



Home Office

Crime Reduction & Community Safety Group

Tilley Awards 2008 Application form

Please ensure that you have read the guidance before completing this form. **By making an application to the awards, entrants are agreeing to abide by the conditions laid out in the guidance.** Please complete the following form in full, within the stated word limit and ensuring the file size is no more than 1MB. Failure to do so will result in your entry being rejected from the competition.

Completed application forms should be e-mailed to tilleyawards08@homeoffice.gsi.gov.uk.

All entries must be received by noon on **Friday 25th April 2008**. No entries will be accepted after this time/date. Any queries on the application process should be directed to Alex Blackwell on 0207 035 4811.

Section A: Application basics

1. Title of the project: Operation Blight
2. Key issue that the project is addressing: Criminal Damage, Graffiti in particular

Author contact details

3. Name of application author: Inspector Mark Spooner, South Yorkshire Police
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Secondary project contact details

8. Name of secondary contact involved in the project: Sergeant Keith Baird
9. Secondary contact email address: keith.baird@southyorks.pnn.police.uk
10. Secondary contact telephone number: 01226 787 073

Endorsing representative contact details

11. Name of endorsing senior representative from lead organisation: Chief Superintendent Andy Brooke

12. Endorsing representative's email address: andy.brooke@southyorks.pnn.police.uk

13. For all entries from England & Wales please state which Government Office or Welsh Assembly Government your organisation is covered by: York and Humber

14. Please mark this box with an X to indicate that all organisations involved in the project have been notified of this entry (this is to prevent duplicate entries of the same project):

X

Section B: Summary of application - *In no more than 400 words use this space to provide a summary of your project under the stated headings (see guidance for more information).*

Scanning

Operation Blight is the Central Safer Neighbourhood Team's response to increased levels of graffiti in the three Barnsley electoral wards of Darton East, Darton West and Dodworth.

As a result of national and local drivers the offence of damage was chosen as the focus of the project, due to the debilitating effect such a signal crime can have on communities and the annual cost to all the agencies involved in the aftermath.

The location was chosen due to the high proportion of damage as an overall percentage of crime in the area, almost 30% of crime being criminal damage.

The scanning process revealed a gap in the knowledge about offenders, which required an innovative approach to obtaining that information and intelligence from the community.

Analysis

With colleagues from the University of Sheffield we reviewed the academic literature on graffiti to better understand the causes and the characteristics of graffiti offending.

We then analysed the data we had collected and combined it with the theory to better understand the nature of the problem we faced.

Using the analysis and situational crime prevention theory we were able to identify innovative responses to see if we could impact on the offending behaviour of the young offenders.

Responses

In addition to a range of traditional responses incorporating partner agencies and local residents the project team tried innovative approaches, for example, the use of 'fear of being caught' as a mechanism for preventing re offending.

Interestingly, and quite unexpectedly, the poster campaign aimed at appealing for information, had the unintended effect of shaming some of the young offenders that may have helped prevent their re offending.

Assessment

The project team recognised the value of a conventional evaluation seeking to show any relationship between their responses and any subsequent drop (or increase) in the crime type being targeted. This forms part of the assessment.

However, the team were much more interested in identifying if any of the mechanisms they had used on the offenders had had any effect on their offending behaviour.

For that the project team enlisted the help of the Department of Law at Sheffield University who agreed to evaluate this more complex piece of work, using the theories of social capital and social disorganisation so that improvements could be made to future projects.

State number of words: 383

Section C: Description of project - Describe the project in no more than 4,000 words. Please refer to the full guidance for more information on what the description should cover, in particular section 12.

Scanning

Why graffiti?

Criminal damage is a policing priority for all police forces in England and Wales – due mainly to the adverse effect it has on communities and as a signal crime the disproportionate level of fear it can engender in communities. Criminal damage can also act as a signal to communities that the police are unable to deal effectively with even the most minor offences and therefore can impact negatively on confidence in both the police service and the criminal justice system as a whole.

Criminal damage was a priority for the District, but it was also a clear priority from the local communities. Right across the borough communities were highlighting damage as a significant factor affecting their quality of life. The Crime and Safety Sub-Groups cited damage, especially graffiti, as a major issue within the community and that was being echoed by the local Elected Members.

Location

The location of the project in the wards of Darton East, Darton West and Dodworth arose due to a number of reasons, not least due to the high levels of criminal damage that the area was suffering as a proportion of overall crime. Almost 30% of the total amount of crime committed in the area was criminal damage. This was almost 8% higher than any other area in the borough.

The project team commissioned an environmental audit of the area by the Local Authority Impact Wardens, which showed the true extent of the problem. It also showed that almost 60% of the damage caused in the area went unreported to any of the agencies.

Within the three wards there are three towns: Darton, Mapplewell and Kexbrough and not surprisingly they saw the highest concentration of damage. The geography of the towns was

ideal for the project due to the fact that they were fairly isolated from other areas by major roads and large open spaces. This meant that possible displacement caused by the project was unlikely.

The SNTs not only enjoyed a healthy relationship with the local Elected Members, which obviously was necessary politically, but there were strong residents' groups in two of the three areas. The third area, Kexbrough, was in the process of establishing a resident's committee. These were important to the project team if the project was to be handed over to the community as part of the exit strategy.

The final reason the area was chosen was the schools. The project team wanted to build education into the process and the area was served by one large Secondary school which was attended by majority of the young people in the area. This would make reaching young people from the area much easier.

Victims

Both the recorded crime statistics and the environmental audit showed that almost all graffiti damage was caused to public buildings and in public spaces, such as telephone boxes and bus shelters. Some local businesses were also attacked but almost no private or council dwellings were damaged.

It was important to take into consideration the effect that a signal crime can have on an individual. Although the individuals do not suffer direct harm, the indirect effect can be serious with 'victims' afraid to leave their houses or go near certain public places or amenities.

Gathering information

As part of the scanning process the following organisations and agencies were involved and provided information about the type and the extent of criminal damage, particularly graffiti:

- SYP Crime Management System (CMS) – Provided information on crimes committed in the area within the previous 6 months. Free text fields also provided valuable information.
- SYP PROCAD data – Provided details of all reported incidents of damage, some of which had not been recorded as a crime. Incidents were also scanned for youth nuisance occurring close to reported offences of damage.
- SYP OIS (Operational Intelligence System) – System was scanned for intelligence re: possible suspects.
- Berneslai Homes - Housing system scanned for instances of damage reported by tenants which may not have been reported to the police.
- Stagecoach damage reports – Stagecoach is the main bus operator in Barnsley. Their system was checked for reported damage to buses
- South Yorkshire Passenger Transport Executive (SYPTTE) – Regularly provide SYP with information about damage to their street furniture. Keen to get involved due to cost of removing graffiti from bus shelters. Provided information identifying ‘red routes’ of damage in the target area.
- Neighbourhood Pride database – Neighbourhood Pride is the agency that cleans graffiti on behalf of the local authority – Their system was checked to provide information that supported the environmental audit.
- Environmental Audit by Impact Wardens – Impact Wardens from the local authority walked the townships of Darton, Mapplewell and Kexbrough and recorded and digitally photographed each instance of graffiti found.
- Central SNT ‘Goldenline’ calls – SNT hotline for people to leave information about crime and ASB in their area.
- Local Elected Members and local residents were visited by PCSOs. Information gained and fed into the system either through a National Intelligence Report or during daily briefings.
- Crime and Safety Sub-Groups – These groups are the formal interface between the public and the SNTs.

Analysis

The data we had told us a great deal about the location of graffiti and what it looked like. What we didn't have was a good understanding of the underlying causes of graffiti – why do people do it and how might we stop them?

With assistance from colleagues at the University of Sheffield, we reviewed the academic research literature on graffiti to better understand the causes and characteristics of graffiti offending. This was extremely important because it enabled us to build a more accurate picture of the problem. By combining the theory and evidence with our own data, we were able to better understand the nature of the problem we were experiencing and design our response strategy accordingly.

Our analysis focussed on the three sides of the problem triangle: offender, target/victim and location:

1. OFFENDER

Our analysis of the academic research literature on graffiti offenders told us the following:

i) Graffiti can be produced by individuals working alone or by groups.

There are three main group types: political dissidents, gangs and the graffiti subculture. **Political graffiti** occurs because it is an anonymous (and safe) forum to express political views. **Gangs** use graffiti to mark their territory or challenge and show disrespect to a rival gang. Graffiti produced by a **graffiti subculture** is usually produced for its own sake, rather than for deeper rooted reasons.

ii) Who are the offenders?

Evidence has consistently shown that the graffiti subculture is made up of predominately male teenagers. There is no clear link between graffiti and other offending. Where gangs are involved, it is likely that the offenders will have colourful criminal careers. However, where individuals are acting alone or within a subculture, they tend to be otherwise 'law-abiding'.

*iii) Offenders can write three types of graffiti: **Tags, Throw-ups or Pieces.***

Tags are single-lined writings that display the writer's name. Graffiti writers carry out a ritual

called 'bombing' whereby they tag as many public places as possible. Tags are the most effective way to 'bomb' due to the speed at which they can be written.

Throw-ups are the stage beyond tags. Throw-ups are two-dimensional compositions usually painted with one or two colours. Those painting throw-ups aim to impress with visibility, quantity and adherence to the hip-hop style.

Pieces are large murals performed by the most experienced and skilful graffiti writers. These pieces are motivated more by artistic expression and style than tags or throw-ups.

iv) What makes offenders stop?

As with all career paths the graffiti vocation comes to an end. There are a number of reasons why graffiti writers slow down with age including: achieving the fame they desire; getting jobs and no longer being able to commit as much time to graffiti; having extra responsibilities such as families; growing out of it; or turning to legal graffiti.

Combining the theory with the data

We were then able to analyse our own data and draw conclusions about the types of offender and the forms of graffiti we were dealing with:

Type of graffiti:

- None of the graffiti could be classed as artistic
- None of the graffiti showed any characteristics of being a 'gang tag' – therefore it appeared that the young people were working alone.
- The graffiti was not marking territory – therefore we assumed all the offenders lived locally.
- Very little graffiti was done on private houses – the majority was on walls, shops bus shelters, public buildings and telephone kiosks.
- Some tags appeared much more frequently than others and they became the initial priority.

Offenders:

- The few names put forward as suspects were not known to the police.
- Offenders were unlikely to be carrying bags or have trouble concealing the implements as the majority of the graffiti was caused by either marker pen or single colour spray paint.
- We estimated offenders were taking less than 15 seconds to each tag, therefore the chances of catching them in the act was remote.

2. LOCATION

From the academic research we knew that the particular location writers choose for their graffiti is decided by their motivation and the type of graffiti they are writing.

Offenders often

- i) choose locations that are the most visible
- ii) choose a location that already has been the target of graffiti.
- iii) try to gain notoriety with their illegal and life threatening risks, such as tagging the highest possible point on a building.
- iv) choose locations from which they can easily escape from the police.
- v) select their targets indiscriminately as their sole aim is to write their tag in as many locations as possible ('bombing').

Combining the theory with the data

Analysis of our data revealed the following about the **location**:

- Although the graffiti was widespread across the wards there were 'hotspots' that suffered from more attacks than any other locations. The main targets appeared to be:
 - the green 'telewest' exchange boxes located at the side of the main roads
 - road signs
 - secluded locations under bridges
 - alleyways.

We concluded that different locations were being targeted for different reasons ; secluded locations were selected to avoid detection, but prominent locations were selected for their

'display' properties.

3. VICTIMS

Although there was very little in the graffiti literature on the victims, we were able to draw on our knowledge of signal crimes to examine the victim perspective. We know that although the victims of graffiti may be said to be 'indirect', the impact of graffiti as a 'signal' of crime and disorder is arguably very real and serious.

Analysis revealed the following about the **victims**:

- Older residents thought that crime was much higher than actual levels as a result of seeing graffiti on a daily basis. (response PCSO reassurance)
- Residents felt victimised by the graffiti despite very few of them being direct victims
- People appeared unwilling to challenge the behaviour or come forward with information to assist the police in detecting the offences.
- Property targeted included public buildings and street furniture in public places

By combining the information gathered at the scanning stage with the existing knowledge base on graffiti offending, we were able to build a much more accurate picture of the problem we were dealing with. This meant our responses could be better tailored to address the problem in both the short and long term.

Responses

The first objective of Operation Blight was to **identify and arrest offenders**. Our main problem was that we did not know who the offenders were so we had to find ways of encouraging members of the public to report suspects' names to us.

A poster campaign was devised, together with an awareness raising strategy across the affected estates.

Poster campaign

The posters were carefully worded and the images chosen to reflect that these crimes were crimes against the community. The posters posed the question: 'Do you care about your community?' (the implication being that if you did then you really ought to be doing something about it).

The posters advertised a reward of up to £1,000 for information and the wording was designed to ease the conscience of any potential informant.

The posters were designed to be attractive and eye catching to young people.

The campaign was originally a partnership venture between Barnsley Metropolitan Borough Council (BMBC) and the SNT. However, just as the posters were being designed we learned of national campaign led by Crimestoppers. The timing was ideal and resulted in BMBC proving £6,000 reward funding to Crimestoppers so that Barnsley 'Name that tag!' campaign could be channelled through them as part of national campaign.

The distribution of posters was also a partnership initiative. SYPTE and Stagecoach were supportive of the campaign and both offered £250 towards printing in addition to displaying poster cove cards on relevant buses and vinyl posters on bus shelters.

Covert cameras

The analysis, highlighted several locations that had been attacked, cleaned and then attacked again. The project team felt that use of covert cameras at these locations would stand a realistic chance of success, so 5 locations were selected and cameras installed. Although the cameras

failed to identify anyone causing damage one camera detected a drug dealer selling drugs to schoolchildren outside the Co-Op at Mapplewell.

The second aim of Operation Blight was **to reduce the chance of those arrested from reoffending**. We sought to achieve this by

- i) educating offenders in the impact of graffiti on the community and
- ii) instilling a fear of being caught.

These approaches had sensible rooting in situational crime prevention theory.

The first method involved the Children and Young Person Officer (CYPO) attending the secondary school, with the full consent of the Headteacher, and speaking to a large group of young people about the damage that had been caused in the area.

The second method was to simply drop a laminated flyer through the letterboxes of the suspects during the night. The flyer carried the Operation Blight logo and simply said: "We are on to you!"

The team then left it for two weeks before any arrests were made.

The third, longer-term objective was **to prevent young people with no previous graffiti experience from taking it up**.

Presentations to primary school children

PCSOs delivered a 'criminal Damage' presentation to all the year 6 children at the local primary schools. The presentations used web technology that allowed the team to take pictures of buildings that the children all recognised and then electronically cover the images in graffiti. Other than positive feedback from the children, many of whom didn't realise graffiti was a criminal offence, and teachers this has not been subject as yet of any evaluation.

The fourth, longer-term objective of Blight was **to reassure the community that the problem was being taken seriously and action was being taken**, and this was done in a number of ways, and to some extent is still work in progress.

Red route patrols

The analysis of the SYPTTE data enabled several routes to be identified within the three townships that suffered a disproportionate amount of damage, and graffiti in particular. In order to help reassure the community high visibility patrols were conducted in the early evening by PCSOs. Despite the incredibly long odds the PCSOs came across two youths spraying a wall and they were duly arrested as part of the operation.

Leaflet drops

As part of the reassurance the PCSOs delivered leaflets to over 5,000 homes asking for information on the offenders. The leaflets were high quality and were designed to give a clear message that the community concerns were being taken seriously and addressed. Funding for the leaflets was provided by the Elected Members who gave £800 from the Area Forum budget.

Local meetings

The project team took every opportunity to attend local Tenants and Residents groups and the Area Forum to inform the residents and the Elected Members of the project progress.

Media

The media were seen as important to the project in raising the awareness of the problem, appealing for information and then publishing the results and achievements to a wider audience. Early contact was made with the local press and media briefings were carried out at regular intervals to ensure the project was never far from the public arena.

Assessing the Impact of Operation Blight

The objectives of Operation Blight were to:

- i) identify and arrest the offenders and
- ii) reduce the chance of them re-offending

In addition, there were two longer-term aims which were more broadly targeted:

- iii) to prevent young people with no previous graffiti experience from taking it up and
- iv) to reassure the community that the problem was being taken seriously and action was being taken.

We were able to evaluate the achievement of objectives 1 and 2 after the Operation had been completed; Objectives 3 and 4 are longer term impacts and we must wait before the impacts can be assessed.

Objective 1: Identify and arrest the offenders

A total of 16 young people were arrested as part of Operation Blight. Of those three were identified prior to the poster campaign, two were arrested in the act of spraying and the remaining 11 were identified through the partnership work with Crimestoppers and the schools. Over 175 offences of graffiti were admitted, and 60 detections were recorded.

Objective 2: Reduce the likelihood of re-offending

It is over a year since the first arrests were made and since then none of the 16 young people have been arrested since for offences of criminal damage. Nine young people have had no further involvement with the police but the remaining 7 have been arrested for various offences including possession of drugs, theft and assault.

In order to understand the reasons for changes in behaviour, we interviewed a sample of 9 offenders about their experiences of Operation Blight. The interviews were conducted by a student from The University of Sheffield. The aim of the in-depth interviews was to find out whether the different initiatives in Operation Blight (the fliers, the posters/newspaper features and the school workshops) were effective in changing offending behaviour. We wanted to know what aspects worked, for whom, and why.

We felt that the context in which the offenders lived and socialised was an important aspect to take into account. For example, young people who have weak family relationships, do not attend school or are socially isolated are more likely to commit graffiti without caring about the impact on the community. In contrast, young people who had stable home environments and were active in their communities were more likely to commit graffiti as part of a 'subculture' and may respond better to responses based on 'shaming' and 'fear'. Both would require different treatment/prevention strategies.

Therefore, we adopted a theoretical framework which supported these ideas. We sought to explore the relationship between the impact of Operation Blight and the Social Capital of the offenders. Social capital is a term used to describe connections between social networks whose members share common values. Where members of a community interact, co-operate and share values, high levels of social capital exist. These kinds of communities impose positive and negative sanctions on wanted and unwanted behaviour accordingly.

Through the interviews with offenders, we wanted to know whether the individual's social capital and the cohesion of the community dictated the kind of strategy that was successful. We characterised the different initiatives of Operation Blight as 'fear inducing' (where the effect was to make the offender afraid of being caught) and 'shame inducing' (where the effect was that the offender was ashamed of being judged by his family, friends or local community).

Which Elements of Operation Blight Were Effective

All the participants interviewed said that they no longer intended to commit graffiti offences. Interestingly, some said that they continued to do graffiti, but not on public property (decorating their school books or using paper instead).

Interviewees were asked to explain what impact the different elements of Operation Blight had had. The data showed that different elements of 'Operation Blight' worked for different people at different times.

Posters and Newspaper features

Five interviewees claimed that the posters had a significant impact on their behaviour. Reasons

given for the impact included fear of getting caught, community disapproval of behaviour and fear of community disapproval as a result of being caught .

School Presentations

Three interviewees said the school presentations had a significant impact on them. The remaining six interviewees however were not in school either because they were truanting or had been kicked out of school. The reasons given for the impact of the school sessions included fear of being reported because of the rewards being offered, and a general fear of being caught .

Fliers

Out of all the interviewees, seven mentioned receiving fliers, the other two respondents did not receive these as they were caught in the act of spraying graffiti. Only one interviewee however felt this had a significant impact on him as he was worried about his family's reaction. He still, however, did not view the flier as having the most impact upon him.

Linking social capital theory with the 'what worked and why' question

As outlined above, the posters tended to induce shame, whereas school presentations induced fear of being caught, the fliers had little to no effect at all and different interviewees were affected by different elements in different circumstances.

Through a series of questions designed to measure the interviewee's levels of social capital, we were able to identify some relationships between the effectiveness of strategies and the levels of social capital.

Participants who had low levels of social capital reported not to have been particularly affected by either fear inducers such as the fliers and school visits or shame inducing methods such as the posters.

Participants who had high levels social capital in the form of family/friend relationships but who lived in communities which lacked strong social networks were most affected by talks in schools. They expressed a lack of concern about how the community would react, and instead were more

affected by the fear of being caught.

Participants who reported high levels of social capital (within family networks and in close-knit communities) were most affected by the posters and the shame induced by them. This group also appeared to be more affected by the operation on a personal level.

Conclusions and The Future

Our work at the Assessment stage of the project was crucial. We were able to identify the factors influencing the behaviour of these graffiti offenders and assess which responses are most likely to work in different community contexts.

Shame inducing techniques appear to be more successful where there is a good level of community engagement/interactivity. Fear-inducing techniques were more successful where the community lacks cohesion and is less able to come together to address problems.

Based on this analysis, we can conclude that it is necessary to identify the levels of social capital in an area before crime reduction strategies are designed and implemented. This is especially important when considering which of the initiatives/strategies used in Operation Blight to use in other wards.

Objectives iii) and iv) are longer-term aims and therefore have not as yet been fully evaluated, however the results of 'Your Voice Counts' were published in April 2008, a year after Blight started and when asked: "Do your local police take your concerns seriously and address the problems that you think are important?" Central SNT came top in the South Yorkshire Police area.

It may also be important to conduct further work looking at strategies for building social capital and making people feel more able and willing to intervene when problems occur in the future. This will result in shaming techniques having a stronger impact upon the community.

State number of words used: 3998



Two posters from the Operation Blight 'Name that Tag' campaign



Cove card used on all the buses in Barnsley

Section D: Endorsement by Senior Representative - Please insert letter from endorsing representative, this will not count towards your word or 1MB size limit restrictions.

Mr A Blackwell
Home Office
Effective Practice & Comms Team
4th Floor
Fry Building (SE Quarter)
2 Marsham Street
LONDON SW1P 4DF

Your Ref:

Our Ref: Barn/AB/JS

Date: 24 April 2008

Dear Mr Blackwell

Tilley Award - Operation Blight

This is a letter of endorsement for the work that my staff at the Central Safer Neighbourhood Team have undertaken in partnership with the University of Sheffield in relation to Operation Blight.

Operation Blight is a partnership response to identifying a particularly important issue highlighted by the community and our partners and then taking a problem orientated approach to try and address that problem. The issue, criminal damage, is high on the agenda of all the agencies working in the field of Community Safety due to the disproportionate impact it can have on the quality of life of the people living in our neighbourhoods.

The project would have been praiseworthy enough had the team resolved to deal with this problem in a traditional way, but they chose to try some innovative techniques aimed at preventing the young offenders from committing more graffiti and damage.

Recognising the difficulties and the complexities of evaluating this element of the project, the team involved staff and students in the Department of Law at Sheffield University, who have produced an interesting and groundbreaking piece of work around the effectiveness of the techniques.

The evaluation, so important to Tilley, makes recommendations that may tailor the way future operations aimed at reducing re-offending are designed and implemented, and I know the University are already talking about publishing the work.

The officers involved in this project will be receiving the appropriate recognition from District, but I feel the work of the whole team is a worthy contender for the Tilley Award.

Yours sincerely

Andy Brooke

District Commander

Checklist for Applicants:

1. Have you read the process and application form guidance?
2. Have you completed all four sections of the application form in full including the endorsement from a senior representative?
3. Have you checked that your entry addresses all aspects of the judging criteria?
4. Have you advised all partner agencies that you are submitting an entry for your project?
5. Have you adhered to the formatting requirements within the guidance?
6. Have you checked whether there are any reasons why your project should **not** be publicised to other police forces, partner agencies and the general public e.g. civil or criminal proceedings pending in relation to your project?
7. Have you inserted your project name as a footer note on the application form? Go to View-Header and Footer to add it.
8. Have you saved you application form as a word document and entitled your message '**Tilley 08 entry (followed by project name in brackets)**' before emailing it?

Once you are satisfied that you have completed your application form in full please email it to Tilleyawards08@homeoffice.gsi.gov.uk. One hard copy must also be posted to Alex Blackwell at Home Office, Effective Practice & Communication Team, 4th Floor, Fry Building (SE Quarter), 2 Marsham Street, London, SW1P 4DF and be received by 25th April 2008.