



2019

**HERMAN GOLDSTEIN
PROBLEM ORIENTED POLICING AWARD**

Hirst Park & Op Dignity

Project Owner

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Scanning

In June 2018 there were a number of assaults reported in Hirst Park, a public park in Ashington. The victims of the assaults were teenage girls who were alone in the park and were attacked by a group of girls the same age. The offenders filmed the assaults and then shared the footage on social media, which was viewed over 300,000 times.

Analysis

- ASB, underage drinking and assaults are occurring in the evenings especially in the school holidays.
- It appeared likely that some of the offences had been committed in retribution against residents who had challenged anti-social or criminal behaviour in the past.
- The layout, design and management of the park made it a difficult area to Police.
- Offenders had been identified and arrested and a multi-agency review had identified they shared common vulnerabilities and all had experienced Adverse Childhood Experiences in the past.

Response

- Patrol Plan introduced to target and disrupt anti-social activity and encourage greater public use of park.
- Work with Off Licences to reduce availability of alcohol
- Design issues addressed as part of planned refurbishment
- Operation Dignity was introduced to address why the offenders acted in the way they had and look at interventions that could be put in place to prevent further offences of this nature by both the suspects and other young people in the community

Assessment

There were 8 public order offences and 6 assaults in Hirst Park during the first three months of 2018/19, since the responses were undertaken there has been one assault in the remaining months of the year, and that involved two young people not previously engaged

with. In the surrounding Area ASB is down 30%, none of the Op Dignity Girls have been in trouble, or involved with ASB, and some are back into mainstream education.

Word Count: 298

Introduction

Ashington is a town and civil parish in Northumberland, England, with a population of 27,864 at the 2011 Census. It was once a centre of the coal mining industry. The town is 15 miles north of Newcastle upon Tyne, west of the A189 and bordered to the south by the River Wansbeck.

The English Indices of Deprivation (ID) 2015 is the UK government's official measure of deprivation in England. It measures relative levels of deprivation in small areas across England called Lower Layer Super Output Areas (LSOAs). Ashington features in the most deprived 10% of LSOAs in England

Hirst Park is one of the main public parks of the town and extends over an area of five hectares; it has traditionally been known as The Flower Park, due to its summer floral displays. It also has bowling greens, basketball and tennis courts, play areas and is sheltered by tall trees. To the north of the park is a large sports field, where historically, the town hosted fun fairs. (See Appendix Fig 1 & 2)

Scanning

Between May and June 2018 there were a number of assaults reported in Hirst Park, a public park in Ashington. The victims of the assaults were teenage girls who were alone in the park and were attacked by a group of girls the same age. The offenders filmed the assaults and then shared the footage on social media, which was viewed over 300,000 times.

Hirst Park is located on the Hirst Foot beat (F2E2), where in 2017/18 there had been 305 reported incidents of Anti-social behaviour. But the first three months of 2018/19 had already recorded 103 incidents, and whilst only 15 of those had been recorded against the park itself, the apparent escalation, exacerbated by the reach of Instagram, Facebook and YouTube, had generated considerable public concern.

In January 2018 work had started on a five year programme of rejuvenation of the facilities following a grant of £2.29m from the Heritage Lottery Fund. The overall project would include new landscaping, a formal garden modelled on the original Hirst Park sunken garden lost in

the mid-20th Century and a water play feature. It was clear that addressing the emerging anti-social behaviour issues was very important to the success of the wider project, but equally that there were real opportunities presented by the challenge.

Analysis

Prompt enforcement action under the Operation Dignity banner had resulted in the identification and early arrest of a number of the key offenders.

Operation Dignity was established with two priorities, firstly to safeguard the victims, and secondly to maximise the opportunities for early intervention with the offenders through collaboration with Social Services, youth groups, the youth offending team and local schools.

Breaking the problem down using a problem analysis triangle told us:

Victim

- All victims were teenage girls passing through the park when attacked by a group of girls.
- The assaults were recorded and posted on social media.
- A resident's survey was conducted in vicinity of Hirst Park to identify any community impact, concerns and desirable outcomes. Letter drops were conducted on adjacent streets, but only 4 replies were forthcoming of which 3 raised concerns over disorder within the park but not that they had directly suffered, and one said they had no issues.

Considerations:

- Identified victims were safeguarded and given advice about personal safety and conflict management.
- CCTV footage of the attack was secured and taken down off Social Media.

Location

- The design of Hirst Park affords both a "Flower Park" and "Playing Fields" is it located in the middle of the Hirst foot-beat within Ashington.
- A number of houses surround the park, with entrances/exits on all 4 sides. The park has 2 Bowling greens which are occupied by 4 Bowling Clubs.
- The Park has a pavilion located in the middle where youths congregate, this is also used by the bowling clubs as their club house.

- The park has a park keeper who resides within the grounds, who has been subject to an assault (Summer of 2017).
- The layout, design and management of the park made it a difficult area to Police.

Considerations:

- In normal circumstances a resident park keeper would be seen as a potential “Manager”, but the historic assault added a degree of complexity to that consideration. Although the Hirst Park Management Plan 2016-2020, which predated the assault, placed some emphasis in the desirability of having a resident Park Keeper to monitor the park.
- The partnership of Northumberland County Council, Ashington Town Council and the Ashington Leisure Partnership, who were delivering the rejuvenation project, could be considered “Super Controllers” of the site, and therefore offered opportunities to address some of the design issues; but whilst there was a clear will to address and mitigate issues the Hirst Park Management Plan didn’t feature much by way of other effective security considerations. The intention within the plan was not to secure the park outside normal hours, but to alarm the central building and improve the overall lighting scheme, then address any ASB problems through the local problem solving mechanisms.

Offender

- ASB, underage drinking and assaults are occurring in the evenings especially in the school holidays.
- It appeared likely that some of the offences had been committed in retribution against residents who had challenged anti-social or criminal behaviour in the past.
- Offenders had been identified and arrested and a multi-agency review had identified they shared common vulnerabilities and all had experienced Adverse Childhood Experiences in the past.
- All of the children that were involved in the attacks were known to partner agencies.

Case Study of Operation Dignity Offender

“Female, 13 years old, violently assaults lone female with accomplices including kicking the female in the head.

- The subject resides with grandmother as her mother is a Heroin addict.
- Her father is in prison following being convicted of Murder.

- She started a fire accidentally as a child and killed her sibling.
- She abuses alcohol and drugs and is at high risk of sexual exploitation.
- Believed to be sexually active, frequently going missing but not reported to police due to fear of social services involvement.”.

All of the Offenders identified as part of the Operation Dignity response had been exposed to Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE).

Adverse Childhood Experiences

Adverse Childhood Experiences or ACE’s as they often referred to, may be a one-off event, or an ongoing issue; an experience that is traumatic to the child and causes stress or anxiety.

Adverse Childhood Experiences

- Emotional Abuse
- Sexual Abuse
- Physical Abuse
- Substance Mis-use in the home
- Mental Illness
- Domestic Violence
- Emotional Neglect
- Physical Neglect
- Incarcerated Relative
- Grief/Bereavement
- Divorce/Broken homes
- Separation from loved ones

ACE’s have been shown to contribute to poor life course health and social outcomes in a UK population. ACES are linked to involvement in violence, early unplanned pregnancy, incarceration, and unemployment suggests a cyclic effect, where those with higher ACE counts have higher risks of exposing their own children to ACES

We were aware and took into account work being done by The Mayor of London in conjunction with the Metropolitan police and Partners into developing a Violence Reduction Unit. This involved a holistic approach which ensured that incidents of violence were not looked at as isolated incidents, but ensured that early intervention is considered with suspects and realising the opportunity for improving outcomes for children and young people is placed at the forefront of any plan to reduce violence in communities.

We also needed to develop our understanding of why traditional methods of Safeguarding didn't capture these girls. We realised we needed this understanding to better design responses, so at the Analysis stage we identified what we didn't know and re-scanned the problem again by spending time with the girls and their families. It became very apparent that their self-esteem was very low and they had no sense of belonging within the community, they had no self-respect and few positive role models in their life. These children, although what they had done was horrendous – they were extremely vulnerable and their offending could be considered to be a symptom of that vulnerability.

We also found that policing tactics used to safeguard and identify Vulnerability were not entirely successful in relation to safeguarding these young people, partly because information that was in possession of partner agencies was not being filtered into the police, but also due to the family and communities that these young people came from there was an intelligence gap as the community were not feeding back concerns around the children either.

Here are some of the issues that were identified.

- They had drug dealers who would serve them directly – grown adults supplying 13 year olds.
- They were associating with older males who were not identified as parents did not raise the flags of concern for numerous reasons including, disengagement with the police, fear of social services involvement, simply not identify the children's behaviour as risky or sadly were not concerned as to where the child was.
- Exposing themselves to vulnerable situations by being under the influence of alcohol and drugs.
- Going missing on a regular basis but not being reported missing by their parents, so they were not being flagged by traditional means.
- Committing offences
- The girls believed they were 'charvas'¹ so would not be welcome in youth provisions and continued to deliver that self-fulfilling prophesy.
- These are girls that have come from fractured homes, have poor or no role models, have low self-esteem, poor education and little to lose.
- General poor standards of education within Wasbeck with many Schools requiring Improvement.

¹ **charva**. Noun. (plural charvas) (**Geordie**, pejorative) Unruly youth; disobedient child or teenager. (Geordie, pejorative) Unemployed youth with poor taste and dress sense.

- Pupil referral units not combating the real issues and failing to provide the children with a satisfactory level of education and by dint of this reinforcing the young person's view of themselves.

We concluded that there were much wider issues with these girls than just being the offenders of an assault – there were other issues to tackle – this behaviour was never going to be resolved unless the wider socio and economic factors were looked at, but unless this was remedied these children were going to come through the custody doors again, and again and again and continue to cause havoc in the community and be future high demand users of all services. We needed to break the cycle.

Responses

Our responses targeted the elements of the problem analysis triangle.

Victims

- Social Media campaign to be considered, requesting further information and possible offenders/educate re ongoing issues and effects.
- Personal Safety advice
- Work in schools about anti-social behaviour

Location

- Patrol Plan
- All off licenses surrounding Hirst park have been visited and reminded of their responsibility with selling alcohol
- CCTV considered for Pavilion area but delayed pending completion of refurbishment.
- Extra lighting
- Existing lighting – Upgrading with with brighter lumens
- Bushes to be cut back in relevant areas (Pavilion area)
- Enforcement officers (littering)
- Mosquito Alarm

Offenders

- The offenders in this case attended court on 10/10/18 and were convicted of the offence and have been referred to the youth offending team for a 9 month period of intervention.
- Offenders were subject to a Multi-Agency holistic review.
- Outreach Youth workers began work in February on a Thursday 6-8 then Mondays and Thursdays from March 2019
- Local Authority to write to parents with a view to attend Ashington Police Station to discuss options.

Operation Dignity - Key Fund Work and Intervention

Ashington Neighbourhood Team recognised the imperative of trying to find a way to change the future for the cohort of young women that we named our Op Dignity Girls. The goal of our problem solving was to find an alternative to traditional offender diversion because it didn't address either their vulnerabilities nor their needs.

Our ambitious objective was to try to reverse the effects of Adverse Childhood Experiences by providing a bespoke plan for each child. We wanted to remedy the effects of those feelings of inadequacy, break that self-fulfilling prophesy of *'this is who I am, I am a charva, I don't belong, I am no good'*. By giving the children positive role models in life and engaging with them to build better relationships with police.

We had researched projects that assisted in engagement with children and young people, but the next challenge was finding the funding to support the projects.

The local councillors were reluctant to fund work with offenders and we did face some critics around a perception that we were rewarding bad behaviour. However, local businesses with charity accounts came to the rescue and funded the projects.

We identified the potential of The Key Fund Project (see Fig 3) as a good fit with what we wanted to achieve. Key Fund is a charitable organisation that young people aged 11-19 can apply to get funding to do a project or activity of their choice. The young people have to come up with the idea, plan the project and review the project.

The young people can repeat the Keyfund framework up to four times. Each time accessing larger sums of money to plan more challenging projects with greater community impact.

1-5 projects £198 (The small membership package allows two people to be trained as facilitators)

1-10 projects £400

1-15 projects £650

The Card Factory Ashington donated £198 so that Ashington NPT could purchase a Keyfund membership to engage with children and young people in the area.

CSO Lisa Auld met regularly with the Operation Dignity Girls to engage, build relationships and work on their views of the world and community and help them apply for funding for their key fund project.

What they had to do

1. Register the group with their chosen group name and project idea.
2. Group to complete a Keyfund skills wheel.
3. Group to plan a presentation about their idea, costs and why they want to do it.
4. Group go to panel to present their idea to a Keyfund panel.
5. Cheque will arrive in the post if successful at the panel.
6. The group to go on their trip/undertake project.
7. Group evaluates the project and sends a copy of the receipts back to Keyfund.

All this planning and preparation helped build relationships and the engagement part worked well. Our Op Dignity Girls have thrived, having trust and confidence in the police and more importantly reacted very well to the confidence we showed in them to change positively.

This relationship has gone from strength to strength and opened up increasing opportunities for us and partners to educate these girls. They have attended SafetyWorks, our interactive training centre, learning about -Drugs, Alcohol and CSE, Crime and County Lines. They have worked with the Youth Offending Team on engaging better within the community and going to cadets.

The group have gone to the Keyfund panel and obtained the money for their project and as the group's confidence grows and they continue to improve, we are going to go to a second

panel with a community initiative – they want to run a breakfast club, do bingo for the old peoples home or organise a Fair.

The girls are under no illusion if they don't continue to improve Community Behaviour Orders and Parenting orders are going to be applied for and this is not an easy ride. But for now the signs are favourable they have built their confidence, and the project has given them a sense of belonging.

Assessment

Ashington was recently portrayed in parliament as a community that had been let down by government policy and that sense of under investment, disaffection and disappointment runs deep in the culture of the town. It is therefore, perhaps inevitable that this might be reflected in the community. It is entirely possible that in this respect disaffection is learnt behaviour and ASB and violence is a symptom of a wider problem, but we have shown that working in a systematic way we can deliver behavioural changes that make life better for very vulnerable members of the community.

In 2017/18 the Hirst Foot beat (F2E2), there had been 305 reported incidents of Anti-Social behaviour and three months into 2018/19 we had already recorded 103 incidents, but the interventions at Hirst Park and with the Op Dignity Girls, whilst not halting all ASB incidents significantly impacted on the rest of the year, there were only 138 further incidents in the following nine months a reduction on the previous year of about 30%.

When we look at ASB and Assaults in Hirst Park itself there had been just 2 Public Order offences and 8 assaults in 2016/17, that grew to 4 Public Order offences and 7 assaults in 2016/17 and then 8 Public Order offences and 7 assaults in 2018/19, but drilling down into last year shows that there was only 2 Public Order events since the instigation of the project and only one Assault, and that involved two young people not previously engaged with.

Operation Dignity - The Future

Due to the positive impact this work has had Op Dignity has evolved and having identified the benefit of information sharing with schools, which previously may have bypassed police and gone straight to social services. (i.e. those children who are causing trouble in the classroom, who are being home-schooled, who are being excluded or have displayed any characteristics that raise concerns of the school). We have introduced a referral mechanism to flag these children with the police so that early intervention can be put in place by

community safety, police and partners. (See Fig 5). From these referrals the future beneficiaries of the Key Fund will be identified.

Not all the children may get the opportunity to take part in the Key Fund Project; however, a bespoke harm reduction plan can be identified in conjunction with partners. This could include –

- Police intelligence officers being tasked to identify information about a certain family if there is concern for the child. This could be to identify if there is drugs being used in the home, if there is violence in the home, or any other issues. Why is the child behaving in the manner they are.
- Community safety visits to school
- At a basic level this could be raising the child's profile with the Community Support Officers so they can look for engagement opportunities and develop intelligence of social groups and peers.
- Referral to the MASH for early Intervention
- Home visits
- Tenancy Enforcement
- Safety Works referral

How will schools refer into Police/Community Safety?

Schools and agency's will be asked to Identify children in the community via exposure to known ACE's, children whose behaviour or educational attainment has caused concern to professionals. Those children who are at greater risk of Exploitation and or Criminality. The early identification of children at risk allows professionals to put intervention in place before the exploitation or criminal behaviour gets beyond rehabilitation and intervention is too late.

Conclusion

We set out to tackle what appeared to be a small scale problem and through analysis found inequality and deprivation; we found children that society cast in the role of offenders and wasn't prepared to risk giving them a chance. In 2006 Jamieson writing in "New Labour, youth justice and the question of 'respect'. *Youth Justice* 5 had said:

"Respect and responsibility is a two way street – it cannot be demanded of children (or of adults for that matter) who have not the wherewithal or the appropriate opportunities to demonstrate responsibility".

We are taking that risk and giving children hope, doing our best to reset the effects of adverse childhood experiences and we are achieving positive outcomes for them and the community.

Word Count: 3,264

Appendix

Fig 1: Plan view of Hirst Park



Fig 2: Views of Hirst Park



Fig 3: The Key Fund

about us

our story

the north isn't known for its grit for 'nowt.

Our story began in South Yorkshire in 1999. Hit by the collapse of coal and steel industries, we wanted to find new ways of breathing life back into our neighbourhoods – to support new enterprises, create jobs and bolster these once proud communities.

And so, Key Fund was formed by a group of likeminded social entrepreneurs and philanthropists.



Our central mission is to provide finance – flexible loans and grant/loan packages – to help community and social enterprises to start-up, become sustainable, or grow. It's not just about the money. It's also about providing the right kind of support to help our investees have the best possible chance of success.



We invest in community and social enterprises who have traditionally been excluded; turned down by mainstream banks and building societies. Particularly those in disadvantaged areas.

Key Fund believes in the power of people to find solutions to the challenges facing their communities. Our mission is to remove barriers to finance.

Our investees have one crucial thing in common – the ambition to build and strengthen local communities. <http://thekeyfund.co.uk/about/our-funders>

“ Key Fund listens with their hearts as well as their ears”

Andy Simpson, Doncaster Refurnish, Doncaster

Join our story; help shape the future.



Fig 4. Crime Stats from Police UK for immediate area around Hirst Park

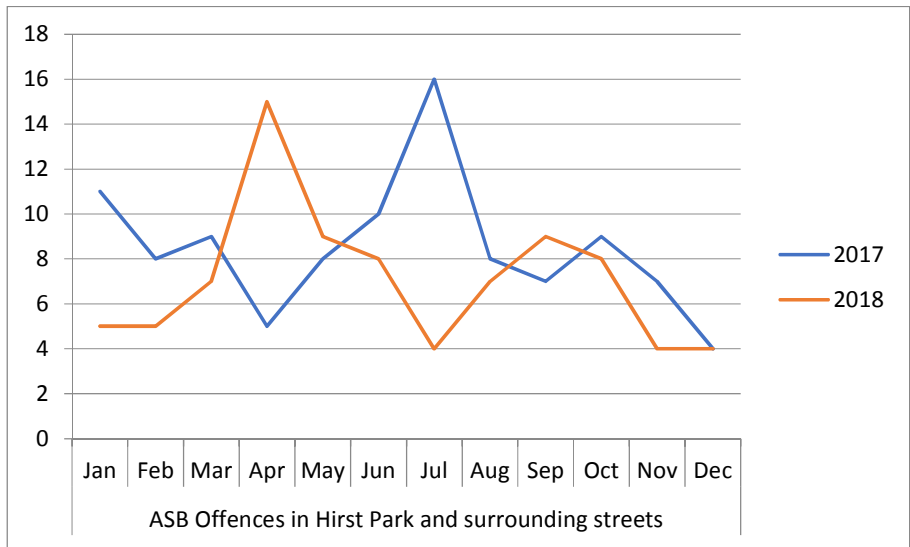


Fig 5: OP Dignity Early Intervention Referral

Operation Dignity Referral Form

School	
Professional Referring	
Children's Details. Name, DOB, Home Address, Parents Details	
Reason for Referral	Y/N
Significant decrease in School Attainment	
Truancing from School and or going missing	
Poor Behaviour in school – possible exclusion pending	
Drug Use or Alcohol Use	
Underage sexual activity	
Frequent periods of being late or signs of Neglect in the home	
Unexplained Gifts or signs of wealth previously not experienced	
New persons collecting/picking children up	
Secrecy and or changes in behaviour	
Parental separation	
Bereavement/Loss of loved one	
displaying inappropriate sexualised behaviour, such as over-familiarity with strangers, dressing in a sexualised manner or sending sexualised images by mobile phone ("sexting")	
New found interest in religion or signs of Radicalization	
Any other reason the refer may have concerns around a child	

** Operation Dignity is not a replacement to any traditional methods of safeguarding or reporting strategies which the school currently use **