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BUILDING A SAFE, JUST AND TOLERANT SOCIETY

SUMMER SPLASH SCHEMES 2000: FINDINGS FROM SIX CASE STUDIES

Briefing Note

Crime Reduction Research Series Paper 12
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The views expressed in this briefing note are those of the authors, not necessarily those of the Home Office (nor do they reflect Government policy).

Background

The Prime Minister formally announced on 3 July 2000 that £2 million would be spent funding summer Splash schemes[1] during the summer holidays. Administered by the Youth Justice Board (YJB)[2], 105 schemes in total were funded, targeting 13 to 17 year olds living on deprived estates in England and Wales. As the summer is traditionally considered a time of increased youth offending, the purpose of the Splash programme was to reduce this offending in the areas concerned by engaging young people in constructive and relevant activities.

The report discusses the findings from six of the 105 schemes. These schemes were selected to provide a broad geographical spread and because each represented varying levels of experience in running youth programmes. The authors visited all six schemes over their five to six weeks' duration, looking in particular at the process of setting up and running such schemes. The impact on crime and disorder associated with three of these schemes was also examined.

Planning for summer Splash schemes

Given that applicants had just three weeks to submit project proposals and develop a programme of activities, what was achieved by the schemes was very impressive bearing in mind that each area faced problems in relation to:

- lack of consultation with young people (concerning their preferred activities)
- lack of experienced youth workers (who had not already secured youth work for the summer)
- lack of available venues for external trips.

In terms of multi-agency working, in two of the schemes, the Youth Offending Team (YOT)[3] subcontracted the implementation and management to the local authority youth services department and a voluntary organisation, respectively. A further two schemes, both first wave Youth Inclusion Programmes (YIPs)[4], managed their own Splash programme with the advantage of being in touch with the key target group of youths.

The schemes generally managed to include a fairly high proportion of youths in the project area, averaging 24 per cent across the six schemes. However, the schemes were somewhat less successful at targeting 'at risk' youths, as only 16 per cent of Splash attendees were known to the local YOT (although likely to be an underestimate).[5]

1. 'Splash' was originally an acronym that stood for 'Schools and Police Liaison Activities for the Summer Holidays'. These were originally police led schemes although the term is now more generically applied to youth activity schemes run during the summer holidays.
2. The Youth Justice Board for England and Wales, responsible overall for managing Summer Splash 2000, was established under the Crime and Disorder Act (1998) to lead the reforms to the youth justice system.
3. Multi-agency YOTs work with young people aged 10-17 who are offending or at risk of offending, and those under 10 to prevent offending and Child Safety Orders.
4. Programmes that target high crime estates within the most deprived local authorities in England and Wales. The majority of Splash schemes were held on YIP sites.
5. This may be in part to have been due to the introduction of a new YOT information system in early 2000 where, it is possible, that a percentage of those at risk of offending had not yet been entered onto the system.

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Running a summer Splash scheme

Time of day

If the aim of Splash is to divert offenders from illegal activity when they are most at risk, one would expect the time of day at which Splash activities are run to match the peak times of reported incidents. However, this varied greatly between schemes. In one scheme, for example, weekday activities ran from 10am until 9pm and 70 per cent of incidents occurred during this time. In another scheme, Splash activities occurred in periods when only 21 per cent incidents took place.

Types of activities

Activities ranged from arts and crafts, drama and football to rather more innovative DJ workshops, dry slope skiing, graffiti projects and kayaking (refer to Appendix A in main report). Some of the activities were 'hit and miss' in terms of their appeal to the target group. In one scheme, for example, a trip to the Yorkshire Dales did not appear to have been of sufficient interest to young people as few signed up for this trip, which eventually was filled by participants from another programme. Perhaps this was to be expected, given that people's interests vary and there was little time for the recipients to be asked what they would like to do. Residentials tended to be popular aspects of the Splash schemes, giving their participants a degree of independence and providing an opportunity to see and do new things.

To charge or not charge for activities

Those in favour of charging argued that it was important for young people to recognise that there was a cost involved in providing the activities, thereby placing a nominal fee (heavily subsidised) on some events. However, the Splash projects were all located in areas with high local socio-economic deprivation and as such, charging for events may have excluded the very people that the youth workers were aiming to target.

However, neither of these approaches necessarily have to prevail – rather, charging practices could be tailored diplomatically to need, capacity to pay, and to supply and demand.

Working with difficult youths

The youth workers involved in these schemes had a challenging job, in dealing with some of the most difficult young people in their local area. Some schemes levelled a clear 'zero tolerance' policy at the young people to reduce the chances of misbehaviour, whilst others dealt with misbehaviour on a more reactive, one-to-one basis as and when required.

The impact of summer Splash on crime and disorder

Of the six schemes examined, detailed crime and disorder incident data were available for only three.

Reported incidents of crime and disorder were higher in August 1999 (i.e. the year before Splash was introduced) than at most other times of year in two of the three schemes examined. However, the extent of the difference was slight, suggesting that the impact of young people having more leisure time during the summer holidays, and therefore more likely to engage in crime, is minimal. This questions the need to target crime reduction resources on August, rather than at other times of the year.

Only one of the three schemes showed a decline in incidents reported to the police in August 2000. This scheme differed from the two others in that it was the only one where there had been little existing summer youth provision (i.e. was a 'greenfield' site) and had a relatively high rate of incidents. The introduction of Splash therefore may have been beneficial in bringing this high rate down. Indeed, it is possible that doing anything to engage young people in these circumstances could have a beneficial effect.

In the remaining two sites, no impact on crime and disorder was associated with additional funding. In one of these, there was little opportunity to achieve a decline in the rate of youth offending due to its relatively low level to start with. It is possible that, had the other scheme targeted young people at risk of offending more effectively, a reduction may have been achieved.

Conclusions and recommendations

The research points to three key findings:

- youth crime does not increase dramatically during the summer holidays
- modest youth work type interventions can have a significant impact in 'greenfield' sites (i.e. areas where there was little *existing* youth provision)
- modest additional interventions can have a diminishing impact in areas with a reasonable level of existing provision.

The schemes examined were set up at very short notice and it is very likely this affected what they could achieve in the time available. In addition, only three schemes were able to provide us with the level of data needed to assess the impact of Splash on crime and disorder. However, it is possible to distil some good practice recommendations from this evaluation to ensure that the most is made of any future funding of Splash schemes:

- target high crime areas
- target 'greenfield' sites
- target the right young people
- allow time for planning
- market Splash locally
- select an appropriate location for Splash
- run Splash at the optimum times
- ensure resources are available on demand
- tailor activities to meet the interests of young people.

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