

Collaborative projects on youth crime

Sept 08 – March 09

Westminster City Council – Case Study

1. Where the project started

The Catalyst project in Westminster was motivated by a desire and need to tackle perceptions of youth crime in particular wards in the borough, where the fear of youth related crime is very different from reality. There was significant political interest in youth crime prevention and real political will to engage young people in the design and provision of services, and to consult with young people more creatively. A great deal of work had recently been undertaken to map youth provision across the borough, which provided a clear sense of where there were gaps and how any new activity could add value to what was already being delivered.

Early discussions engaged a range of colleagues across the council to identify the focus for the project. Quite quickly it was suggested that the Catalyst should:

Develop a new kind of inter-generational project which actively involves young people and older residents, and contributes to improving local perceptions of young people and reduces the fear of youth crime.

Youth crime in Westminster

Only 6% of all crime in Westminster is committed by someone under the age of 18.

Key youth crime targets are:

- To reduce the number of people who tell the Council that youths loitering are a problem in their area
- To increase safety and feelings of safety among children and young people
- To reduce the number of children and young people entering the youth justice system

2. Defining success

The team defined success as:

- Undertaking an innovative process which generates a locally owned viable intergenerational project involving young people as designers and ultimately co-delivers
- Effective cross-directorate working bring together youth and adult participation and engagement teams, youth services, policy and crime and disorder teams, YOS and quantitative data analysis function

3. Building the right project team and selecting a key location

The Catalyst team in Westminster quickly established a cross-service partnership led by the Policy Development Team in the Crime and Disorder Reduction Service (CDRS) and also involving the YOS, the CDRS Engagement Team and the Youth Service's Positive Activities for Young People (PAYP) Team. There was also early support from senior staff from both the Youth Service and the Community Protection Department.

Westminster were keen to use their local, qualitative knowledge of the estates and young people coupled with the extensive crime and perception data provided by their Analysts to identify an appropriate location for this project. They identified the Hallfield estate as the key project location because of the significant gap between perceptions of youth crime and actual crime that existed there, and because there was an emerging youth engagement infrastructure to tap into.

4. Researching the key issues

In order to inform the development of the Catalyst project, relevant research was undertaken to provide the project team in Westminster with a clearer and greater understanding of the issues they were trying to tackle. The aim of the research was to explore how inter-generational contact can facilitate understanding and learning between different generational groups, break down barriers in the community, improve the perception of young people and reduce animosity and conflict. A particular focus was how to reduce fear of crime through the breaking down of barriers between generations.

The research programme incorporated desk-based research and interviews/focus groups with young people and adults on the Hallfield estate in Westminster.

An initial report of the desk-research summarised some of the existing knowledge in the field about altering public perception, fear of crime and about the effect of intergenerational programmes in a variety of different neighbourhoods.

The desk research concluded that:

- Much is known about the challenges of altering public perceptions – it is neither simple, nor straightforward, particularly where such entrenched stereotypes exist about other communities or generations.
- Projects on the widest scale, including work with the media, are the most effective at challenging and changing public perceptions.
- However, practical and local projects, such as intergenerational projects, can also make a significant difference to developing new levels of understanding about our neighbours – both young and old.

A series of focus groups with teenagers and adults from the Hallfield estate, as well as older teenagers from elsewhere in Westminster, were used to:

- Find out how the different generations perceive one another
- Explore perceptions of crime
- Generate ideas for how young people and adults could come together to improve things

Key findings included:

- Positive relationships between young people and some adults on the estate, and a fractious relationship with others.
- The use of open space, including green spaces, was highly contested by residents young and old.
- The fear of crime was shared between both adults and young people (who were uneasy about using spaces away from the estate).
- The need for positive news stories about the achievements of young people locally, and publicity of the fact that the estate is much safer than residents perceive, to challenge the fears of some adults.

5. Moving from research to design

The team ran two intergenerational design workshops with young people from the Hallfield estate, residents, and young leaders, followed by a further design session with Ward Councillors, senior local authority officers and the Youth Parliament. The key ideas generated were:

Idea #1: Intergenerational Estate Forum: Forum for Hallfield residents of all ages to discuss and resolve issues relating to the estate and discuss ideas for the improvement of the estate

Idea #2: Hallfield Residents' Activities Club: Classes and activities every week organised by Hallfield residents of all ages for Hallfield residents of all ages

Idea #3: Community Events Calendar: Publicising all year round intergenerational activities for all Hallfield residents

Idea #4: Bringing the school into the Hallfield community: Using the local primary school as a base for local activities

Idea #5: Capacity building: Employing a co-ordinator to support residents with capacity building for this work in the first year

6. Planned next steps

The team is committed to taking forward the projects on the Hallfield estate and also to ensure the learning from the project has a wider impact across the Council. In particular, the team plans to:

- Have a session with elected representatives, including members of the Youth Council and local Councillors, focussed on intergenerational project possibilities for estates across Westminster.
- Develop a business case for rolling out intergenerational estate-based projects across the City.