

Report on Nightlife Trial evening in Hebden Bridge and Todmorden Friday 16 November 2007

Introduction

The aim of this trial was to explore the potential for the use of highly visible volunteers and non-emergency service security and health workers beyond Halifax Town Centre.

Halifax benefits from the coordinated provision, each Friday and Saturday evening, of the Nightlife partnership. Nightlife provides additional security, care and support and medical assistance from three partner agencies the Street Angels, St John Ambulance and the Nightlife Marshals.

This provision has widespread support from the licensed trade, police, local authority and the general public who use Halifax as an entertainment centre and has been much copied in other parts of the country.

Extended Nightlife Project

Since their launch in Halifax there have been many calls for satellite Nightlife schemes to benefit other parts of Calderdale. One model currently under consideration is an outreach service to take the Angels, Marshals and medical volunteers to areas where their presence could have a positive impact.

Security and crime prevention tends to take the focus of media attention regarding the Nightlife provision; this is, however, only one element of the work. Much of the activity in Halifax is centred on positive interaction and support much like the Town Centre Ambassadors or Street Wardens in the daytime economy.

Concerns of young people congregating, possibly involved in anti-social behaviour, is a constant theme in today's society. The Nightlife workers are likely to encounter far more younger people, congregating in public areas such as parks, in a wider remit. Street Angels, with support from Marshals, regularly encounter younger people, 11-15 year olds, both in the centre and on the fringes of Halifax and have had positive experiences and reactions in doing so.

The potential for enhanced youth work style engagement is limited, especially if drink and drugs are a factor, however this type of provision can provide -

- a) the ability to offer practical support to those who are vulnerable as a result of drink or drug use. Young people's drinking habits, and the incredible acute and chronic health risks and accident potentials involved, feature heavily in recent news
- b) the ability to provide medical and first aid attention
- c) the 'capable guardian' or authority figure factor to reduce the potential for anti-social or criminal activity
- d) the ability to intervene to prevent the escalation of public disorder should the need to rise

and should it be assessed by the trained, professional security personnel as safe to do so

e) the ability to act as extra eyes and ears for the emergency services and gather pertinent information

f) the ability to better direct CCTV provision in the area

g) the ability to engage with both adults and young people in these environments if it is assessed as appropriate

Hebden Bridge was chosen as a trial as a result of two separate meetings. The first was after a trial of the Youth Caravan which runs successfully in Todmorden and is an initiative of Churches Together in Todmorden and Todmorden Together. The group found that many of the young people travel on public transport around the Calder Valley, and so tried the caravan in Hebden Bridge one evening with favourable results. As a follow-up the group in Todmorden arranged a meeting between Churches Together, Todmorden Together, Police, Youth Services and Street Angels. Separate to this Street Angels was approached asking to attend a Council initiated meeting looking at vandalism problems in Hebden Bridge. Street Angels successfully merged these two ideas and a trial evening was set up to give us practical insight into the possible next steps in adapting the Nightlife projects idea for a role beyond Halifax and Todmorden.

The Trial Evening

The evening started at 8.30pm outside the council office in the centre of Hebden Bridge where PCSOs gave a briefing. Present with us were two Street Angels two Calder Event Medical Services volunteers, two Nightlife Marshals, five PCSOs, Louise Castro from Todmorden Together, Jeff Hunter from Churches Together in Todmorden and four local people including Hebden Royd mayor, Nader Fekri and James Allinson the vicar of Mytholmroyd and former mayor.

We initially split into two groups each lead by PCSOs and the local people; we patrolled the town centre and local parks, especially the Calder Holmes Park and canal area. We were shown many of the areas where young people congregate and where there had been some issues with anti-social behaviour, vandalism and alcohol related violence.

Nader, James, Louise and Jeff left at around 10pm. At 11pm we went to Todmorden, and lead by the two local PCSOs concentrated on the Cricket Club grounds, the park next door, market area and the river pathway behind the market leading to a recently constructed play area.

The PCSOs finished at midnight and we returned to Hebden Bridge at around 00.15am, continuing our patrols until around 00.45am then returning to Halifax for a debriefing

Issues and Concerns

We encountered no violence and no particularly anti-social behaviour bar from some minor abuse, levelled against PCSOs, shouted by two adult drinkers from the safety of a pub's external smoking area.

The smoking ban has lead to greater numbers of people congregating outside venues. There were a fair number of people outside Hebden Bridge Sports and Social Club on Albert Street,

especially later on in the evening when other venues had closed. We were aware that in recent months this has been a hotspot for incidents, however the two door staff from the venue were a constant visible presence and the crowd was well natured.

Young people were congregating in some numbers in a variety of locations and we could see that some may find this intimidating. The young people, however, were generally well behaved and willing to talk to us. The young people in Hebden Bridge appeared to react more positively and cooperatively than those in Todmorden. None of the young people we encountered in either town were engaging in vandalism.

Lighting was an issue in both Hebden Bridge and Todmorden. The PCSOs were concerned that there was no lighting along one side of the river in Todmorden on a footpath leading to a newly constructed play area. The Calder Holmes park has several 'black holes' with limited lighting, including the skate park area and the tennis/ basketball courts, which were unlocked.

Alcohol

The majority of groups of young people, but not every young person, had some alcohol on them, usually bottles of beer or alcopops carried loose in plain white carrier bags. It appeared that they had managed to buy the alcohol locally that evening, but we personally did not witness any specific sales.

Early on PCSOs saw one group of young people acting suspiciously and suspected that they were attempting to conceal alcohol. They found a bag of beer bottles nearby behind Riverside Junior School and tipped it away in view of the kids. They confiscated more alcohol and some cannabis from other young people, both in Hebden Bridge and Todmorden throughout the evening. The young people were generally compliant and cooperative.

Although there was a fair amount of alcohol around, only one of the young people we encountered appeared incapacitated through drink. She was with friends in Todmorden and they accompanied her home in a taxi following support by CEMS and Street Angels.

First Aid - CEMS

The CEMS volunteers assisted two people, both worse for wear through drink. They were called to assess one man at Hebden Bridge and assisted him in getting home and monitored a young woman in Todmorden, ensuring that she was safe before she went home in a taxi accompanied by friends. Beyond that were not called on for any other incidents.

PCSOs

Community Support Officers were extremely helpful explained the challenges they face in. They appeared to enjoy a positive rapport with many of the young people we encountered; exchanges were genial and good-natured.

Security - Marshals

The Marshals were not called on to intervene in any incidents.

Street Angels / Todmorden Caravan

As a result of the coverage in the Hebden Bridge Times earlier in the week, many people we met were aware that we would be working and were keen to ask questions.

Street Angels talked to a number of groups of young people about the local area. The general

consensus was that there were limited options for teenagers in the town and that they would welcome somewhere inside (a safe place) which was warm and had coffee, crisps, biscuits, etc available and people who would treat them as young adults. They would want to meet and socialise and said most of the young people got along with each other except those who sit in the Memorial Gardens.

One worker was of the opinion that there were some minor tensions between the PCSOs and one group of young people in Hebden Bridge, probably linked to the confiscation of their alcohol earlier in the evening. Street Angels reported that the group were more relaxed and willing to chat when the PCSOs moved on.

Communication

All patrollers were briefed by PCSOs prior to working and there was an interim debrief before the group moved on to Todmorden later on in the evening.

The radiolink radios, used in Halifax to coordinate activity between police, CCTV, marshals, angels, St John/Cems and door staff were tested but as anticipated, the signal from Halifax was not strong enough to reach Hebden Bridge and Todmorden. PCSOs were able to use the police airwave radios to keep in contact.

Mobile phones were used by the non-police patrollers to ensure everyone kept in touch throughout the evening.

Concluding Observations and Recommendations

- Feedback from local people and PCSOs indicated that this Friday evening was quieter than usual. It was bitterly cold night which may have dissuaded some people from going or staying outside.
- Given that this was only one evening, it is difficult to draw any specific conclusions, but the project workers were welcomed warmly by both young people and adults as an increased visible presence with the ability to support.
- The local police community support officers were invaluable to trial evening and all future work should be fully coordinated with WYP
- The need for Marshals and SJA/CEMS was limited on the evening. It is a large area to cover and for any future work there must be clear communication channels to ensure all activity is well coordinated and sufficiently reactive.
- Further consultation with local community representatives and agencies active in the area should initially focus on the provision of a drop-in cafe and possible Nightlife projects activity on the streets and outside public areas such as parks. Halifax Street Angels would be able to offer assistance with this and with the proposed pilot of a 'Nightlife on Wheels' provision in Spring to include the Calder Valley.
- Youth workers report that a drop in facility has been trialled in Hebden Bridge in the past, but that there were issues around certain young people wanting to drink alcohol and smoke cannabis inside or nearby.

- The Young Peoples service should be a key partner in advising on good practice in engaging positively with young people.
- Clear communication and information sharing protocols need to be in place to make sure pertinent intelligence and information on both individuals and the wider environment is handled and passed on appropriately.
- Hope Baptist Church have plans for £2 million redevelopment of the existing building on New Road in the centre of Hebden Bridge. Street Angels have spoken to Hope Baptist who are willing to open a room for a drop in café and include this in their plans for the redevelopment project. Any drop-in facility would need to be owned by the local community and not something Halifax / Todmorden people travel in to run.
- Police and local authority to use test purchasing operations and explore new ways to identify how young people are getting hold of alcohol and to identify and prosecute adults involved in proxy buying.

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This is not a comprehensive report and if further agencies wish to contribute then please email either Paul or Andrew.