
This item was submitted to [Loughborough's Research Repository](#) by the author.
Items in Figshare are protected by copyright, with all rights reserved, unless otherwise indicated.

Identifying and disseminating 'good' community safety practice : a problem solving approach

PLEASE CITE THE PUBLISHED VERSION

PUBLISHER

© Pavilion

LICENCE

CC BY-NC-ND 4.0

REPOSITORY RECORD

Erol, Rosie, and Andrew Millie. 2019. "Identifying and Disseminating 'good' Community Safety Practice : A Problem Solving Approach". figshare. <https://hdl.handle.net/2134/3794>.

This item was submitted to Loughborough's Institutional Repository (<https://dspace.lboro.ac.uk/>) by the author and is made available under the following Creative Commons Licence conditions.



For the full text of this licence, please go to:
<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/2.5/>

Identifying and disseminating 'good' community safety practice: a problem solving approach

Rosie Erol

Jill Dando Institute
r.erol@west-midlands
pnn.police.uk or
r.erol@ucl.ac.uk

and

Andrew Millie

Loughborough University
a.e.millie@lboro.ac.uk

KEY WORDS

problem solving
good practice
dissemination
project management
implementation

ABSTRACT

This paper describes how a problem solving approach was used to identify good practice lessons from four community safety projects implemented in Birmingham, and how these lessons were disseminated to meet the different needs of practitioners, managers and a wider community safety audience.

BACKGROUND

Many different projects are implemented across the country that have a direct or indirect impact on community safety, be they specifically targeted at community safety and crime reduction or, for example, wider neighbourhood renewal or regeneration objectives. The managers and staff working on such projects build up a great deal of knowledge about project management and implementation, solving problems and building relationships with partner agencies. Through this, they develop an understanding about what has worked well – and why – for their project, and what they would do differently next time. This knowledge should then inform future developments and practice within their own work and, if shared amongst others, contribute to building up 'good practice'. However, this does not always occur. The knowledge and experience built up can be lost, even before a project is completed, as managers and staff move on. Police staff, in particular, are frequently moved with little notice (Johnson *et al*, 1993). Often some of the most skilled and dynamic staff leave, either through promotion or to address new priorities (Hamilton-Smith, 2004). If projects are evaluated, wider good practice lessons can again be lost if dissemination of these lessons to appropriate audiences is not considered. It is certainly not uncommon for evaluation reports to gather dust once a project is finished.

In this article we describe a problem-solving approach recently used in Birmingham to retrospectively identify and then disseminate good practice lessons from previously evaluated projects (Erol *et al*, 2005). The Birmingham Community Safety Partnership (BCSP) was aware that in the past it had commissioned evaluation work that did not necessarily feed into the development of wider good practice lessons for the city. As evaluations tended to follow different methodologies, these were also not always easy

to compare. We were commissioned by BCSP to revisit a number of community safety evaluations and produce standard outputs accessible to a number of audiences. We also formulated tools for effectively disseminating good practice lessons.

COMMUNITY SAFETY GOOD PRACTICE

Defining good practice can be problematic as definitions often depend on the context within which the good practice is occurring. Good practice lessons need to be captured through robust evaluation, setting the context within which a project was conducted, how the available resources were used and the outcomes achieved. There is a lot of information available relating to crime reduction and community safety good practice; for example that found on the Home Office crime reduction website (www.crimereduction.gov.uk). Whether all the practice cited is necessarily 'good' and supported by evaluated evidence, or just an account of what happened, is sometimes questionable. According to Read and Tilley (2000), lack of evaluation makes identifying good practice difficult. Even when an evaluation has been carried out, deciding what is, and what is not, good practice can be subjective – and the criteria may differ

“GOOD PRACTICE LESSONS NEED TO BE CAPTURED THROUGH ROBUST EVALUATION, SETTING THE CONTEXT WITHIN WHICH A PROJECT WAS CONDUCTED, HOW THE AVAILABLE RESOURCES WERE USED AND THE OUTCOMES ACHIEVED”

depending on whether the good practice is a new and innovative approach to a problem, or whether it results from particularly good use of existing practice, such as achieving results using limited resources, or producing additional benefits through tried and tested methods (Diputació de Barcelona, 2000).

The underlying purpose of establishing good practice and transferring knowledge in community safety is to make the most effective use of available resources and improve, extend and sustain performance (Ekblom, 2002). This is closely linked with the concept of benchmarking: *'the process of identifying and learning from best practice in other organisations'* (PSBS, 2005). Benchmarking should help to monitor progress, identify gaps in performance, and provide fresh approaches to bring about improvements. Recent research

around regeneration (Regen, 2004) has highlighted another important outcome of sharing good practice; to encourage people to accept 'good' new ideas.

Once criteria for recognising good practice have been established, and examples of good practice that meet these criteria identified, these examples need to be applied effectively to current and future practice. For this to happen, good practice lessons need to be gathered and disseminated in an appropriate and accessible format. This requires identifying appropriate methods of dissemination for a variety of audiences, including those developing responses to problems at a strategic level, practitioners delivering community safety and other related projects on the ground, and the wider community.

IDENTIFYING GOOD PRACTICE IN BIRMINGHAM

For the purposes of this study, and in the context of work to improve community safety in Birmingham, we defined good practice as:

- using practical lessons from projects and approaches to problems that have been developed and implemented successfully
- having been shown through evaluation to have been effective in achieving the desired outcomes.

The aim for BCSP was to contribute to the evidence base on the effectiveness of community safety interventions and, ultimately, to increase the effectiveness of community safety activity through applying successful interventions.

Four projects, which had previously been funded and evaluated through BCSP, were identified by the partnership as being examples of good practice, with a number of critical success factors that contributed to the achievements of each project. Some of the projects were ongoing, and therefore able to provide further information about sustaining and mainstreaming centrally-funded projects. We carried out research additional to the original evaluations including: a review of relevant documentation (such as interim and final evaluation reports, additional project material and information from the original funding bids); semi-structured interviews with key personnel involved in establishing and delivering the projects ($n = 8$); and further crime data analysis from each area where available, to bring the projects up to date.

The four projects all covered very different neighbourhoods, with a variety of communities, geographical differences and community safety and disorder problems.

- **Safer Neighbourhoods:** Projects based in five small, well-defined high crime areas that engaged the community in setting priorities, decision-making, and getting actively involved in a wide variety of community-based projects (Janice Webb Research, 2004).
- **Bournbrook Community Safety:** A project based in a declining area with a high student population living in poorly maintained rented property; the project aimed to improve the environment, provide physical security and raise awareness of crime prevention (Nacro, 2002).
- **Wyrley Birch Youth Inclusion Project:** A project targeting young offenders through diversionary activities and developing new skills in an area of high deprivation with a problem of youth crime, anti-social behaviour, and low educational achievement (Nacro, 2002).
- **Atwood Green Community Wardens:** A project based in an inner city area undergoing regeneration; residents deemed to be especially vulnerable benefited from a visible 'reassuring' presence from the authorities (Johnston *et al*, 2004; Landon, 2004).

USING A PROBLEM SOLVING APPROACH

Not only did the projects themselves differ greatly in the approaches used, the evaluations of these projects had all been carried out at different times over the previous four years, each by different evaluators, all of whom had used a different approach. The evaluation reports varied considerably in the methods used, depth, content and amount of evidence provided to draw conclusions relating to the reported success of the projects.

To provide a more consistent format, we developed a template based on the problem-oriented policing/problem-oriented partnership (POP) framework, which was developed for community policing in the USA in the 1980s, using a problem-solving approach to community safety and disorder problems (see eg, Goldstein, 1990; Bullock and Tilley, 2003; www.popcenter.org). This was in order to capture information about how each project was set up, the context in which it was based, how initiatives were developed around this information, and how they were actually implemented. Based on the SARA model (Scanning, Analysis, Response, Assessment) – the most frequently used problem-solving approach for POP work (Clarke & Eck, 2003) – a template was developed to capture

the different levels of information available.

The SARA model is usually used as a process for developing, managing and evaluating projects, although it can equally be applied retrospectively to previously evaluated work to provide a consistent format for presenting project outcomes. Using the model in this way enabled all the relevant information to be collected in a standard format, it provided evidence to show what had been effective and also highlighted any gaps that may have existed in the evidence. The approach has been recently used to present good practice lessons from the Street Crime Initiative (Tilley *et al*, 2004). It is similar in intention to the '5is' (Intelligence, Intervention, Implementation, Involvement, Impact) framework developed by Ekblom (2003) that was used retrospectively to present a number of successful projects from the Home Office Reducing Burglary Initiative (Kodz & Pease, 2003).

A standard template to use with all the projects was developed based on the SARA model. This covered the following themes:

- Background information – this included: the name of the project; date started (and finished); funding amounts and sources; date of evaluation; and contact details for the project.
- Scanning – the context of the problem and structure of the initiative. This provided: a description of the overall problem and how it was identified; the context of the project and the type of neighbourhood in which the problem existed; details of lead and partner organisations; and levels of involvement of partners.
- Analysis and definition of the problem – a description of the area being targeted and details of how the initial analysis was carried out, including: the types of data used; who held responsibility for conducting the analysis; problems encountered in accessing data; any weaknesses in the analysis; and whether any reference was made to existing good practice. A description of the results of the analysis was also included in this section.
- Response – the stated aims and objectives of the project and any targets set, looking at the extent the response fitted the analysis of the problem. This provided a description of each intervention, problems encountered and how these were overcome, lessons learnt during the project, how the project was monitored, including measures of effectiveness, and what outputs were achieved.
- Assessment – outcomes of the Initiative – this looked at: the data used to evaluate the outcomes; how the evaluation was carried out; what outcomes were achieved and whether targets were met; the mechanisms through which the project achieved the outcomes and what the critical success factors were; if there were any non-intended outcomes; and identification of any specific good practice lessons.
- Sustainability and mainstreaming – this looked at whether the project was ongoing, and if it had changed at all to enable this. Also considered was how it was being funded and to what extent the activities had been mainstreamed. It covered any changes since the project was evaluated, and looked at whether recommendations from the evaluation reports had been incorporated into practice. Finally it covered issues around whether the project could be replicated in other places, and what considerations would be needed for this to be successful.

The data from all sources were collated into this SARA template for each of the projects. The resulting framework was used to identify measures of effectiveness for each project, highlight practical lessons for implementation and

Problem Solving

sustainability based on good practice, and show gaps in the analyses. Using this tool also helped to identify good practice relating to cross-cutting themes which applied across projects, such as partnership working and information sharing. The framework provided the basis of the material for use in the dissemination tools.

DISSEMINATING GOOD PRACTICE MESSAGES

Developing an effective dissemination strategy can be seen as being a 'problem' that could also benefit from the SARA problem-solving approach, with a scan of the problem being that good practice lessons have not always been disseminated effectively. The aim of the dissemination strategy, and development of appropriate tools, was to provide the right lessons to the right audiences in a way that was easily understood, timely, and relevant. The level of detail required should depend on the purpose for which it is being provided, and meeting the needs of different audiences was thought vital to maximise the impact of good practice lessons on future practice and policy. Finding good practice information can be time consuming, and the strategy aimed to present clear, easily accessible messages that provide an appropriate level of information. Three audiences were identified by

"THE AIM OF THE DISSEMINATION STRATEGY, AND DEVELOPMENT OF APPROPRIATE TOOLS, WAS TO PROVIDE THE RIGHT LESSONS TO THE RIGHT AUDIENCES IN A WAY THAT WAS EASILY UNDERSTOOD, TIMELY, AND RELEVANT"

the BCSP who could benefit from the good practice knowledge produced from the four projects in Birmingham:

- Specialists: These included practitioners working 'on the ground'; for example, crime prevention officers, community wardens, and community safety managers.
- Generalists: Those working at a strategic and policy level, such as local authority policy officers and senior police managers.
- The wider community safety audience: including local authority departments not directly involved in community safety, such as housing, and local residents. This could also extend to those who do not realise that they would benefit from an awareness of community safety issues, or that their work may impact on community safety, to comply with section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act requirements.

Each of these audiences may benefit from a different level of information. The specialists may need full evaluation reports or more detailed summaries, generalists may prefer key messages and learning points, while the wider community safety audience may require general principles, or evidence of what action has taken place within a specific area, depending on the individual or agency. We aimed to provide different materials - formatted using the SARA process template - to meet these different audiences. To get a better understanding of the needs of the audiences, as part of the analysis stage of the SARA process, BCSP hosted a focus group consisting of 12 people with a variety of professional interests in community safety in Birmingham in order to determine what materials may be required. The resulting discussion, along with further information from the practitioner interviews, highlighted a number of existing networks and channels of communication already in use for sharing good practice messages. It seemed sensible to use, or build on, these already familiar channels where appropriate:

- good practice internet sites (and use of general search engines)
- informal networks of contacts, often through attendance at seminars and conferences

- resources provided by Government departments and the Government Office
- subscriptions to mailing lists providing regular updates of relevant information.

The focus group discussion and practitioner interviews also revealed the need for dissemination outputs to be of good quality in terms of presentation, images, and materials used. It was thought that the use of jargon should be limited and the language used should be clear, recognisable and relevant. This is currently not the case for all community safety evaluation work. Participants also wanted specific detail about how to implement particular initiatives and practical information about what actually happened in practice. As well as providing information about what worked, information should also be provided on what did not work. Identifying the critical success factors for each project can help when trying to transfer a project from one area to another. It was thought that the format, whether electronic or paper based, should be easy to navigate, allowing quick access to the information that is relevant to each audience. Details of someone involved in each project who would be willing to act as a contact point was also thought important.

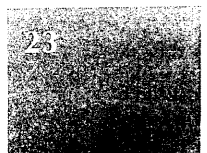
“EVALUATION NEEDS TO BE AN INTEGRAL PART OF COMMUNITY SAFETY WORK, TO ENSURE THAT LESSONS CONTINUE TO BE LEARNT AND THE EVIDENCE IS AVAILABLE TO ENABLE NEW IDEAS AND APPROACHES TO BE ADOPTED INTO MAINSTREAM ACTIVITY WHERE APPROPRIATE”

Dissemination materials produced

The response stage of the dissemination strategy development was to produce a variety of materials to meet the needs identified for each of the target audiences, providing access to different levels of information and detail. For each project, a reasonably detailed, but not overwhelming, report of 6-7 pages was produced, based on the different stages of the SARA process. A two-page summary was also produced highlighting the critical success factors and good practice lessons for each project. It was fundamental that each report and summary was in the same format for each project, so that good practice lessons could be easily found, and compared. The information was reproduced in a series of fact sheets and on a CD-rom (and made available to a wider audience to download from the

BCSP website, www.Birmingham-csp.org.uk). The web-based format allowed rapid access to relevant sections of each report, and the possibility of updating or adding to the material as more evaluated projects demonstrated good practice. The dissemination strategy in the short to medium term focused on distributing the fact sheets and CD-roms to relevant agencies, and publicising the website to the wider audience, for example through networks of known contacts, targeted emails, via relevant conferences, events and seminars and local media outlets. In the medium to long term, the dissemination strategy could focus on updating the website, incorporating good practice case studies into training for new entrants to the field of community safety and targeting professional and academic journals.

The final stage of the dissemination strategy will be to evaluate the progress of the strategy implementation – the *assessment* stage of the SARA process – finding out how well the material is received by the audiences, and whether the information provided is appropriate for inclusion in new projects. The ongoing review process should ensure that material can be revised if necessary, and continue to provide good practice lessons.



CONCLUSION

Evaluation needs to be an integral part of community safety work, to ensure that lessons continue to be learnt and the evidence is available to enable new ideas and approaches to be adopted into mainstream activity where appropriate.

The focus on evaluation as a key part of the problem-solving approach makes this a useful framework on which to base dissemination material from projects demonstrating good practice. This exercise has also shown that developing a dissemination strategy is an activity that can be approached using the same SARA model (or equivalent): understanding the problems around dissemination through consultation with practitioners and analysis of existing channels of communication; developing appropriate materials in response to the problem; and finally evaluating the strategy to ensure that the right lessons are reaching the right audiences.

Disseminating and reviewing good practice work is a continuing process, not just a one-off activity. For the current set of information and fact sheets developed, time needs to be spent identifying opportunities to ensure the different target audiences can access the relevant material. Future work will be needed to manage and update

the information available, to get feedback on the relevance and usefulness of the information provided, and to keep abreast of the changing needs of the different audiences.

References

- Bullock K & Tilley N (2003) *Crime Reduction and Problem Oriented Policing*. Cullompton: Willan.
- Clarke R & Eck J (2003) *Becoming a Problem-Solving Crime Analyst*. London: Jill Dando Institute, University College London (www.jdi.ucl.ac.uk).
- Diputació de Barcelona (2000) *Local Occupational Good Practices: how should we analyse and publicise good practice?* Available from: www.diba.es/promocio_economica/bones_practiques/guiaen/com.htm (accessed September 2005).
- Eklom P (2002) From the source to the mainstream is uphill: the challenge of transferring knowledge of crime prevention through replication, innovation and anticipation. In: N Tilley (Ed) *Analysis for Crime Prevention*. Crime Prevention Studies 13. Cullompton: Willan.
- Eklom P (2003) *5Is: a practical tool for transfer and sharing of crime prevention knowledge*. Available from: www.crimereduction.gov.uk/learningzone/5isprint.doc
- Erol R, Millie A & Singh P (2005) *Birmingham Community Safety Partnership: Sharing Good Practice – Final Report*. Wolverhampton: Policy Research Institute.
- Goldstein H (1990) *Problem Oriented Policing*. New York: McGraw and Hill.
- Hamilton-Smith N (Ed) (2004) *The Reducing Burglary Initiative: design, development and delivery*. Home Office Research Study 287. London: Home Office.
- Janice Webb Research (2004) *Tackling Priorities for Neighbourhood Renewal: final evaluation of the Birmingham Neighbourhood Safety pilot schemes*. Report to Birmingham City Council Housing Department, March 2004.
- Johnston V, Shapland J & Wiles P (1993) *Developing Police Crime Prevention: management and organisational change*. Crime Prevention Unit Series Paper 41. London: Home Office.
- Johnston V, Dewey C, Pitcher J & Crawley P (2004) *Report on Optima's SRB4-funded Community Safety Activities*. Keele: NACRO and University of Keele.
- Kodz J & Pease K (2003) *Reducing Burglary Initiative: early findings on burglary reduction*. Home Office Research Findings 204. London: Home Office.
- Landon E (2004) *Evaluation of Optima's Community Warden Scheme*, December 2004. Birmingham: University of Birmingham.
- Nacro (2002) *Mid-term evaluation of community safety regeneration 4 Birmingham programme*. London: Nacro.
- Public Sector Benchmarking Service (PSBS) (2005) Website. Available from: www.benchmarking.gov.uk.
- Read T & Tilley N (2000) *Not Rocket Science? Problem-solving and crime reduction*. Crime Reduction Research Series Paper 6. London: Home Office.
- Regen WM (2004) *Towards Good Practice... an interim report*. December 2004. Available from: www.regenwm.org
- Tilley N, Smith J, Finer S, Erol R, Charles C & Dobby J (2004) *Problem Solving Street Crime: practical lessons from the Street Crime Initiative*. London: Home Office. Available from: www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/pdfs04/pssc.pdf