

ROTHERHAM COMMUNITY SAFETY DEPARTMENT (East Area)
Radio-Linx Project

"Together we can make a difference"

Background Information

The idea for the 'RadioLinx' project stemmed from a scheme called, 'Retail Radio Links', which was launched in 1992. This was further developed in the West Midlands in 1998 to become 'CATCH' (Community Action Tackling Crime & Harassment)¹.

The scheme is based upon the principle of linking people together with two-way radio communication. It has been shown to have a positive impact on improving communication and strengthening communities.

The 'Motorola' Communications Company have joined together with Neighbourhood Watch, Community Groups and the Police to provide low cost, licence free, two way radios. The radio used for our project is the 'Motorola TA288' two way radio.²

We decided to carry out a pilot scheme based upon this project, calling it 'Radio-Linx', and submitted a bid for funding from a programme initiated by the South Yorkshire Police Authority called the Community Initiatives Programme. (CIP). The vehicle for this was the 'ABC' (A Better Community) Awards, 2001.

The project was linked to a local action group called the 'Rawmarsh and Parkgate Project'. The membership of this group comprised of the Police, members of the community, local housing officers, private landlords, area assembly officer, community development worker, environmental health, neighbourhood wardens and youth services. This group was well established in the area and had made excellent progress in trying to tackle local problems.

We were able to obtain a total of £1500 for the project.

This allowed us to purchase a total of twenty radios including chargers from Motorola.

The Aims Of The Project

The aims of the project were:

1. To improve communication between residents the Police and other agencies.
2. To reduce the fear of crime and disorder and improve confidence of people in the community.
3. To reduce crime and disorder in identified local 'hotspot' locations.

1. Inspector martin Wright of the West Midlands Police was the founder of the 'CATCH' scheme.
2. At the time of purchasing for this project the radios cost £69.50p each.

The Target Area

The area targeted for this project was Rawmarsh and Parkgate, two adjacent residential areas on the outskirts of Rotherham town centre.

Rawmarsh and Parkgate have a combined population of some 20,000 people.³ Rawmarsh is a fairly large mainly, residential area whilst Parkgate has a mixture of some heavy and light industry, large retail parks and local retail businesses. There is a substantial proportion of old terraced housing alongside newer housing estates.

Rawmarsh and Parkgate are well known for being areas frequented by drug users and suppliers. In particular Parkgate has the reputation for being the area where the suppliers of controlled drugs are most located in the Rotherham area.

The crime statistics for 1999 and 2000, showed the following:

<u>Year</u>	<u>Total crimes</u>	<u>Burglary</u>	<u>Car crime</u>	<u>Violence</u>
1999	1883	298	452	100
2000	1916	557	515	76

Clearly there was an increasing trend in all-main offences with the exception of violence.

Taking into account this information, linked to the number of requests for Police to attend all incidents in the target area, we were able to identify a number of 'hotspot' locations. This information was put together by our District Analyst, which enabled us to target selected areas of Rawmarsh and Parkgate in which to issue the radios.

Operating Practice

In each location responsible individuals would be identified to be the holders of a radio. Each was then supplied with a pack containing a letter outlining the aims of the project along with a guide regarding use of the radio and a diary / evaluation sheet on which to record details of incidents and results. Each was asked to sign a receipt for the radio and a simple survey was carried out to identify their feelings about communication and the fear of crime and disorder in their area. A decision was made not to disclose the identities of those holding the radios in order to prevent any possible victimisation taking place.

In addition the two local Community constables and local Traffic Warden were each supplied with a radio along with the newly formed Neighbourhood Wardens and the local Council Housing Officers.

³ Based upon the 1991 census

The Neighbourhood Wardens are based in the local Council Housing Offices situated on Rawmarsh Hill. These were funded by the Home Office as a part of the Governments national strategy to encourage local authorities to employ wardens. Their main remit was to deal with low level nuisance and environmental problems, though overall they had an aim to reduce crime and disorder in the area.. They were managed through the local Authority Housing Department and this was a pilot scheme for Rotherham Borough. It therefore made sense to utilise their services as a part of the Radio-Linx project as it was felt they could make a significant contribution to it. As could the Housing Officers themselves who frequently had responsibility for dealing with anti social behaviour by tenants.

First Steps

The initial response to the scheme was very positive by the community and the statutory agencies who worked in the area. The difficulty we found was actually finding members of the community who were willing to take part and have a radio. The main reason for this was the fear of possible retribution from offenders if they were identified as being a part of the project.

In fact this only served to reinforce the fact that the fear of crime was high in the area and that such a project as the radio-linx was needed to try to address that. It was for this reason we decided not to publicise the scheme in great detail in the target areas to start with. We did not wish to initiate 'witch hunts' in those areas where opponents of the project would seek out those with the radios. Publicity could come as we made progress and the when the time was judged to be right.

We persevered in working with the local community representatives including Neighbourhood Watch and residents groups and started off with small numbers of people in each of the target areas. This gradually increased to a total of thirteen radio holders in the community and five Police and other agencies.

The radios were gradually distributed and the project actually commenced operation on the week commencing 5th November 2001.

The Initial Survey

The results of the initial survey of those people who had received a radio showed the following:

1. 100 % (7 and 6 respectively) felt that crime and disorder was very high/high in the area.
2. 91% (6 in each category) felt that it was very likely/likely that they would be a victim of crime and disorder.
3. 69% (9) had been a victim of crime and disorder, with burglary being the most common.
4. Drugs related incidents and burglary caused most concern (30% each) followed by violence (23%).
5. Communication with:
Police : Was felt to be; acceptable 46%, poor 46% (6 in each category).
Neighbours: Very good/good, 46%, acceptable, 23%, (comprising of 6 and 3 in each category).
Other agencies: Acceptable 61%, good 23%, (8 and 3 in each category)

Progress

It was clear that initially the members of the public taking part were reluctant to actually make use of the radios. We encouraged them to do so and as their confidence increased they began to make more use of them.

We continually monitored the progress of the scheme.

Several incidents were reported over the radio's resulting in Police attendance. This did not result in any arrests but it did show that the system worked.

In addition the participants made use of them to speak to each other about other more domestic matters and this was encouraged as it was all part of the intention to improve communication and reduce the feeling of being isolated and vulnerable.

Results

After 3 months of operating, at the end of January 2002, we carried out follow up surveys with the radio holders and this showed the following results:

1. There had been a clear reduction in the fear of crime .The number of participants who felt that crime was very high in the area had dropped from 7 down to 3 (23%). Two now felt the level to be acceptable and one low.
2. Similarly the number of participants who felt that it was very likely that they would be a victim of crime and disorder had dropped from 7 to 2. (15%).
3. None of the participants had been a victim of crime and disorder since taking part in the project.
4. Drugs related incidents and burglary remained the main causes concern.
5. Communication with:
 - Police:
Very good/good (84%).
 - Neighbours;
Very good/good (69%).
 - Other agencies;
Very good/good (77%).

Conclusion

The overall aim for this project was to increase communication for members of the community and by so doing reduce their fear of crime. It was hoped that along with this the increased activity would effect localised crime and disorder.

Clearly the people taking part in the project were unanimous in their support of the idea and from the follow up survey results there had been a marked improvement in their communication with the Police and the other agencies. This did indeed lead to a similar marked reduction in the fear of crime and disorder.

Unfortunately there was not the knock on effect we expected of actually making any significant reduction the crime and disorder incidents, which may have been optimistic given the number of participants.

The conclusion is that we really need to focus on smaller areas utilising all of the radios in that one location which should give us more chance of impacting upon local crime and disorder. There is also clearly a need for more radios, which will allow for more involvement from the community. This is something we will look at in future bids for funding.

The overall feeling is that this has been a very positive pilot project, which has increased community involvement and partners from other agencies, working with the Police, to good effect. The overall impact has been positive and the community wishes the project to continue and it is intended that it will do so.

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2 August 2002