

Tackling youth vandalism

ABOUT THESE GUIDES

This is one in a series of guides designed to share ideas for tackling vandalism and other forms of criminal damage. They are based, as far as possible, on examples we have found from around the UK and further afield. Although in most cases these have not been rigorously evaluated, they have been reported to have been successful in tackling this sort of crime.

Other guides already produced in this series cover:

- tackling vandalism and other criminal damage;
- tools and powers for tackling criminal damage;
- environmental approaches; and
- high visibility “policing”

Further guides are in preparation including on arson, criminal damage to vehicles and analysing criminal damage data.

These guides are intended to be living documents that can be up-dated as necessary so if you have any comments on these guides or if there are any other subjects you would like covered please send your suggestions to us via your regional Government Office or the Welsh Assembly Government.

WHAT IS VANDALISM / CRIMINAL DAMAGE?

Criminal damage refers to crimes where any person without lawful excuse intentionally or recklessly destroys or damages any property belonging to anotherⁱ. Activities resulting in non-permanent damage (i.e. that can be rectified, cleaned off or removed at no cost) such as letting down of car tyres should not be classed as criminal damage, nor should accidental damage.

Any damage around a point of entry to a house or vehicle should be treated as attempted burglary / vehicle crime rather than criminal damage if, on the balance of probabilities, one of those crimes is the more likely offence than criminal damageⁱⁱ.

Vandalism is the term used in the British Crime Survey. Whilst the definition has been kept as close as possible to that of criminal damage, it only covers crimes against households and household property, including cars.

YOUNG PEOPLE AND VANDALISM

The victims of vandalism are broadly spread across a variety of social categories. However, two thirds of offenders are aged 21 and underⁱⁱⁱ.

Across all crime types many young offenders experience problems at school and / or at home, have low self-esteem,

and are unaware of the opportunities that exist to channel their energies in a positive manner.

Providing young people with educational and diversionary activities and equipping them with key basic skills – whilst ensuring that a robust framework of penalties exists – is an important step in addressing vandalism, and offending more widely. Not only are there large similarities in the underlying factors across a number of crime types, but crimes such as vandalism – if not dealt with early on – could potentially lead to the development of more serious criminal behaviour.

Young people are much more likely to engage in these schemes if they are consulted in their development, rather than have activities imposed upon them – do things with them, not to them!

SPORTS BASED ACTIVITIES AND PROGRAMMES

When asked why they had committed vandalism, 23% of offenders cited boredom, and a further 18% ‘for the buzz’. It is important, therefore that young people are able to channel their energies positively.

Diversionary activities can engage young people before they become involved in criminal activity. Sports based activities can be an enjoyable means of increasing self-confidence and interpersonal skills, in a manner that is widely accessible. Importantly, these activities should not be regarded as rewarding those who behave badly, but rather as a means of initially engaging young people, and then developing a relationship of trust that allows them to explore the underlying reasons of nuisance behaviour, such as poor educational attainment or drug and alcohol abuse.

There is also a need for recreational facilities for teenagers that are free and available to use at all times, because venues for organised activities are not open all day or may request a charge for use. This could include open spaces, where young people can play ball games and ride bikes without disturbing others.

In **Liverpool**, the Kensington Youth Inclusion Programme Community Sports Project works directly with young people from neglected areas, or troubled domestic backgrounds, as well as with schools and other youth groups. A number of sporting activities and health education sessions are held, aimed at different age groups and sporting abilities, with some specifically for girls. An average of 100 young people participate a week, resulting in a **significant reduction in arrest rates, school exclusion and truancy** for those involved. Many of the volunteers who work on this programme are also young people, giving them valuable management skills and developing a sense of responsibility. A number of volunteers have taken advantage of training opportunities on offer in areas such as child protection and first aid, increasing their self-esteem.

ARTS BASED ACTIVITIES AND PROGRAMMES

As with sports based activities, arts programmes can increase a young person's sense of self esteem and confidence, as well as developing important team-working and communication skills.

The most successful projects are targeted at different age groups and abilities, and are developed in consultation with young people to find out their interests and skills. Sport can often be incorporated into dance, music, film and theatre as an innovative and stimulating means of engaging a broader range of young people.

NACRO has developed a series of arts based schemes for young people in 'at risk' groups:

FILM: In **Chelmsford**, a video entitled 'On the Sidelines' was wholly produced by young people over a period of 8 months. Those involved presented a bid to a local group for funding a video that would focus on the lack of youth facilities in the area, and what difference these facilities could make to their lives. Once they had successfully secured the money, they filmed and edited the footage and produced the music for the backing track. A screening of the film was held, attended by the Mayor of Chelmsford, parents and partner agencies.

MUSIC: In **Chelmsford**, money was raised from various sources, including the local housing association, to run a **DJ and MC-ing project** over 6 months. A local professional DJ trained a group of young people, who went on to perform at an under-18s event at a local nightclub, which they organised and advertised themselves. The strict anti-drugs policy enforced by the project organiser meant that a number of the young people involved stopped or reduced substance misuse. In addition, they received accreditation from a local youth centre music workshop programme for their work.

THEATRE: In **Boston**, Lincolnshire, young people work with professional actors to create and perform productions that focus on issues facing themselves and their peers, including sexual health, social deprivation and bullying. Arts based projects are also carried out with young people at the Lincolnshire Secure Unit.

YOUTH SHELTERS

Shelters provide an area for young people to congregate (so seating is important) thereby concentrating litter, noise etc. ideally in an area where it is going to cause the least problem to others. Shelters vary from the very basic to venues with sporting facilities, such as a kick wall or a basketball hoop.

Many local authorities have found that the cost of building a shelter is more than justified by the amount of money saved through reductions in vandalism to the surrounding area.

Shelters should be designed to minimise opportunities for vandalism. For example, shelters that are open on all sides allow all round visibility and safety, but may be less popular in bad weather. Adequate lighting is necessary to deter intimidation.

A sense of ownership is vital: the target age group should be consulted over the design of the shelter, and involved in decorating it – and every few years the new generation of young people should be consulted over the appearance of the shelter to maintain their respect for the space.

Whilst ensuring that shelters are accessible, they should not be placed too close to areas of concentrated housing, to respect the needs of residents.

EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMMES

Recreational facilities should not be seen as definitive solutions in themselves. Rather, they should accompany strategies to combat such factors as educational and social exclusion, or alcohol and drug dependency, as these are often common to young offenders.

Teaching young people about their role as responsible citizens is already a part of the mainstream education system. However, targeted initiatives that focus on particular problems can be beneficial. These are often best delivered by a partnership between the school and key local agencies, such as the police, fire and youth services.

It is important, however, that those who have fallen out of this system – through, for example, truancy and exclusion – remain engaged and inspired, so they are less likely to commit criminal offences. The key messages can be

delivered in a variety of different settings outside of a classroom or a school, and can utilise stimulating learning tools such as drama and sport. Care is needed, however, to ensure that this is not seen as rewarding bad behaviour – not only will this cause presentational problems, it can also lead to young people misbehaving to get access to activities that otherwise might not be available to them.

In **Essex**, the 'Firebreak' initiative involved fire-fighters mentoring a group of young people who were no longer engaged with the school system, and were not motivated in making decisions about their future. It provided a learning environment that combined practical fire safety and rescue skills with classroom based discussion at local fire stations, thereby developing interpersonal skills in an environment that required young people to exercise discipline. Part of the course was aimed at encouraging the participants to think about their futures, and how further education could be beneficial to them. Importantly, a presentation ceremony was held at the end of the programme to **recognise and reward accomplishments**, giving young people a positive perception of their own capabilities.

YOUTH VANDALISM AND ALCOHOL

Alcohol misuse can cause and exacerbate many differing forms of anti-social behaviour. Evidence suggests that vandalism is no exception and is strongly linked with evening drinking at weekends. Across all offence types, 'being drunk' is most commonly given as an excuse or reason *by offenders* who commit criminal damage (26%). (From the Criminal Justice System perspective being drunk is an aggravating not mitigating factor.)

Consequently, tackling the problems of alcohol misuse can help to reduce the risk of vandalism. Local agencies need to provide a joined-up integrated response to alcohol misuse, and make it clear to individuals that the associated misbehaviour will not be tolerated. A wide range of tools is available including:

- Alcohol test purchasing operations can be undertaken on licensed premises by the police and trading standards officers.
- Anti-social Behaviour Orders and Acceptable Behaviour Contracts can be sought, where appropriate, against particular individuals.
- Dispersal orders could be used to target action at problem areas.
- Alcohol containers – even unopened – can be confiscated from underage drinkers.

Moreover, an extensive range of new powers under the Licensing Act 2003 became effective on 24 November 2005. These include a new mechanism for reviewing licences with

regard to any problems that arise relating to the four statutory licensing objectives:

- The prevention of crime and disorder;
- Public Safety;
- The prevention of public nuisance;
- The protection of children from harm.

At any stage, a responsible authority may ask the licensing authority to review the premises licence because of a matter arising at the premises in connection with any of the four licensing objectives.

In **Gateshead**, youth disorder was exacerbated by alcohol. An enforcement campaign was implemented to crack down on the problem, including numerous arrests and Penalty Notices for Disorder. In addition, an **investigation of drinking establishments** was undertaken by licensing officers looking for evidence of underage drinking – resulting in the closure of a pub. This strict approach led to a decrease in alcohol related disorder, which, in turn, has led to a reduction in vandalism.

RESTORATIVE JUSTICE

Restorative justice can be an effective means of helping young people who have committed criminal damage better understand and appreciate the concerns of the victim, and the impact on society of their actions. This can include:

- **Direct reparation** to the victim, for example an oral or written apology, or supervised activity to benefit the victim.
- **Community reparation**, for example young people painting over graffiti, repairing vandalism done to a local play area, or helping to arrange and deliver local youth activities.

Since 2001 Neighbourhood Wardens in Gorton, **Manchester**, have run the 'On the Streets' Project, which focuses on breaking down **barriers between young people and the wider community**. It provides a forum to engage young people who have been perceived as causing a nuisance, enabling them to discuss their problems and at the same time instilling a sense of community responsibility. Leisure activities are provided as a reward for positive interactions in the community, such as 'clean up' campaigns and improving gardens. In addition, education is provided on various issues important to young people, including sexual health, alcohol/drugs awareness and bullying. Organisers of community events increasingly invite along young people from the project, showing that greater community understanding is being developed.

For comprehensive information on restorative justice, please refer to the Youth Justice Board website^v, and "Best Practice Guidance for Restorative Practitioners" on the Home Office website^v

PENALTIES AND OTHER LEGAL POWERS

Whilst addressing the underlying causes of criminal behaviour, it is important that an appropriate system of penalties and sanctions exist to send out the message that such behaviour is not acceptable.

In addition to prison sentences, youth vandalism can be addressed by a range of measures, some of which are detailed below. A more comprehensive and detailed list can be found in the accompanying guide 'Tools and powers for tackling criminal damage':

- **Fixed Penalty Notices** of £50 for minor graffiti and fly posting to individuals aged 10 years and over.
- **Penalty Notices for Disorder** of £80 to those aged 16 years and over for destroying or damaging property that is valued at under £500.
- **Acceptable Behaviour Contracts.** Non-legal contracts between a perpetrator and a relevant authority, in which the perpetrator agrees not to perform certain anti-social acts.
- **Anti-Social Behaviour Orders and injunctions,** prohibiting the perpetrator from undertaking specific anti-social acts. Breach of an ASBO or injunction can lead to a custodial sentence.

In **East Chesterton**, **Acceptable Behaviour Contracts** were issued to 3 young people. However, they were also empowered to **organise their own recreational activities**. They had a budget, made decisions on what activities they would take part in and made the necessary arrangements. In addition, youth workers engaged them in detached outreach work. The result was a steep reduction in anti-social behaviour. This project was funded for 3 years, enabling it to develop and evolve with the young people and to keep them engaged until they no longer needed any support to keep out of trouble.

In **Bexley**, London, graffiti was declared a **prevalent offence** following the agreement of the head of the Crown Prosecution Service and the Chief Superintendent of the local police. Instead of receiving a caution for a first offence, a young person is now referred to the **Youth Offending Team** and subsequent offences result in a referral to the **courts**. Courts in Bexley have developed a much better understanding of the gravity of graffiti and associated offences.

Parenting Interventions: Parenting can have an impact on a child's behaviour, so successful interventions may involve the parents as well as the young person. These interventions can

be carried out on a voluntary basis, in liaison with youth outreach workers, the school and Youth Offending Teams. In addition a **Parenting Order** can be issued on conviction of a juvenile; when an ASBO is issued; or when a Youth Offending Team applies for one for young people up to 17.

CHILDREN UNDER 10

Children below the age of criminal responsibility also commit vandalism. A **Child Safety Order** can be applied for by a local authority. It requires a child under 10, who has been involved in anti-social or criminal behaviour, to comply with a specified set of measures. These are usually used with a parenting order and contain a range of requirements, for example restricting the child's behaviour and attending educational programmes.

A parenting order can be attached to a child safety order or applied for by a Youth Offending Team.

In **Spilsby**, Lincolnshire, Sergeant Gary Brown has formed the **Knight School** for 6 -8 year olds. The courses utilise stimulating techniques to deliver lessons on appearance, good manners and respect in order to instil a code of courtesy and pride within the young people. Each participant is given a knight's name and, they are rewarded with a 'kighthood' at a special ceremony and banquet if they pass the course: *"Instilling a sense of personal pride, of mannerly and compassionate behaviour and of respect for oneself and for others in a child in its formative years is, I believe, the way to becoming happier and more responsible as they enter young adulthood. If it saves one child from a life of crime then it has been worth it."* The Knight School is in addition to a newly built **skate park**, as well as projects to get teenagers involved in **community work**, including cleaning graffiti and road signs and collecting litter. Anti-social behaviour and crime rates have been halved in Spilsby. Five neighbouring towns plan to adopt his schemes.

NEED MORE HELP?

Further information and assistance on tackling criminal damage is also available via your regional Government Office / Welsh Assembly Government or from:

- i) **Crime Reduction website** (www.crimereduction.gov.uk)
- ii) **Together Academies** which bring together practitioners to provide advice and training on specific issues to transform the way that they tackle anti-social behaviour.
- iii) **ASB Action Days** when an expert practitioner will meet with ASB teams and their partners to help find solutions to intractable problems, refocus action to

get results, encourage use of the full range of new anti-social behaviour powers or remove blockages that are preventing progress.

iv) ASB Action Line (0870 220 2000) and website (www.together.gov.uk) which provide information, solutions and best practice to help practitioners tackle anti-social behaviour.

v) Overseas websites such as the International Centre for the Prevention of Crime (<http://www.crime-prevention-intl.org/index.php>); the Center for Problem-Oriented Policing (www.popcenter.org); and the National Criminal Justice Reference Service (www.ncjrs.gov).

ⁱ Criminal Damage Act 1971 Section 1

ⁱⁱ Home Office Counting Rules for Recorded Crime

ⁱⁱⁱ Crime and Justice Survey

^{iv} www.youth-justice-board.gov.uk

^v www.homeoffice.gov.uk