This would also allow with flexibility should hotspot times and locations change so services can be moved into areas at short notice. The group is already looking at the formation of a charitable trust, which will allow them greater access to funding opportunities.

The music/ dance project, and youngsters involved in same, are already working towards another show which will raise money for a local charity, whilst other youngsters in the project are also working on a dance/ drama workshop which will tour primary schools with a drug and alcohol awareness message.

Above all the working group are very strong, confident due to early successes and their targets are to continue to monitor relevant youngsters who come through their services that should be encouraged to become involved in the project so diverting them away from negative behaviour.

The involvement of local people, a careful planning structure, consultation with young people, and feedback being given to the local community, has resulted in a project which frees up vital police resources to deal with other forms of crime. It also increases public confidence in the police service and part it has played in creating the Thrillseekers Club.

Also the project has created a framework which can be exported out to other rural areas of the division should the need arise.

I firmly believe that the above project is a very good example of the SARA concept, and I would recommend it you for consideration of the Tilley Awards. If successful it is likely that the project would recommend that at least one of the people who would travel to America to speak at the conference, would be a young person from the project.

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