

London Fire Brigade (London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority)

Innovative youth programme supported by the London Borough Council of Waltham Forest and the London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority to educate young people of the consequences of crime.



Who is involved?

The London Fire Brigade which is the operating arm of the London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority (LFEPA). LFEPA is part of the Greater London Authority Group (GLA). LFEPA have an annual safety plan with targets that look at reducing the number of fires, the number of deaths and injuries associated with fire and reducing the number of fire alarms.

The London Fire Brigade in the borough of Waltham Forest have a partnership with other groups including the police and ambulance services in participating at Crime and Safety Awareness Days organised by the No Way Trust (more commonly referred to by its flagship project Prison! Me! No Way! – PMNW).

The Trust is based in Hull and operates UK-wide in all the devolved countries and the Channel Islands. It was established by prison officers in 1993 and was recognised as a charity in 1995. It seeks to guide and inspire young people and to promote and develop a fairer socially included society, with fewer inequalities. Mistakes, poverty, exclusion, or social deprivation should not mean a future without hope, it is the Trust’s intention to provide credible and effective lifelong learning experiences that will help to reduce any negative influences and encourage more young people to make a success of their lives. The Trust was instrumental for starting the PMNW scheme which is one part of the Trust’s activities.

Approach to CSR

Community fire safety and work at a local level is new to LFEPA and Borough Commanders of the Fire Brigade as a result they are taking their own approaches. “Action plans developed by the LFEPA do not take into consideration local needs as these will vary from place to place,” said Jim Saddington Waltham Forest Borough Fire Commander for the London Fire Brigade, “As a model employer and a

respected body within the community we have an obligation to do what we can for the communities in which we operate". This approach by LFEPA recognises its role within the wider community and not just within fire prevention and fire fighting. The LFEPA unique position of its reputation and social standing means that it is trusted and respected which is extremely useful in communicating messages on social responsibility.

The drivers

The GLA, LFEPA and the London boroughs are seeking to improve links and relationships between themselves and with the communities in which they operate. The LFEPA aim of reducing hoax calls, false alarms, arson, and improving community relations were key drivers and the justification for Waltham Forest Brigade's support to the PMNW Crime and Safety Awareness Days.

The driver for the establishment of the PMNW was the belief that youth's perception of life in prison was un-realistic and an initiative was needed so that they would think differently about the issues. This belief was shared amongst a small group of prison officers who did not want to see youths entering prison. Funding for the Trust comes from a variety of sources mainly grant giving trusts, neighbourhood renewal funding, county councils and children foundations.

The initiative

Prison! Me! No Way! organise around 200 Crime and Safety Awareness Days throughout the UK each school year. The aim of each day is to raise awareness amongst young people about the causes, consequences and penalties of crime. Young people involved in these days are generally aged 12 to 14. PMNW's research with secondary school children revealed that their perception of prison was far from the reality.

Representatives from the police, fire and rescue, ambulance services, youth offending teams, victim support, magistrates, O2 nuisance calls bureau and other agencies are joined by prison staff volunteers (there is a pool of over 550) from various prison service establishments throughout the UK to participate on crime and safety awareness days.

Themed workshops that have been developed in consultation with youths and are further tailored to meet the specific needs of the area are delivered relating to crime, consequences and imprisonment. Wherever possible there is a fully furnished life size replica prison cell on hand to provide an authentic experience and a life size street set used for acting out anti-social instances; prison dog displays and a period of prison exercise further complement the learning experience.

Pupils at most venues are escorted as would be prisoners (subject to sufficient volunteers), to workshops and events. The idea is for the pupils to experience the restriction placed upon inmates and for them to recognise the true value of their liberty. Days are devised so that young people can investigate how one moment of thoughtlessness can lead to totally changed lives and to help them recognise how important trust and freedom are to building successful lives.

“These days are innovative, hands-on approach to educating young people on the causes, penalty, and consequences of crime and to promote personal safety issues” said Paul Wilkinson CEO of the PMNW.

Crime and Safety Awareness Days started in Waltham Forest in 2002 and were supported by the London Fire Brigade. They saw the opportunity to participate in a themed workshop on important issues relevant to the fire service such as false alarms and hoax calls to the fire brigade that can divert resources and as a result cost lives. The fire brigade volunteers assist the pupils in role-playing on various aspects dealing with fire safety and fire prevention such as arson. An example of a role play would be the pupils setting fire to a bin that then spreads to the eaves of a factory resulting in the factory burning down. The consequences of the fire such as deaths caused by the fire, or unemployment whilst the factory is rebuilt or the firm going out of business and family issues such as resulting marriage breakdowns are explored with the pupils. These role plays make the school children think about the consequences of their actions to others, and they also discuss and experience what happens to the offenders, for example prison or community service.

Challenges

The main challenges for the LFEPA have been to understand how best to operate at the community-level and gain funding. As it is a new approach convincing people of its value takes time. This has been overcome by a seminar in London in March 2004 hosted by the police where interest was secured for the projects expansion into other London boroughs. Another challenge is funding. Each borough fire service has, in general, a budget of £2,500 to commit to community fire safety. This has meant that the London Fire Brigade has given support by volunteering rather than substantial funds to the initiative. However, on a more practical level school day timetables do not fit the shift system of the fire brigade. So it takes a certain amount of logistical effort to free up fire brigade staff time for a whole day at a school.

Benefits

PMNW's evaluation in 2003 of its national programme from a questionnaire at 32 schools (including those in Waltham Forest) involving 2,970 pupils revealed that 98% of the pupils said they would describe the Crime and Safety Awareness Days as either 'very valuable' or 'valuable'. In another assessment Loughborough University evaluated the success of the programme found a 27% reduction in hoax calls to the fire service that could be attributed to the programme. Feedback from head teachers at the schools involved provides qualitative feedback and examples of marked improvement with individual children. In addition the initiative helps promote the fire brigade which is good for recruitment – an unexpected benefit. "Our involvement with other services has demonstrated that partnerships can work - one reason for this is the 'can do mentality' of the LFEPA," said Jim Saddington.

The initiative delivers to the core LFEPA mission, by improving safety and reducing false alarms which contribute to the LFEPA operating targets. The LFEPA are only just learning to work at the borough level so it has been an invaluable learning experience which has included seminars to 10 other borough commanders and six other borough councils to share experiences and promote uptake in other areas. As a result PMNW will start in Hackney in 2004 and other boroughs are interested. It aims to encourage new partners to 'roll the programme out across London in years to come'

Why is it CSR?

The development of the activities in the awareness days involved consultation with its target audience demonstrating stakeholder involvement. There are other aspects of CSR featured in this project and they include community involvement, education, health and safety, partnerships, good neighbour programmes and volunteering. The fire brigade and the other partners in the project are all volunteers and provide their support in attending the days outside of their working hours. Providing volunteers and 'workers participation' is another CSR activity.

What next?

The London Borough of Waltham Forest and other partnership organisations have made available £70,000 for the crime and safety awareness days. An additional £30,000 is still required. If raised, it will mean that for the first time all 17 schools, approximately 2200 children, will be able to participate in the programme for the next 3 years.

As a result of the success in Waltham Forest other borough fire commanders, e.g. in Hackney, are interested in participating in the project, and for the school year 2003/04 the awareness days will also be run in the London boroughs of Enfield and Newham. For 2004/05 it will expand into another six boroughs. “This is a direct result of the vision, support and participation of reputable organisations such as the London Fire Brigade, without this the expansion would not have happened”, said Paul Wilkinson. The Waltham Forest Fire Brigade, the LFEPA and the other partners aim to continue to promote awareness of the project amongst the community and borough leaders. PMNW aims to increase the crime and safety awareness days from 200 to 300 in a school year.

For more information

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