

The Tilley Award 2004

Problem Oriented Policing and Crime Reduction



Norfolk Constabulary Submission

'SOS Bus' : Safe Haven

Title of Project

SOS BUS Safe Haven

Name of Force/Agency

NORFOLK CONSTABULARY

Name of Force

NORFOLK CONSTABULARY

Name of endorsing senior representative(s)

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SUMMARY

'The SOS Bus Project is a multi-agency initiative to meet the needs of young people in Norwich's club land at night. It is a first point of contact for those whose well-being is threatened by inability to get home, illness or injury, emotional distress or other vulnerability.'

In January 2001 the city of Norwich had seen three tragic deaths of young people which *might* have been avoided if a satisfactory series of safety measures had been in place. The deaths particularly highlighted the issue of under age and responsible drinking.

The pub and club community of Norwich, along with statutory agencies such as the police, local authority and a number of voluntary agencies formed a partnership aimed at developing and introducing a series of pragmatic checks and balances in an effort to reduce/eradicate these problems. Following the formation of the partnership, a reduction in violent crime in the areas where problems had been experienced was achieved. The Norwich entertainment industry, along with statutory and voluntary agencies, the public and parents, in particular, recognised their moral and legal obligations. The group formed an alliance with the Evening News newspaper, and launched a fundraising campaign to cover the estimated costs, which in real terms were £78,000, but with co-opted staff were reduced to £38,000 for the six-month period.

On average, the SOS bus helps nine people every night, ranging from 13 to 40 years old. The bus has diverted young people particularly from the health service, because minor injuries can be treated on board by qualified St John ambulance staff. In addition, it has been used by people who might otherwise have been arrested for drunk and disorderly offences, and has allowed their safe passage home.

In essence, we believe the bus is proving an excellent facility as a 'safe haven' for vulnerable people in need of assistance, while allowing emergency services the opportunity to remain available for emergency responses.

The objectives of the project are:

1. *To establish, develop and evaluate - in co-operation with relevant agencies - a pilot service, which offers immediate assistance to people presenting themselves at the bus who are at risk of harming themselves or being harmed by others.*
2. *To explore and make recommendations for appropriate future provision in the light of evaluation and experience.*

The bus is a 17-metre bendy bus imported from Germany, which has been adapted to receive clients.

DESCRIPTION OF PROJECT

What were the objectives of this project?

At the time the project was under development, violent crime was a key priority nationally. The Home Office had produced research which showed a clear link between violent crime and under-age and binge drinking. In anticipation of the National Alcohol Strategy it was felt tackling these areas was essential in delivering crime reduction and reassurance policing in these areas.

The overall aim was *'To support the development of the evening economy by creating a safe environment through the reduction of crime and the fear of crime.'*

It was intended to achieve this by:

- Improving public safety and reduce crime and the fear of crime related to the evening economy.
- Ensuring the effective delivery of public services through adequate resourcing, efficient investigation and detection of offences and appropriate prevention methods. Utilising effective intelligence and providing necessary support to victims and witnesses to minimise the threat of intimidation.
- Working in partnership with the local authority, relevant statutory and voluntary agencies, businesses and the wider community to deliver a co-ordinated coherent response to evening economy issues reflected within the Local Authority Replacement Plan, Policing Plan and Home Office objectives.

How did we define the problem?

Violent crime reduction is a key priority in Norwich. Norwich City Council strategy included the promotion of Norwich as a 24-hour economy. It would follow that if 24-hour drinking - as envisaged by the Government - was granted, the area could expect a rise in violence and crime associated with the evening economy. This was coupled with plans to use Interreg 3 funding to develop late-night shopping and family-orientated activity in the vicinity of The Forum. This highlighted a need to address the implications of section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act with Norwich City Council, ensuring its 24-hour strategy included a robust infrastructure to address additional demands on public services.

By adopting an evidence-based approach, we were able to work in partnership with the city council and other agencies to raise their awareness of these issues. Following analysis of city centre crimes, we established that over a 15-month period, 470 offences were recorded in Prince Of Wales Road alone. The most significant of these offences was violence against the person, accounting for 31 per cent of the crimes, and that 83 per cent of all offences happened between Friday and Sunday, with 48 per cent coming after midnight. By scanning Home Office information it was discovered Government analysis estimated 40 per cent of violent crime, 78 per cent of assaults and 88 per cent of criminal damage is committed while the offender is under the influence of alcohol.

Victims have frequently been found to have consumed alcohol too. This meant that, by using our own figures against Home Office estimates, we could say 117 of the 150 violent crimes in Prince of Wales Road were alcohol related, 97 of which will have taken place between Friday and Sunday. By targeting alcohol-related violent crime over this short period, violent crime could be drastically reduced.

Proposals for new liquor licenses would mean a 33 per cent increase in entertainment capacity, with no additional resource from statutory or voluntary agencies. The City supports 1,052 liquor licenses and, therefore, the potential for young people to obtain alcohol while under the age of 18 is immense. By working with responsible license holders, we aimed to reduce crime and the number of under-age children gaining access to alcohol. At the same time this work was taking place, the hospital moved out of the city centre, meaning 'walking wounded' could no longer access medical help at night without calling an ambulance. This meant calls to the ambulance service would increase.

How did we deal with the problem?

The alcohol-related deaths of three young people attracted huge public attention and provided a momentum to motivate a partnership response to these issues. It was recognised there was a need to bring partnership and police initiatives together and, using recent recommendations, a Public Disorder Reduction Strategy was developed. The strategy included a Public Disorder Policy and a detailed Action Plan aimed at developing best practice - such as door staff training. Each section contained SMART targets and projected costs. Having developed a good working relationship with, for example Norwich City Council,

the licensing trade and voluntary agencies, we were able to promote this work. The SOS Bus is just one example of the partnership work.

The objectives set for the project are:

1. *To establish, develop and evaluate, in co-operation with relevant agencies, a pilot service which offers immediate assistance to our clients at risk of self harm or external threat presenting themselves at the bus.*
2. *To explore and make recommendations for appropriate future provision in the light of evaluation and experience.*

Having developed strong links with the evening economy community, we seized the opportunity to encourage licensees to adopt a series of initiatives from the Action Plan which would improve public safety and reduce crime. These included proof-of-age schemes, a phone-a-friend scheme and the adoption of a radio link system. We were aware of the effect that some of these initiatives, particularly in respect of proof-of-age, may have county-wide and ensured through the Community Safety Working group that this information was disseminated widely. We also approached Licensing Justices and linked the plan to their strategic aims. Subsequently they adopted the Action Plan as best practice.

The city's nightclub managers also decided to form a Nightclub Liaison Committee. They invited statutory and voluntary agencies to join with them to try to prevent further tragedies.

From those discussions, a well-attended public meeting was held. Further meetings then took place and it was decided the following were needed in the city centre to make it safer for people:

1. A radio system that linked clubs, pubs and police.
2. A sticker that could be displayed in pub and club windows which said people in trouble could use the phone at those premises, free of charge, to phone for help or call home.
3. A safe haven for people to attend at time of need, for whatever reason.

1. Radio system

A radio system was soon established. It connected the clubs and pubs on Friday and Saturday nights to the police, CCTV, a 24-hour control centre and the SOS Bus. Since its introduction, it has been an invaluable tool for clubs and police. For example, three men were spotted trying to force entry into a building by staff aboard the bus. The staff were able to contact police straight away, follow the offenders and then guide the police, who made arrests.

2. SOS Sticker

The SOS Sticker was designed by a local company and printed and paid for by the Evening News. It can now be seen emblazoned on most pub and club windows. The newspaper's publicity ensured the public knew what it represented.

3. SOS Bus (Safe Haven)

Proclaimers International offered the use of its former Berlin city bus as a mobile safe haven. It is a 50-foot long bendy bus with running water, power and heating. The community and local businesses provided all the items required to make the project work. Within six weeks the SOS Bus was on the streets. The launch date was April 24, 2001.

Eight volunteers staff the SOS Bus every Friday and Saturday between 9pm and 3am.

The staff are drawn from the following groups:

- Police
- Youth and community service
- St John Ambulance
- Proclaimers International
- YMCA
- Age Concern
- Public (with youth or medical experience)

The advisory group is made up of people from:

- Proclaimers International
- Police
- Norwich City Council
- YMCA
- Evening News

The project has received wide acclaim from nationwide and has been publicised in national newspapers and magazines.

Several police forces, such as Manchester, Suffolk, Essex and Sussex have shown an interest in replicating the idea within their own force areas.

And the Government has been extremely impressed with the project, with the bus making the trip to the 2001 Labour Party Conference where it was toured and praised by Home Secretary David Blunkett .

On a local level we have a support unit (a caravan) which can be taken to events where the SOS Bus size would make its attendance impossible.

An SOS first aid building was opened on May 30, 2002, at the top of Prince of Wales Road outside the Anglia Television building. This is used in conjunction with the SOS Bus and is staffed by St John Ambulance. It is equipped with two beds and first aid equipment. It also contains a WC for staff. The local ambulance trust also uses the area outside the building as a set up point for its first response team, so a paramedic is also available at times.

The bus has helped more than 1,000 people since it was introduced and, more importantly, there have been no further deaths since the project has been operational.

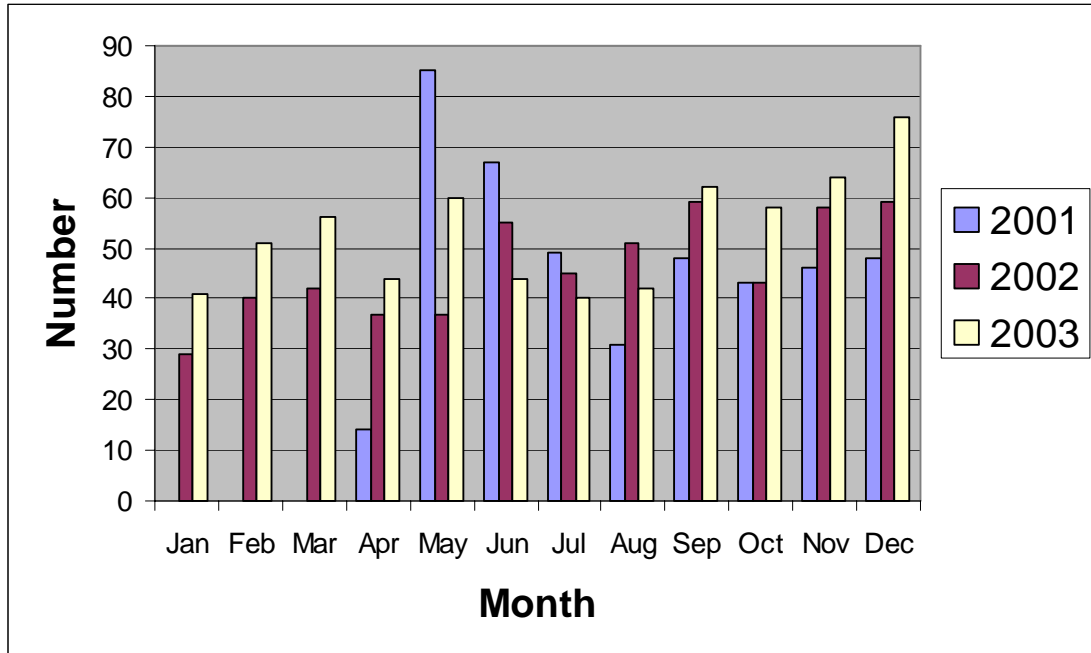
This project has brought many partners together and increased the working relationships to a tremendous level. It has also brought the community together and now plays a major role in the evening economy of Norwich. And city streets are now safer for the people of Norwich. The police and ambulance service bring people to the bus for help, which saves resources, allowing them more time to carry on with their roles.

For more information, please visit the project web site at www.sosbus.co.uk.

How successful was your approach?

The statistics below speak for themselves. The SOS bus has become part of Norwich life without being intrusive.

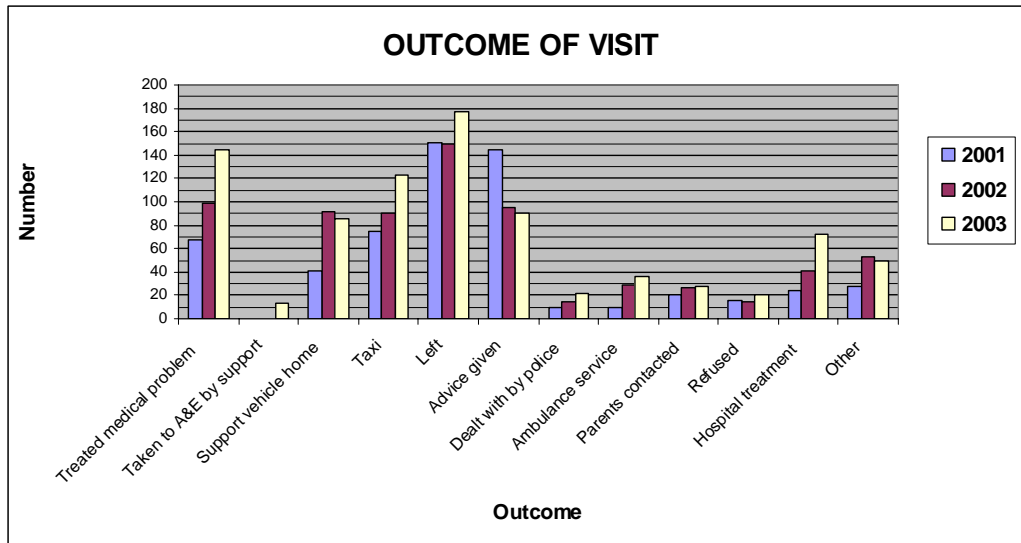
The first graph represents the number of people who have attended and sought help from the SOS bus.



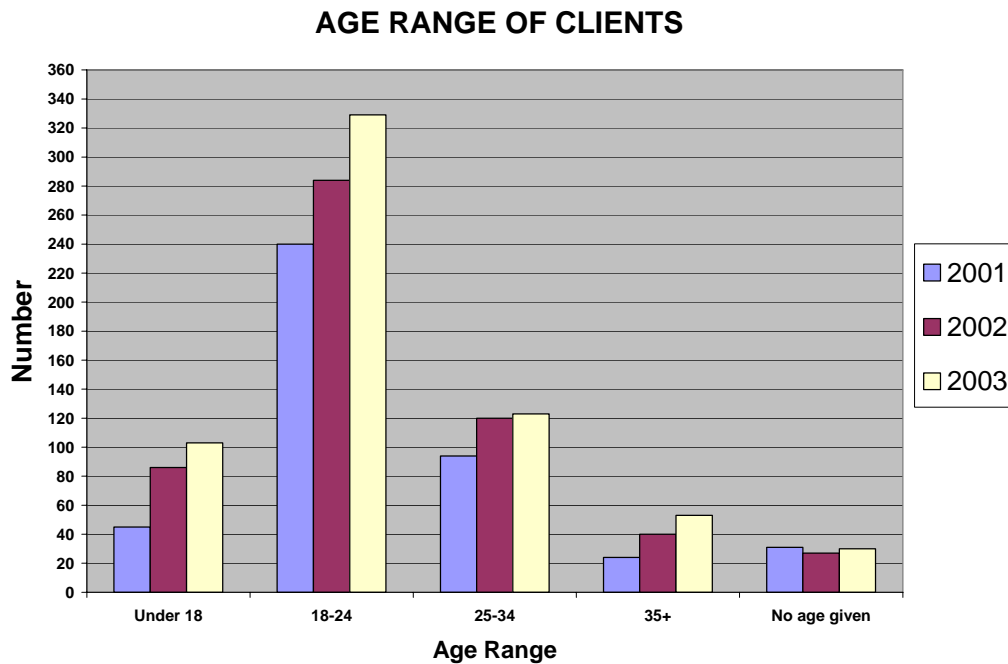
This table shows the gender split of people using the services on the bus.

GENDER			
	Male	Female	Not given
2001	214	120	97
2002	305	157	93
2003	382	249	7

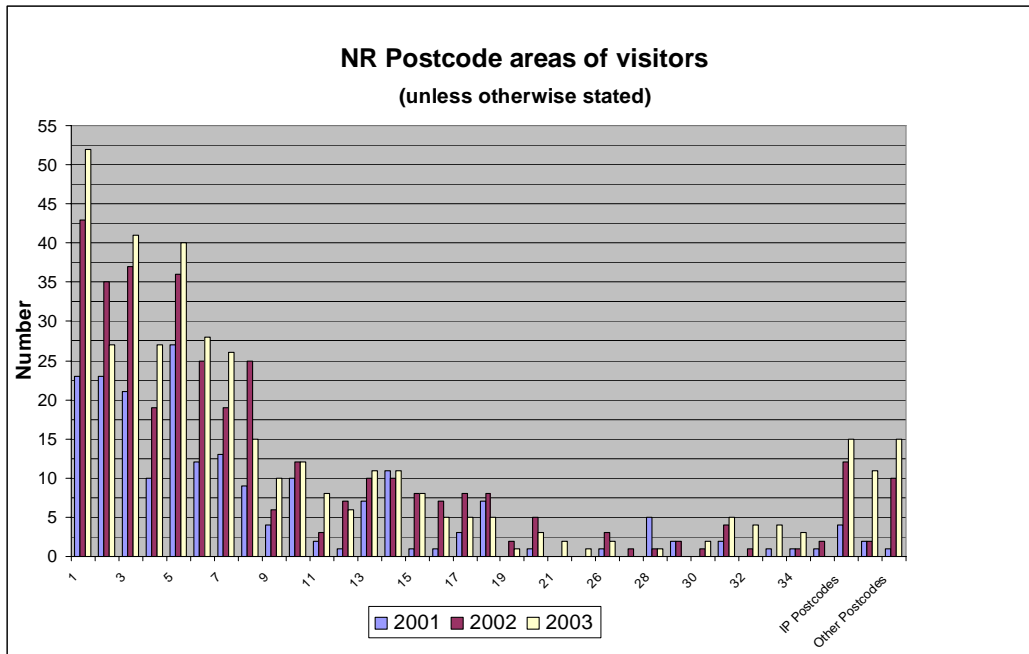
Each outcome is also recorded. As can be seen, a large proportion receive medical treatment without the need for hospitalisation.



The number of young people attending the bus has risen over the last three years. The majority of clients are aged between 18 and 30.



Postcodes are taken from clients to provide additional information to help indicate where alcohol reduction work needs to be carried out.



SUPPORTING MATERIAL

Fred Shingler trainee manager of the Time nightclub

"We have raised £626.41 in just a week and will continue to collect on nights we are open. The bus is extremely important to us and looks after our drunks and girls who are out on their own."

Glen Keeler assistant manager of Liquid nightclub

"Bars are happy to get these young people drunk, but come kicking-out time we need to take responsibility for them and not rely on the police."

Nick De'ath landlord of the Unthank Arms and chairman of the Licensed Victuallers' Association

"We will support the bus whichever way we can. As an association we think it is a good idea."

Gary Tortice was the first person to be helped by the team at the SOS bus which hit the streets of Norwich on Friday. He was discovered lying on the ground by security guards who immediately called in volunteers from the bus "I had too much to drink it was very silly of me. I guess I must have had about 15 or 16 brandies with lemonade. Thankfully the staff on the bus were there to help me. Although I can't remember everything that happened that night I do know I was lucky the bus was there. I more or less blacked out and it's all a bit of a blur. If the bus people had not been there, God knows what situation I would have been in. At the end of the day I got home safely and it is thanks to the bus. I wanted to tell the story so people realise the bus is there if they need it."

PC Colin Lang, project manager of the SOS Bus scheme, said Mr Tortice had been with staff at the bus for about an hour and a half. "This was a classic situation showing what this bus is all about. Gary was put under permanent observation by the St John Ambulance team. He slept a lot of it off in a laid down position and then his friends came to the bus and took him home. I wonder what happened to these people before the bus was there. We've had a 14 year old totally out of it who ended up going to hospital. We had a 24-year-old girl carried on to the bus at 9.20pm by door staff. She was totally incapable of looking after herself. We've also had two people picked up from Riverside, one of them had been left completely by his friends."

Home Secretary David Blunkett

"I hope to see experiments like this gaining money from the Home Office because they do valuable work against crime, drug and alcohol abuse. I am keen to get everybody to see that they have a part to play. If people at local level are prepared to give a bit as well, then the public and private sector can also help."

Norwich North MP Ian Gibson

"Mr Blunkett is saying the door is open and it now means it is up to us to continue the initiative. He will remember this visit."

Norwich South MP and Education Secretary Charles Clarke

"We'll be putting the project on the Home Office website as a fine example of best practice. We will be advertising it across the country. I want to congratulate the community."