

Tilley Award 2003



Project Title: Operation Avoid

Category: Crime and Disorder

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Operation Avoid

Summary

There are 13 Primary schools within the Blackpool South section and following numerous complaints from the schools, parents and members of the public about dangerous and inconsiderate parking of motor vehicles close to the schools entrances, particularly on the zigzag lines and at road junctions, it was apparent that there was serious potential for road casualties, particularly children going to and from school.

Operation Avoid was formulated with the intention, in the short term, to inform parents and drivers of vehicles, that indiscriminate parking would not be tolerated and that action would be taken against offenders. This was achieved by distributing letters to all parents via the schools, supplying the schools with posters and leaflets and by coverage in the local press. This was followed up by an action week, which was staffed by Community Beat Managers, geographic and road safety patrols, who visited the schools at the start and end of the school day, providing a visible presence and also the opportunity to prosecute the worst offenders. Over the week over 50 fixed penalty tickets were issued and several motorists reported for summons. Many parents commented on the success of the action week, but commented on the fact that when drivers realised there was no police presence, most reverted back to their unacceptable manner of parking.

To sustain this level of police attendance would not be practical, but monitoring of the situation on a regular basis was required. The people who were 'at the scene' the most were the school staff themselves. Sponsorship was sought to provide each school with durable signs for the school railings and a digital camera. A staff member would then be able to take details and a photograph of the offending vehicle then e-mail them direct to the police station, this would result in a letter being generated and a personal visit by a Community Support Officer to the driver of the vehicle warning them of possible prosecution should further instances be reported. This process would usually be completed the same day.

Although this process has proved successful, the Community Beat Managers and Community Support Officers make regular visits to the schools and a visible difference to the indiscriminate parking has been seen.

Operation AVOID

Scanning

There are 13 primary schools within the Blackpool South section, with over 6000 children between the ages of 6 and 11 attending these schools. All have to travel to and from school and many rely on parents, friends or relatives to transport them there by vehicle. Use of motor vehicles is becoming more frequent with less and less pupils walking to school thus the morning and afternoon school run is part of everyday life to many parents.

Many schools were built before the war when there were very few motor vehicles on the road. Although the buildings have been updated to today's standards, road infrastructure and parking facilities have not. This results in almost total gridlock on many roads surrounding schools, with drivers vying to park as close to their destination as possible, regardless of whether their actions would have any bearing on anybody else. A number of vehicles would be parked in dangerous, inconsiderate and illegal positions i.e. on junctions, double yellow lines and school zigzag lines.

Many complaints were received by the Police, particularly the Community Beat Managers when attending surgeries, forums or generally speaking to members of the public. The Head teachers themselves were experiencing difficulties when other parents would complain about the situation. They felt quite helpless dealing with the situation, their only course of action was to repeatedly send letters home to remind parents of their responsibilities.

A check of the accident statistics showed that there were in fact only a couple of injury accidents that occurred during the periods immediately before and after school on the streets directly adjoining the school sites, but having spoken to local residents and parents, there was a potential for serious road casualties, particularly for the pupils. It was therefore decided that a short and long-term solution was required for this problem, which would fall into line with the Constabulary's corporate strategy by reducing the number of road casualties, particularly children and to increase the public's confidence and satisfaction.

Analysis

Location

Following consultation with the Community Beat Managers, it would appear that the aforementioned problem existed, to a greater or lesser degree, at all the 13 primary schools. Inconsiderate drivers would park as close to the school as possible to either drop off or to collect the children, it seemed to be a major inconvenience for them to park a short distance away from the school and walk, even on a sunny day.

Consultation was made with each school and the Head teacher, all reported that they had problems, that there was only just sufficient car parking for the staff at the school site and that several drivers would constantly put the pupils at risk by being very selfish and narrow-minded. Several stated that they had requested extra or improved parking round the site, but were unable to secure funding as this was against Government policy of trying to reduce the number of vehicles travelling to school sites. Indeed all the schools had submitted to the council a transport plan that outlined the steps they had taken to implement this policy.

Consultation was made with the road safety department for the council, who stated that they were well aware of the situation around the schools and had recently undertaken a review of all the roads around the schools as part of an upgrading of parking restrictions, but that any changes would not be imminent. The department was keen to assist the operation in any way possible, they would be able to provide literature and posters and other educational materials.

Consultation was also made with the divisional accident clerk, in an attempt to produce figures that would support this operation, but there were difficulties in providing accurate data due to the different locations, times and the actual causes of the accidents.

Victim

In a situation such as this there are many different victims, most obviously the child who is injured because of not being able to assess the oncoming traffic due to inconsiderate parking, also the innocent motorist who would probably have no chance of stopping in time to avoid a collision. Then there are the local residents who suffer the obstruction and gridlock daily.

At several sites there is sheltered accommodation very close by and numerous reports of ambulances or other transport for these elderly people being unable to access the addresses due to illegally parked vehicles, were made. Other victims are the other law-abiding motorists who see drivers flouting the law and apparently getting away with it. Some of these people, it has been reported, have become quite incensed and have remonstrated with the offending drivers and have ended up being subject to verbal abuse.

Offender

The offenders in this situation can easily be defined as the drivers of vehicles transporting pupils to and from the schools, these are usually parents, friends or relatives of the pupils.

Objective

The object of this operation was two fold, one was to reduce the number of road traffic collisions involving children, which is one of the Constabulary's objectives, this would be achieved by prevention at sites deemed to be high risk and by target hardening such sites. The other objective was to increase the public's confidence in the police by the efforts being made to protect the children in the area and also to deal with what was becoming a persistent problem, which was affecting more and more people.

The success criteria for the project will be that there are no children involved in accidents close to the school sites due to parked vehicles and that parents and other road users are educated as to the dangers of inconsiderate parking. This will mean that the roads around school premises will be free of obstructive vehicles and thus safer for the children to cross

Response

From this analysis of the situation, following consultation with the schools, parents, road safety officers and police officers, it was felt that the problem needed a short-term response to try to alleviate the immediate problems, but to be able to sustain the operation a long-term strategy was also required.

Short term

The initial plan was an attempt to educate drivers as to the danger of their actions, followed by a period of high visibility patrolling and enforcement. As the focal points for the whole operation were the schools themselves, it was felt that the contact with the drivers should be concentrated through them.

The road safety department from the council provided a large number of leaflets and posters which were distributed to all the schools along with a letter from the section Police Inspector which outlined the purpose of the operation and requested the co-operation of all parents. A copy of this letter and a leaflet outlining the dangers of parking on school zigzag lines was distributed to all parents via the schools. Copies of

the posters were laminated and were affixed to the railings at the entrance to the schools. Numerous spare copies of the leaflet and poster were displayed internally within the schools for the benefit of other visitors and the pupils. The Community Beat Officers and road safety officers made contact with the Head teachers of the schools who were briefed about the operation and were then able to introduce the subject to their pupils during assemblies and general class periods and make them aware and understand the problems that their parent or relatives may cause.

To reach a greater audience and to inform local residents of the operation, the local press were contacted and they wrote an article that was published in the evening newspaper, outlining the dangers of inconsiderate and illegal parking around schools and the imminent enforcement period.

The next stage of the operation was the action week, where the Community Beat Managers, geographic patrols, road policing patrols and council road safety officers made their presence felt at the school sites at the start of the school day and again at the end of school. Officers were deployed in pairs to patrol outside the school entrance and also the adjacent streets, the brief was to provide hi visibility presence, issue advice to drivers and to enforce legislation where appropriate. On the first day of the operation, a reporter from the local newspaper accompanied officers spoke to parents and school crossing patrols, and again a report was published in that evening's newspaper, to further drive home the point.

During the week, all the schools were visited, numerous drivers were spoken to and over 50 drivers were either given fixed penalty tickets or reported for summons for various offences including unnecessary obstruction, waiting where prohibited and seatbelt offences. Whilst on patrol, the Community Beat Managers were tasked to look at the current parking arrangements and limitations around the schools, detailed mapping was obtained, and suggestions for improvements were marked on the maps which were then passed on to the council road safety department for their consideration. Site meetings have been held at several of the worst affected schools

During this week, there was a definite reduction in the number of people parking inconsiderately as more and more motorists were made aware of our presence and objectives, feedback was obtained from the schools, parents and school crossing patrols, which was very positive, parents were very happy to have a presence around their school but commented on the fact that the persistent offenders, once it had been observed that there was no police presence at the school, would revert to parking as before, not heeding the advice. This obviously confirmed that for the operation to be a success there must be a long-term response that could be maintained. The action week performed what was required to give the operation a good opening and start the re-education program for the drivers, but it was very labour intensive and not practical for the police as it would use up already scarce resources. Also the situation required continual monitoring and enforcement.

Following the initial enforcement period, one class of a local school, decided that they wanted to do something themselves to help in the operation, they designed their own posters which were displayed outside the school and held their own action day where the pupils held thumbs up or thumbs down signs to motorists dependant on how they parked outside the school and handed out leaflets explaining how they all felt. These

pupils had made this decision themselves after discussing the issues in class, what made this exceptional was that all these pupils had special educational needs. This demonstrates the level of feeling about road safety that has been implanted in the pupils in that particular school, and the same feeling is starting to manifest itself throughout other schools in the area.

Long Term

Careful consideration had to be given as to how best monitor the situations at the schools, as previously stated, to provide a police presence at the schools on a regular basis would be very labour intensive and obviously not practical. There were responsible people who attended the school on a daily basis, the teachers and other school staff, who would be able to observe what was happening at the school and report incidents to the police. Further liaison took place with the schools who fully supported the initiative. To give this scheme some credibility, it was decided that if the staff saw a motorist parking in an inappropriate position that the vehicle details be taken, details of time date and place be recorded and passed directly to the Community Beat Managers who would be able to take matters further. As there would be no direct evidence, it would be one word against another and as the motorist who was being reported on would probably be one of the persistent offenders, stronger evidence would be required. It was then decided that if a photograph could be taken of the offending vehicle in situ and forwarded to the police, which would be irrefutable evidence.

Sponsorship for the project was sought from local businesses to provide a digital camera for each school, together with a more substantial and durable sign for the school railings. A member of staff or the school crossing patrol would photograph and take details of any vehicles which were parked either on the zigzag lines or in other dangerous positions, and that day e-mail them to the newly instated Community Support Officers, who would then print a copy of the photograph, complete a pre formatted warning letter and then visit the registered owner of the vehicle pointing out to them their inconsiderate actions and the consequences of parking in similar positions in the future. There would only be a few instances where this could not be completed within the same day.

Over the following months the system worked well, several motorists were captured parking where they shouldn't, details and photographs were e-mailed that day to the PCSO's who were able to visit the drivers, issue a warning letter and suitable words of advice, only one motorist was reported on two separate occasions and after a further warning to the driver the Community Beat Manager who covered the particular school was given the full details and extra patrols were put in place for a couple of days. Since then there have been no further reports of this driver causing any problems.

Assessment

Operation Avoid has been a great success with members of the general public, there has been a very positive reaction from all the schools concerned, the majority of parents and nearby residents, there have been numerous letters of appreciation received, several from parents and other school crossing patrols from outside our geographic area, praising the scheme and asking for it to be implemented within their area.

There is no particular data available to be able to measure the impact of the operation, although to date there have been no injury road traffic collisions that could be attributable to vehicles causing obstruction around schools. The best measure of an operation of this kind is the public response and the general observations by the police and the public.

When the operation was first launched, 50 motorists were prosecuted by the police for blatant and inconsiderate parking within the 5 day enforcement period, during the prevailing weeks when the long term solution was put into place there were less and less drivers being reported to the police by the schools for their inconsiderate parking. I do not envisage the time that every motorist will tow the line and totally conform to legislation, that is human nature, but the fact that there is someone at the schools acting as the police's eyes has made a great impact.