

Tilley Award 2004

OPPORTUNITY KNOCKS FOR YOUNG PEOPLE
FOREST SCHOOL PROGRAMME

**South Wales Police
and The Safer Neath Port Talbot Community Safety
Partnership**

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SUMMARY

The County Borough of Neath Port Talbot in South Wales has twelve political wards identified as deprived under the Welsh Assembly Governments, Communities First Initiative. This high level of deprivation has a tremendous impact on the levels of youth annoyance and associated crime and disorder in the borough. One of the major concerns for the residents of the borough is anti-social behaviour, and the effect it has on their quality of life.

Analysis of crime and disorder data shows that young people aged 14 to 17 have the highest proportion of offending within the population, and that 10% of offenders are responsible for over half of all offences committed. Home Office research indicated that approximately 60% of those excluded from school become young offenders. The Safer Neath Port Talbot Community Safety Partnership initiated the "Opportunity Knocks For Young People, Forest School Programme", in order to provide effective and long-term sustainable interventions targeted at addressing the behaviour of this core group of young people.

The lead agencies of the scheme, Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council Community Safety Team, South Wales Police and the West Glamorgan Council for Alcohol and Drug Abuse applied to the New Opportunities Fund of the Lottery Board, for a grant of £121,000 to finance the programme over three years. The object of the Forest School programme is to build self-esteem and confidence in young people using the woodland environment as a learning area. On completion it offers formal accreditation, helping towards employment and further education, and continuing support from a specially employed youth worker. The intervention removes motivators of offending behaviour, thereby preventing young people becoming offenders, and turning them away from crime.

Analysis of the initial course outcomes shows that the behaviour of 60% of the young people has improved sufficiently to prevent exclusion from school. Over the three-year period of the initiative this could give a cost efficiency saving of over £1,700,000.

INTRODUCTION

Neath Port Talbot County Borough is situated in South Wales, between the cities of Cardiff and Swansea and forms a Basic Command Unit of South Wales Police. It incorporates the heavy industry of the Corus Steel works in Port Talbot, the major towns of Neath, Port Talbot, Pontardawe and the communities in the Afan, Neath and Dulais Valleys. These valley communities were historically, heavily dependant on the coal mining industry. Since the closure of the mines there has been a rise in social deprivation in the County Borough area.

In 2000, the Welsh Local Government Association commissioned the Oxford University to conduct an analysis of the areas of deprivation within Wales. The levels of deprivation were assessed on the indices of income, employment, health, education, housing, access and child poverty. These were then combined to provide a Multiple Deprivation Index for all electoral wards. The top one hundred of these wards were then selected for focussed intervention under the Welsh Assembly Governments, Communities First Initiative. Neath Port Talbot has twelve wards highlighted by the Multiple Deprivation Index. This has a tremendous impact on the levels of youth annoyance and associated crime and disorder in the borough. As part of the Communities First Initiative, Neath Port Talbot Basic Command unit established in April 2002 a dedicated policing team of four constables under the direction of Sergeant Richard Jackson. They work specifically within these areas of deprivation, to provide Problem Oriented and Intelligence Led sustainable policing interventions. The team works in support of the Safer Neath Port Talbot Community Safety Partnership. The partnership members include representatives of:- Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council, South Wales Police, The Local Health Group, Mid and West Wales Fire Brigade, The Youth Offending Team and other statutory and voluntary agencies.

Scanning

One of the major concerns for the residents of the borough is anti-social behaviour, and the effect it has on their quality of life. Anti-social behaviour accounts for approximately 25% of the incidents reported to police, which has a considerable impact on police resources.

The British Crime Survey 2002/3, examined the perceptions of, and concern about, crime and disorder in England and Wales. It found that "There was a small but significant rise in the

proportions of people considering teenagers hanging around, rubbish or litter lying around, and people being drunk or rowdy in public places, being a fairly or fairly big problem.” See Figure 1.

Figure 1. Fear of Crime, anti-social behaviour and disorder.

	2001/02	2002/03
Teenagers hanging around the streets	32%	33%
Vandalism, graffiti and other deliberate damage to property	34%	35%
People being drunk or rowdy in public places	22%	23%

Source - British Crime Survey 2002/3

Analysis

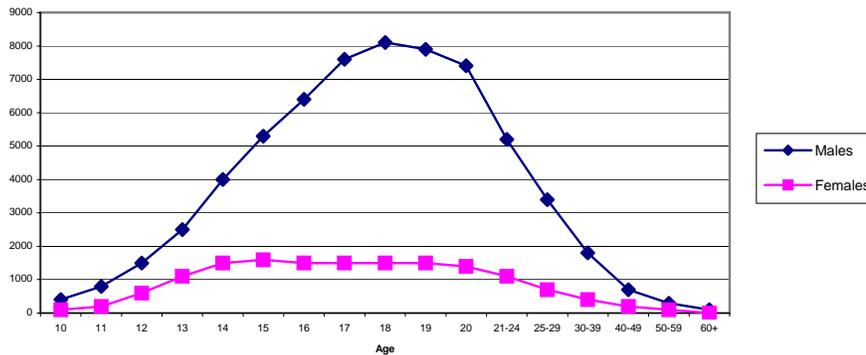
In 1999 the Crime and Criminal Justice Unit of the Home Office, Research Development and Statistics Directorate published the report “Aspects of Crime: Young Offenders”. This document collated self-reported and official statistics for offending in young people aged between 10 and 17. The sources for this data included the Youth Lifestyles’ Survey 1998/99, The 1998 British Crime Survey and Criminal Statistics 1999.

The Youth Lifestyles’ Survey indicated, “A minority of the sample was responsible for a disproportionately large proportion of the offences committed. Approximately 10% of offenders were responsible for nearly half of the offences admitted. These very prolific offenders represented 2% of men and less than 1% of women in the full sample.”

The report made a comparison between the results of the 1992/3 and the 1998/9 Youth Lifestyles’ Surveys. This highlighted a significant increase of 14% in the proportion of 14 – 17 year old males admitting to committing an offence.

Of the known offenders, the report identified a peak age of offending for males as 18 (8,100 offenders per 100,000 of the population) and for females as 15 (1,600 offenders per 100,000 of the population). See Figure 2.

Figure 2. The number of young people per 100,000 of the population found guilty or cautioned, 1999 (indictable offences only)



Source - "Aspects of Crime : Young Offenders 1999", Home Office.

In view of this data it was vital that the Safer Neath Port Talbot Community Safety Partnership devise innovative, effective and long term sustainable interventions targeted at addressing the behaviour of this core group of young people. From this base the Forest School Programme was initiated.

BACKGROUND

In 2002 the head of the Community Safety team of Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council, Mrs Jayne Griffiths, attended a meeting with Mrs Jane Davidson the Education Minister for the Welsh Assembly Government. This meeting included a discussion on the "Forest Schools" scheme. Mrs Griffiths immediately saw the value of developing a scheme based on the Forest School ethos. A meeting was held with representatives from the following agencies:-

- Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council Community Safety Team.
- West Glamorgan Council for Alcohol and Drug Abuse.
- South Wales Police.
- Mid and West Wales Fire Brigade.
- The Duke of Edinburgh Scheme.
- Forest Enterprise Wales.
- The Youth Offending Team.
- Educational Welfare.

This working party agreed that there was a need for a multi-agency, partnership based, structured diversionary intervention. This intervention should be targeted at young people aged between 14 – 18 years, who are non-achievers due to their irregular school attendance, and display anti-social, disruptive behaviour in the community.

It was felt that devising a coherent intervention and support facility for the target group of individuals at an early stage, would have the following benefits:-

- Offer specialist support and advice on accessing vocational education and training opportunities as well as giving advice on issues such as substance misuse, sexual health, budgeting, housing support and health promotion.
- Provide a cost efficiency saving by preventing future reactive expenditure by the statutory authorities in dealing with the causes of the individuals anti-social and criminal behaviour.
- Reduce the impact of these individuals on the quality of life of the residents living in their communities at the earliest possible opportunity.

A bid for funding for the initiative was put forward to the New Opportunities Fund of the Lottery Board, following selection by the Young Peoples Partnership in Neath Port Talbot. A grant was subsequently given of £121,000. This was then apportioned with £30,000 to be used to fund the Forest Schools Programme over three years, and the remaining £91,000 for the West Glamorgan Council for Alcohol and Drug Abuse to employ a youth worker. This person would work specifically with the forest schools programme and provide the follow up support for the young peoples education, training employment and substance misuse needs. The inclusion of this role would guarantee the sustainability of support to the young people, and ensure the overall long-term success of the initiative. Sergeant Jackson, Pc Andy Davies and Pc Simon Merrick of the Communities First Policing Team, and representatives of each of the partner agencies undertook to provide staffing assistance in running the Forest School courses. This two-tier initiative called “Opportunity Knocks for young people, Forest School Programme” was developed to provide a Problem Solving approach to establishing a sustainable long-term solution to effectively deal with the target group of young people.

What Is Forest School?

Forest Schools originated in Scandinavia in the 1950s when a retired soldier started to teach children about the natural world through songs, stories and hands on experiences. By the 1980s it became an integral part of the Danish early years programme.

In 1995 a group of Nursery Nursing students visiting Denmark witnessed the benefits of Forest School for themselves and brought the idea back to the United Kingdom. This system was further developed by Bridgwater College at their Early Years Centre. Individuals within the Forest School environment were encouraged to learn the boundaries of acceptable behaviour, both physical and social, and thereby grow enormously in confidence and independence. The learning style of each participant is identified and activities are tailored to suit the individual. Using the outdoor environment, participants are encouraged and supported to grow in confidence, independence and self-esteem through the mastery of small achievable tasks. As the participant grows in self-esteem and confidence, the challenges become more complex.

“At the heart of this (Forest) School is an approach to learning which fosters the development of probably the most powerful and long term attribute that can be given at any age. That is a sense of self worth, self-confidence and emotional well-being. I have seen children and adults transformed by the work of the Forest School...”

Professor Christine Pascal BA, MSocSc, PhD, FRSA, University College of Worcester.

RESPONSE

Objectives Of The Project

The objective of the project was to devise a structured response, targeted at specific high-risk individuals living within the communities of Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council, based on the principles of the Forest School ethos. This intervention must be tailored to meet the needs of the young people, and provide a long-term sustainable improvement in their behaviour, thereby reducing their impact on the quality of life of members of the community. This initiative supports the achievement of five of the seven Action Plans proposed in the Neath Port Talbot Crime and Disorder Strategy Document 2002 – 2005.

These are:-

- Aim 1 – Tackling Anti-Social behaviour.

- Aim 2 – Reducing youth crime and disorder.
- Aim 3 – Tackling drug and alcohol misuse.
- Aim 4 – Reducing recorded crime and the fear of crime.
- Aim 5 – Improving the effectiveness of the partnership.

Identification Of The Young People

The working party invited referrals of individuals to be placed on the initial phase of the scheme from the five secondary schools in Port Talbot, from the Youth Offending Team and from West Glamorgan Council for Alcohol and Drugs Abuse. The nominees were required to fit the criteria of the target group, and must have voluntarily agreed to attend the scheme.

The rationale behind placing the young people into the forest environment is to break their existing social interaction and place them into a different environment, thereby severing the cycle of unacceptable behaviour.

A total of twelve nominations for the first course were received by the beginning of September 2003. Most have a record of underachievement, a sense of low self-esteem and have little or no parental guidance. Peer pressure and their own low self-expectations encourages them to behave in an anti-social manner.

Forest Schools Course

The forest school programme is designed to run three courses per academic year over a three-year period. Each course could facilitate between ten and twelve students. The duration of the forest school is one day a week over a ten-week period during normal school time. This would offer the course to a minimum of ninety young people from the target group, from the existing funding stream.

The object of the course is to build self-esteem and confidence in young people using the woodland environment as a learning area. Through this they raise their self worth and responsibility, engage in team working, gain respect for others and the environment, develop motivation and a sense of achievement. The students can also gain a qualification in Forest School (Open College Network Level 1 in Forest School) and the Duke of Edinburgh Bronze Award providing they attend all ten sessions. This provides a tangible recognition of the

young person's efforts and achievements, which can help towards employment or further education opportunities.

The Forest Education Ranger from Forest Enterprise Wales based at Afan Argoed Country Park devised the ten-week programme for the course. The emphasis on the course was to start with small achievable individual tasks. Once these had been learnt and mastered, and praise given, the difficulty and complexity of the tasks was increased. This progression is designed to foster team working and leadership skills in the young people.

The devised programme was carried out as follows-

Week 1 – Teambuilding and Brief.

The group of young people was brought together for the first time. They did not know each other at all. This immediately broke any possibility of peer pressure on their behaviour and attitude to the course. They were all in the same situation, of being in a new environment and being unsure of the expectations, which were going to be placed upon them. This gave the group a common base and encouraged the fostering of a basic team attitude towards each other. Initial introductions were carried out from both the young people and the staff / helpers which were drawn from all of the working party agencies. First names were used and those adults from services which usually wore uniforms, were in casual clothing, in order to prevent any initial barriers to communication. A full explanation of the course content was given to the young people. A discussion on the following ten weeks activities was carried out, and information given about the achievement of recognised vocational awards on completion of the course, and the continuing support offered thereafter by the youth worker. The needs, concerns and fears of the young people were addressed, and the expectations of the helpers were made clear.

The most important session of this initial day was to set the boundaries for behaviour. There were certain rules, which were given to the participants, such as no alcohol, or drugs may be taken prior to, or during the workshops. The rationale for this was that they would be using tools, which if handled inappropriately could cause serious injury to themselves and others. This was readily accepted by the group as reasonable. The young people were also told that the staff had the ultimate power to prevent their continued attendance on the course, should their behaviour be considered sufficiently disruptive to the enjoyment and learning

opportunities of the other students. This would however, be a last resort and support and guidance would be offered to prevent exclusion. The students were then asked to draw up a list of rules for behaviour which they felt were acceptable whilst on the course. With only slight modifications both the group and the staff accepted these. The setting of student led boundaries meant that the young people had employed their own reasoning for setting the rules. They would therefore be more likely to abide by them, rather than regulations imposed by others, which they traditionally would resist against.

Week 2 – Firelighting and Fuel.

The students were taken into the forest school site within the Afan Forest, and shown the area which had been set-aside for their use during the course. This was going to be “their camp”. They were told that the area was for their exclusive use, which was designed to foster a sense of ownership and responsibility for it. They were given a full Health and Safety briefing regarding the environment, and introduced to the tools, which they would be given, and provided full instruction on their use and dangers.

The group was shown how to gather the necessary fuel for a fire, and how to light it safely. They were then split into groups, assigned an adult helper, and given a time limit within which to achieve the task of lighting their own fire. This was their first introduction to basic team working. All the groups managed to light the fire, with differing levels of assistance. This was their first major achievement, with a visual and warming outcome. This immediately generated interest in the course from the young people as they had achieved something, which the majority felt they would be unable to do.



Firelighting.

Week 3 – Shelter and Campcraft.

The group was shown how to make a shelter from materials found in the forest. They were then informed that they were going to build one of their own, and that they were going to sleep in it in week nine, when they would be spending the entire night in the forest.

They were given the choice of where in the camp they would build their shelter and whether it would be built individually or in small groups. The full construction of the shelters would be carried out over the following five weeks. This introduced a long-term goal, the necessity to work with, and for others, and the realisation that their future comfort depended on their efforts.

Week 4 – Mallet and Stool Making.

A professional wood carver was brought into the camp for the day. The young people cut down a tree and were shown how to make a mallet, using basic tools and a lathe. Within three hours all of the students had produced a tool, which was of sufficient quality for them to use in the construction of their shelters. In the afternoon they constructed a small stool using similar techniques. This they were allowed to take home. For the majority of the young people this was the first thing they had ever made with their own hands. The sense of achievement for the individuals was tremendous.

Week 5 – Advanced Team Building.

This week the group was introduced to advanced team-building exercises. These included a race between teams standing on two planks, and stretcher exercises. The young people were forced to act as a team, and work for each other in order to achieve the completion of the task. The introduction of low-level competition between the teams demanded the full participation of each individual in order not to let the team fail.

The benefits of working together, the sense of achievement, and recognition of effort and praise from within the peer group was now having a dramatic effect on the outlook and behaviour of the majority of the young people within the group.

Week 6 – Food on the Fire.

The group was introduced to “Kelly Kettles” and shown how to boil water and cook on an open fire in the forest safely. They were split into groups and given the task of lighting a fire and boiling water to make a hot drink.

Having made their own fire, boiled the water and cooked their food they were then allowed to consume what they had made. This re-enforced the benefits of team effort, and working together.

Week 7 – Advanced Campcraft.

The young people were encouraged to further develop their shelters and were introduced to basic conservation issues within the forest. They were given a basic understanding of the importance of forest management, the benefits to them as local residents, and to jobs and employment. The issues of forest and vehicle arson were discussed, and the damage caused by anti-social use of off road motorcycles. By this time, the young people had developed a sense of ownership of the forest, and therefore were much more receptive to these issues being raised and discussed.

Week 8 - Advanced Campcraft / Bushcraft.

The finishing touches were made to the shelters and the camp, in readiness for the sleepover to take place the following week.

Week 9 – Sleepover.

This was probably the most enjoyable session of the course for the young people, and the staff. The group entered the camp in the early evening, and set up their sleeping bags and other equipment in their shelters. They cooked their evening meal and made a hot drink as darkness fell.

Following this, the group was lead on a two hour walk through the forest in the darkness. This introduced a whole new perspective of the forest to the young people. The importance of teamwork, sticking together as a group and taking responsibility for the safety and welfare of

others became apparent. This ownership of the groups well-being encouraged all of the individuals to behave in a much more adult way.

Week 10 – Conclusion.

The final week consisted of a feedback session between the students and staff. Strong relationships had been developed between the adults and the young people. The adults had become significant others to the young people, and the barriers of occupation and authority had been replaced with a respect for the individual and an understanding of differing perspectives.

The day concluded with the presentation of certificates to each of the students for the successful completion of the course and part achievement of the Duke of Edinburgh Bronze Award.

ASSESSMENT

The Forest School Programme is directed specifically at changing patterns of behaviour, enhancing the individual's future opportunities for employment, and effective participation within the community. This targeted early intervention will prevent future crime and disorder and the associated costs for the partner agencies.

Quantitative and qualitative assessment has been made on the first cohort of young people to participate in the scheme. This was carried out through seeking feedback from the young people and the referring agencies.

Quantitative Assessment

Of the twelve students placed on the initial course, ten managed to fully complete it. All of the students were at risk of exclusion from mainstream education prior to attendance on the scheme. The Social Exclusion Unit of the Home Office places an average cost of exclusion at £8000, per student. Additionally, Home Office research suggests, "Around sixty percent of those excluded from school go on to become young offenders".¹ The National Association for

¹ Source, www.socialexclusionunit.gov.uk/publications Report of The Social Exclusion Unit of the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, Policy Action Team 12: Young People, National Strategy For Neighbourhood Renewal.

the Care and Resettlement of Offenders (N.A.C.R.O.) places an additional cost of £52,000² in responding to the behaviour of a young offender. This figure is made up of prosecution, incarceration and supervision costs, as well as family intervention and care. Analysis of responses from the referring agencies reveals that the Forest School has had a positive effect on the behaviour of six of the ten students completing the course. Using the Home Office figures this has prevented a potential exclusion cost of £48,000 (6 students X £8,000 = £48,000). By further applying the N.A.C.R.O. data and assuming only 50% of this group would have become young offenders, an additional saving of £156,000 can be assumed (3 X £52,000 = £156,000). This provides a potential cost saving of one course of £204,000. Through applying these conservative estimates to all nine scheduled courses, a net cost efficiency saving of **£1,700,000** (£204,000 X 9 = £1,836,000 less £121,000 initial grant = £1,715,000) under the Forest Schools Programme can be evidenced.

Qualitative Assessment

The young people all stated they enjoyed their participation in the course, and felt that it had improved their ability to work with others, take responsibility for their actions and have increased awareness of the impact their behaviour has on others.

The referring agencies stated they had seen a direct improvement in the behaviour and attitude of over fifty percent of those attending the course, and all of them were deemed to have benefited. One student was being banned from a local youth initiative on a weekly basis. Since attendance on the scheme he has displayed none of the behaviour which lead to the bans, and has not received any further exclusion.

Feedback comments included:-

“Student has taken on a much more relaxed and mature approach to working with myself and other people”

“Student has more confidence and is more tolerant of other people”

² Source, National Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders report Wasted Lives, 1998.

“Student has basic motor skill problems which he found to be a barrier, since attending the Forest School scheme he now attempts a task even if he is unsure as to whether he can do it or not”

“During the course of the scheme, student was given the opportunity to learn new skills and succeed. This empowered her to be more confident and motivated...”

“The Forest School provides young people with the opportunity to succeed in something they may not necessarily have experienced before. Student illustrated this well, he now has the motivation and confidence to join other groups or activities and he is keen to repeat the sense of achievement he gained....”

Additional Outcomes

The initiative has provided very positive outcomes for the adults participating in the scheme. Effective working partnerships on a professional and personal basis have been formed, giving rise to an enhanced awareness of the roles and responsibilities of the contributing agencies. For the police staff within the programme, the scheme has given them significantly enhanced skills and confidence in engaging with young people, which will be of immeasurable benefit in their traditional policing functions.