

**TITLE – OPERATION MISPER**

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**FORCE – LANCASHIRE CONSTABULARY**

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**ENDORISING OFFICER: MR PAUL STEPHENSON,QPM.**

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## SUMMARY SECTION.

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Darwen is part of Blackburn with Darwen Borough and is an individual town in its own right with its own sense of independence.

Historically Darwen used to employ local people for the cotton industry, but agriculture also played a large part in the town's development.

Darwen is made up of both affluent areas close to open moor land whilst other areas are classically two up two down terraced houses in run-down locations, these properties are predominantly rented.

There are several pockets of council owned properties within the town, the largest being St James estate.

Tragically back in 2001 a young girl had gone missing from home and had died at an adult's house, they had allowed the girl to take drugs, the adults were successfully prosecuted.

Over the past twelve months the local police have noticed a trend of behaviour displayed by certain female young people, there have been several girls that have repeatedly gone missing from either their own homes or Children's Homes.

It became apparent that most of the girls were either going missing singularly or in small groups, sometimes missing for several days at a time.

It also became apparent that many of the girls were spending time in the company of inappropriate adults when missing from home.

The information we gathered about the girls revealed them to be particularly challenging in their behaviour, they could not accept/understand their own vulnerability.

All the girls that I dealt with were from broken or dysfunctional homes and had all been excluded from mainstream schooling, some already had criminal convictions.

Most of the girls had been reported to the police as missing on many previous occasions, some numbering as many as twenty previous occasions in the last twelve months, not only was there great concern for the girls when missing but also the commitment in officers' time spent trying to locate them.

Our Problem Oriented Policing Plan was to set about raising the profile of these girls, and seeking ways of trying to keep them safe back with parents at home or carers in Children's Homes, our task was to include many partner agencies both statutory and voluntary with the same shared goal to achieve our aims.

## **DARWEN PROJECT – MISPER.**

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Having scanned the problem Darwen had a group of approximately five female young people aged between 12yrs to 15 yrs, they all knew each other, some were friends some were not. All were excluded from mainstream schooling and either lived at home with a parent(s) or accommodated within the care of the local authority in local Children's Homes.

Intelligence suggested that they spent some of their time when missing in company with inappropriate adults that either had criminal convictions, alcohol/drug dependency and/or socially inadequate.

It was suspected that the girls were being allowed to smoke cannabis and drink alcohol without restriction; it was also suspected that sexual activity was taking place albeit the girls strenuously denied this.

It is fair to say that the girls considered themselves as 'Ladettes' and felt that their street credibility was raised if they conducted themselves in an aggressive and truculent manner, often intimidating local residents.

Studying the girls backgrounds in most cases the girls came from broken homes or family units that were already known to social services, all the girls had both older or younger siblings, albeit their behaviour was not typical of the other family members.

In one case both parents were serving lengthy custodial sentences, which seems to have totally derailed both children.

All key stake holders in the Borough i.e. Social Services, Education, Youth Offending Teams and other agencies knew the girls in their professional capacities.

It was apparent after analysis of the background and general behaviour of the girls that the police were not alone in their concerns, so were other statutory agencies, however having reviewed some of the missing from home logs it seemed apparent that our information sharing, knowledge of agency/stakeholder protocols and long term plans were not as comprehensive as they could have been.

Having been reported several times previously the police had a great deal of intelligence about the girls with regards to their associates and life styles they chose when absent from home.

We set about sharing this information at case conferences held locally either at social service offices or at the Children's Home.

I nominated myself as a point of contact, I viewed this as vital to our intelligence gathering, it had been mentioned by all agencies about the difficulties in contacting someone with an 'in depth' knowledge of the girls etc, we needed to show a consistency of approach and understanding.

From there I was able to identify 'key contacts' within other statutory and voluntary agencies, again whilst stakeholders wanted a point of contact so did I.

Within a short space of time I had established links with professionals and spoke on a regular basis to see where each case was up to, what the current problems were and how we were going to try to address them together, from a personal perspective I gained a great deal of information about Social Services and their protocols and difficulties in placements/options available to them.

I wanted to get us away from the perception that it was just our role to find and return the girls when missing, it was our collective responsibility to find the girls, we could all try to address short term measures, but we needed to explore medium and long term measures together.

One of our key problems were the adults that harboured our young girls, without the availability of shelter, food, alcohol and perhaps drugs the girls would have no doubt returned home in much shorter time scales than the lengthy periods some of the girls were displaying.

I researched the powers that the police could adopt to tackle these adults, there were offences to consider under abduction, kidnapping and false imprisonment, however very specific evidence was required, the key evidence being a complaint from the girls themselves, this was never forthcoming from them.

An alternative were the powers available under the Children Act 1989, specifically sections 49(1) and (3) which dealt with knowingly harbouring children in care etc, unfortunately these offences were summary matters without a specific power of arrest, offenders on conviction could receive a six month term of imprisonment and/or fine.

I spoke to our local Criminal Justice Department and explained our difficulties, they committed positively to 'fast tracking offenders' through the summoning process, in effect they stated that they could have a summons issued within a ten to fourteen day period on receipt of sufficient information against an offender under this act.

I then consulted with the Crown Prosecution Service and sought their advice regarding the evidential requirements, again they were very positive in their approach, they assisted in terms of guidance to prove an offence - once an offender had been warned, they were to be shown a photograph of the missing person and these facts must be recorded in the officers pocket note books for future reference.

As part of our medium to long term strategy myself and other stakeholders arranged for a 'girls group' which was to be held each Thursday morning, the principal stakeholder being the Rapid Response leg of the Borough's Social Services department, we utilised their base on Lytham Road, Blackburn.

The purpose of the group was to encourage the girls to open up a little more and discuss the issues/reasons why they needed to run away, self-esteem issues and the dangers they could have been placing themselves into.

The group had limited success, it became very apparent that some of the girls in attendance had very strong and manipulative personalities, they quickly established a 'pecking order' which led to some of the girls either choosing not to attend or become very introverted whilst in the group.

However on the positive side we invited in the Brook advisory service to discuss issues surrounding drug/alcohol abuse, sexual hygiene and sexually transmitted diseases, many of the girls acknowledged that they were unaware of many of the sexually transmitted diseases. I also had an input in relation to the responsibilities that the police undertook when the girls were reported missing from home; again the girls were oblivious to the amounts of police time taken up on such enquiries.

Having gathered information from various meetings it became apparent that whilst many of the girls individual circumstances ran on parallels many of the issues were unique to the individual, for example not every girl committed crime, not every girl sought the attentions of Asian males etc, some of the girls had suspected mental health/behaviour issues.

As part of my response I established a list of known harbourers within the Borough and together with either a social worker or key worker (Children's Home) we visited the known addresses of these males.

Several were warned by myself and the social worker about their activities, most appeared co-operative and played down their involvements in the girls lives, it was noted that having met these individuals they too led chaotic life styles were not appropriate role models to the girls.

We scanned a wide range of police powers to try to control some of the offending behaviour, one of our most criminally active girls signed up to an Acceptable Behaviour Contract, this was to limit and control her intimidating behaviour on a local estate, we also included a condition to attend her school regularly and behave appropriately when there, this ABC worked quite well for several months with this girl.

The definition of our project was to drastically reduce the occasions that the girls went missing from home, this in turn would limit the dangers that the girls placed themselves in, this would lead to a limitation of a serious crime being committed against one of the girls. From our perspective alone if the project was successful this would lead to police officers having more time to deal with other members of the public, whether to investigate crime or deal with a whole host of incidents that the police are asked to resolve each day. As far as evaluation so far I can report limited successes as follows;

GIRL	NUMBER OF REPORTS MISSING	PERIOD MEASURED.
A	13	01/01/03 – 01/06/03.
B	19	As above.
C	7	As above.
D	8	As above.
E	9	As above.

The results of the project after several months of partnership working as follows;

GIRL	NUMBER OF REPORTS MISSING	PERIOD MEASURED.
A	14	01/06/03 – 01/12/03.
B	14	As above.
C	5	As above.
D	0	As above.
E	4	As above.

Girl A was the only one to show an increase during the second measured period, in effect she went missing on one more occasion than the previous six month period.

Girl B saw a reduction in reports of missing by 26%, Girl C saw a reduction of over 28%, Girl D saw a reduction of 100%, she was not reported missing throughout the second six month period, Girl E saw a reduction of over 55%.

From our early evaluation we have seen an overall drop in reported missing from home incidents concerning the five girls during the second measured stage of over 50%.

On comparing the first half of the year's figures with the later half year's figures we have saved the sum of approximately 570 police staff hours with 19 fewer reported incidents.

This project has gathered momentum throughout the first half of this year with the Division supporting a larger campaign to target the adult harbourers as a planned operation called Engage.

Again this operation has kept to the same ideals of partnership working to resolve long-term social problems and issues.

Next year will hopefully see the full benefits of our collective efforts to protect this vulnerable section of society.

PS 6272 Scott,  
Darwen.

## **APPENDICES.**

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Please find attached a copy Warning letter that I have created to address the issues raised by CPS regarding adequate and documented warnings to adults that harbour the juvenile missing from homes.

Also attached is a pro forma MG11 statement created for officers to complete once an identified offender has been warned with the above warning letter.

1. Warning letter pro forma.
2. Pro forma MG 11 statement document.

**Lancashire Constabulary**  
**Eastern Division.**

**WARNING LETTER.**

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You are advised that ----- years old, born -----, is currently in the voluntary accommodated care of Blackburn with Darwen Social Services.

You will commit offences if after this warning you knowingly and without lawful authority/reasonable excuse keep her away, harbour her or allow her to stay away from the voluntary care of Social Services or other responsible person, contrary to sections 49(1) and (3) Children Act 1989.

You have no lawful authority to keep -----away from her legal carers.

Lancashire Constabulary WILL PROSECUTE YOU if you commit this offence, for which you could receive a SIX-MONTH PRISON sentence and fine.

You have now been shown a recent photograph of ----- by an officer.

Name:

Time:

Address:

Date:

Date of birth:

Officer:

Telephone number/mobile:

Vehicle details:

Signed.....

