

BRIDGING THE GAP

ORGANISATIONAL SUPPORT CATEGORY

LANCASHIRE CONSTABULARY, CENTRAL DIVISION, ENGLAND, 2002

SUMMARY:

The organisation and recruitment of volunteers for identification parades was a problem at Central Division, it was clear that a great deal of officers time was spent recruiting volunteers, usually at short notice. Parades were regularly cancelled due to a lack of volunteers found by officers and the unreliability of those recruited. This resulted in a poor quality of service being received by the public and a lack of positive identifications for cases going to court.

The research carried out into the problem was based on personal experience, verbal feedback from colleagues, liaison with PACE Inspectors, who organise the parades, CID and other internal departments who carry out parades on a regular basis.

As the University of Central Lancashire's Community Beat Officer I formed a partnership with Alison Hughes at The Bridge, the employment centre for the university. We decided to utilise and upgrade the existing computer system at The Bridge, this would then allow for descriptive searches to find volunteers for identification parades. We were able to do this at a minimal cost of £50, we also devised and had printed descriptive forms, for students and staff who were interesting in becoming volunteers, at a cost of £100, all funded from the divisional budget. These forms were then inputted on to the computer database at The Bridge. Officers would then contact The Bridge with a description for a parade. Staff at The Bridge would then contact the relevant volunteers and arrange for them to attend. The Bridge receives £1.00 for every referral they make in addition to the £10 each volunteer receives.

Between November 2001 and January 2002 thirty identification parades were run at Central Division, twenty-two of those used The Bridge. A questionnaire was sent out to those officers that have used the service to ask for their views. The responses were very positive with officers stating that the service was useful and saved them time.

It is difficult to give an exact figure as to the time and money saved. An estimate would be that it takes two officers four hours to organise volunteers for an identification parade. The average hourly pay for a police constable is £18. Using the bridge, officers would require two ten minute phone calls to relay the description required and check on the volunteers recruited. This is a saving of 3 hours and forty minutes per officer per parade, which is equal to £66. For two officers per parade this is a saving of £132. The Bridge has been used twenty two times in the past three months; this is a saving of £2904.

SCANNING

The 'Bridging the Gap' project was aiming to tackle the problem of identification parades at Central Division. Historically identification parades had been difficult to organise, mainly due to the requirement to have 15 volunteers available for the parade. Much police officers time was spent searching the streets trying to find such volunteers, which were required to match a particular physical description and needed to be available at a certain time and date. As a result of this identification parades were often cancelled due to a lack of volunteers found or due to volunteers failing to turn up at the last minute. This meant that cases were not proceeded with due to a lack of evidence or that cases which managed to get to court were weaker due to a lack of positive identification. As a result of this the quality of service to the public was reduced as the aggrieved in cases were unable to have the opportunity to attend an identification parade or found their cases thrown out of court due to lack of identification evidence. This resulted in a lack of public satisfaction with the police service. Front line officers were also frustrated as they spent an average of 8 hours organising a parade only to have it cancelled or postponed, and as a result saw their cases suffering at court.

The objective of the project was to increase public satisfaction by having less identification parades cancelled and therefore an ability to get more cases through court. It was also to support front-line officers by offering them a system that could give them access to volunteers quickly and easily, resulting in a more professional approach to organising identification parades and to have less of their time spent organising parades, freeing their time up to complete other important duties. This would also assist in presenting a professional and efficient image to members of the public. For many this would be one of the few times they would deal with Lancashire Constabulary directly and it is essential they leave with a positive image.

The problem was identified by close liaison and discussion with various specialised departments, PACE inspectors, response officers, Criminal Justice Service (CJS) and personal experience.

Specialised Departments

Departments such as the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) and the Crime fighting fund (CFF) are those which use identification parades the most as they investigate more long term and involved crime than other front line officers. The CFF department is proactive and actually targets criminals, it deals with mostly vehicle crime and burglary and often the identification of an offender is the most important part of the investigation. On speaking to officers within these departments it was clear that all found identification parades difficult to organise, time consuming and frustrating due to cancellations. They stated the present system whereby they were searching the streets for volunteers was not working and was very unreliable. They did not feel they were offering the public a quality service.

PACE Inspectors

PACE inspectors are responsible for the day to day running of the station and they deal with PACE (Police and Criminal Evidence Act) issues. Identification is a topic that PACE covers in great detail and as a result the PACE inspectors are responsible for running identification parades. They ensure the parades are run in line with PACE and generally co-ordinate the gathering of volunteers and oversee the actual parade. As the officer - in - the - case, i.e. the officer dealing directly with the investigation, is not allowed to have any involvement in the identification parade the task is normally delegated to colleagues. This means the parade is organised by officers who have no direct involvement in the case and therefore the PACE inspectors role in co-ordinating the parade and ensuring details, i.e. the description of volunteers, are correct, is paramount.

The PACE inspectors in general found identification parades very difficult to organise and stated that the actual day of the parade was often difficult as volunteers failed to attend and response officers were asked to find extra volunteers at very short notice. This meant those volunteers and witnesses who had attended were often waiting around until more volunteers were found. It was also the responsibility of PACE Inspectors to inform the aggrieved and witnesses if a parade was cancelled. They felt the poor quality of service often gave a negative and unprofessional image of Lancashire Constabulary.

Response Officers

These front line officers deal with the day to day incidents that occur at Central Division. The Division, which recently gained city status, is very busy and response officers are generally responding to jobs or catching up on enquiries for a full tour of duty. In relation to identification parades response officers stated they are often asked to find volunteers on the streets at very short notice, usually for within the next half an hour, as volunteers have failed to attend a parade or they have been unable to find enough volunteers. This is very difficult as they are already busy and find this interrupts their normal duties, it also prevents any proactive work they may wish to do during this time.

Response officers also stated that they were unsure how to organise an identification parade as this is not something they do regularly and stated they felt a more systematic approach would assist them if and when they were required to organise one.

Personal Experience

During my service I have been required to assist on the day of an identification parade. During this time I have experienced first hand the problems with the current system. During one identification parade only six volunteers attended and response officers were asked to find up to nine more. I sat with the volunteers

that had attended who were told after two hours the parade was cancelled. Those that attended were still paid £10 each for their time, which was a drain of valuable financial resources for Central Division without a parade going ahead.

Criminal Justice Service

This department deal with the case files from operational police officers. The department staff act as the disclosure officer and ensure that each case has all the evidence required. They liase directly with solicitors and barristers. I was informed that files are often returned to them with a request that an identification parade is held. It is then the responsibility of the officer-in-the-case to arrange for a colleague to organise the parade on their behalf. CJS staff stated in their experience files were often being returned with identification parades having been cancelled several times before going ahead due to lack of volunteers or the parades not going ahead at all, as officers ran out of time before the case was due in court

Success Criteria

It seems from this research the success criteria for any project designed to address this problem is:

- A reduction in the time police officers spend organising identification parades.
- An efficient system that is quick and easy to use.
- Increase in public satisfaction.
- Reduction in cancellations of identification parades.
- A more professional service.

ANALYSIS

From my research I decided that this issue needed dealing with. It was obviously a recurring problem, one that was causing front-line officers many problems, it was using up valuable officers time and offering the public a poor quality of service resulting in a lack of public satisfaction. I decided the best way to tackle this was using the Problem Orientated Policing system which would allow me to consider the victim, location and offender using the PAT triangle and using the SARA model would allow me to consider the problem in detail, consider various responses and eventually assess the success of the project.

I analysed the problem by examining the information I had received from the various sources i.e. CID, CFF. It seemed the problem was caused by a lack of a structured and organised approach to acquiring volunteers to stand on identification parades. There was also the lack of commitment and unreliability of the volunteers to overcome. A secondary problem was the lack of information for officers regarding organising identification parades.

It was necessary to discover what have previously been done to address this problem. In order to discover this I approached the various sources again. I was informed by the PACE inspectors that they sometimes had to use volunteer databases at Liverpool and Manchester in order to get volunteers of an unusual description, but that this was time consuming and costly, as the volunteers were paid upwards of £15 each and the parades had to be held in those areas as most of the volunteers were local to Manchester or Liverpool.

I was also informed by several of the sources that there was a database of volunteers currently in place at Central Division, but that it was very unreliable as it was not updated regularly and it was out-of-date, with the majority of the volunteers having left the area or changed their appearance. I spoke to the person in charge of this database who informed

me she did not have the time in her current role to maintain and up-date the database, as this was a full time role in itself. She admitted the database was rarely used and was unreliable.

RESPONSE

As the University of Central Lancashire's beat manager I was aware that there are in excess of 20,000 full and part-time students and over 3,000 members of university staff at Preston. It seemed this could provide Central Division with the pool of volunteers it required to conduct efficient identification parades. Most of the students and staff would either live locally or would be attending Preston on a daily basis making them more reliable than the general public. One of my options was to set up a database of volunteers in conjunction with the university.

My second option was to try to re-establish the existing database at Central Division. It seemed in order to do this I would need a full or part time member of staff to monitor and update the system regularly. I felt the Division would not be willing or able to make the financial commitment for an extra member of staff and therefore I sought a more cost effective alternative.

It was clear from my analysis of the problem that the solution to the problem needed to result in an organised systematic approach to identification parades that provided a quick, easy to use system that resulted in reliable volunteers who would attend when required.

As a result of this I approached; 'The Bridge' a student employment service from the University of Central Lancashire with the intention of setting up a database of student/staff volunteers from the university. I spoke to Alison Hughes the manager of 'The Bridge' and discussed the problem, the POPS philosophy and the benefits of forming a partnership approach to solving this problem. The idea and project was eagerly embraced by 'The Bridge' who felt it was a positive partnership not only with the university but

with the students who would be financially better off (£10 paid to each volunteer) and they would have an insight into and personal interaction with Lancashire Constabulary.

It was decided that The Bridge should set up a database of volunteers which they would update and monitor as part of their daily duties. For this service Central Division would pay The Bridge £1 per volunteer provided for each identification parade. The service would be publicised at the university and at Central Division. Officers would be able to ring 'The Bridge' with a description, time and date of the parade and staff at 'The Bridge' would enter the physical description into the database which would then select relevant volunteers. 'The Bridge' staff would then contact the numbers of volunteers required and arrange for them to attend the parade.

An initial difficulty was finding software suitable to support the database. I liaised with the person *who* operated the database at Central Division. The force had bought the database and were unwilling to give it to 'The Bridge', we were also unable to copy it due to Copyright.. I contacted the company who produced the database. They informed me it was no longer in production and if they could locate a past copy the cost would be £200. There was also the issue that the computer equipment at 'The Bridge' may not be compatible with the database and that a new computer system would be required if it was to be used.

After further liaison with Alison Hughes it was decided we would try to utilise the current database used at 'The Bridge' for selecting people *who* are suitable for jobs. Alison inputted physical descriptions of 10 fictitious people and then inputted a description, as if looking for volunteers. The system worked and was able to give the names of people fitting that description. Utilising this system meant a new database did not need to be purchased the only cost to the Constabulary would be £50 to have the system amended to take a much larger quantity of data.

The best time to launch the project was at the beginning of term in September. 'The Bridge' produce welcome packs for the new students to introduce to them the services they provide. In this pack a registration form for identification parades was included, this allowed students to fill in their details including a physical description. This form could then be returned to 'The Bridge' where staff could input the details onto the database. This could be repeated at the start of each new academic year in order to publicise the initiative amongst the first year students. Forms were also displayed at 'The Bridge' office in order to gain students from other years. There was also a media campaign to publicise the scheme,(see below). The form used includes the year the student is leaving and availability over holidays, in order that the system can be up-dated. The cost of the printing and stationary for the initial 3,000 forms was £100, this was likely to be an annual cost.

As I now had a cost plan I submitted a report to the senior management team, outlining the project using the SARA model to explain all the features. I then requested financial support from the senior management team with regards to the £50 for the database, £100 initial stationary costs and a commitment to pay 'The Bridge' £1 per volunteer. This report was reinforced by support from a PACE Inspector, Michael Whitehead, who had been tasked by the Senior management team to address the problem of identification parades and had heard about my POPS plan. As a result of this I gained the financial support I needed. Inspector Whitehead was willing to deal with the financial side of the plan, he would receive monthly invoices from 'The Bridge' both for the money they required for provision of volunteers and the stationary costs.

Promotion

The initiative required promotion both at Central Division and at the University of Central Lancashire. Alison and I discussed our options and the following were completed.

- Article in the Lancashire Evening Post
- Article to be distributed to the local news papers within the North West i.e Preston Citizen, Accrington Observer, Burnley Express.
- Article to be published in the university magazine 'Pluto'
- Information on 'The Bridge' website
- Freshers Fair stand.
- Local radio station (Rock FM and Radio Lancashire)
- Poster campaign at Central Division at all three stations Preston, Lea and Fulwood.

In Practice

The initiative was launched in September. Initially the response from students was good with over 1500 students on the database by Christmas. The first identification parade using 'The Bridge' was run at the beginning of October. The Bridge was only able to provide 4 volunteers at this time due to the unusual description of the offender. In November there were 8 identification parades and 75 volunteers provided. The actual process that was involved was very simple and easy to use. Officers rang 'The Bridge' with a description of an offender, staff would then input this into the database and a list of suitable volunteers were provided. Staff at 'The Bridge' would then contact these volunteers, by e-mail or telephone to ascertain their availability for the parade. Once a list of volunteers was arranged that list was sent to the officer organising the parade with the volunteers names, addresses and a space for the officer to acknowledge if each volunteer attended or not. This form could then be returned to 'The Bridge' who could then invoice Central Division for those volunteers that attended. A copy of this form was also sent to Inspector Whitehead so he was aware of those that had attended. A form was also sent to the volunteer, either via the post or by e-mail.

This outlined the time, date and location of the identification parade, it also reassured the volunteer that if they were picked out they would not be arrested!

ASSESSMENT

Initially the feedback that was received was verbal from police officers speaking to myself or Alison stating how useful, easy to use and efficient the service was. Officers appreciated the fact they had only to make a 10 minute phone call to 'The Bridge' with a description of an offender and that the staff at 'The Bridge' did the rest. Most officers informed me that despite being sent the list of volunteers, most phoned 'The Bridge' a second time to check with them how many volunteers they had found.

In order to formalise this feedback I sent questionnaires to all the officers that had used 'The Bridge' between September and February. Twelve questionnaires were received from approximately 18 that were sent out. Many of these officers had used the service more than once and in some cases upto six times, in total these questionnaires covered 28 of the 34 parades held between these times.

Results

- All of those questioned found the service useful and all but one parade went ahead.
- In reply to the question 'Did 'The Bridge' save you time', all replied 'Yes'. When asked to quantify this officers replies varied from 'Lots', '4-6hours' to 'Days'. From this an average was sought which was, two officers at 4 hours each (minus two ten minute phone calls to 'The Bridge').
- Half of the officers thought the cancellation of identification parades had lessened as a direct result of the service. A quarter were undecided and a quarter thought it had no effect as there are many reasons for cancellations.

- Only three officers (6 identity parades) had encountered any problems when using 'The Bridge'. These problems related to students tagging along with friends and the quality of the descriptions of volunteers that attended (although it was commented on that this is on a par with those identity parades arranged directly with the police!)
- Suggested improvements were photos database of volunteers and to increase the variety of volunteers on the database I.E. the ages and ethnic origin.

Usage

The following table shows the amount of times the service was used.

	NO I.D. PARADES	USING BRIDGE
November	13	8
December	6	4
January	11	10
February	14	12
March	5	3 (i.d suite closed)
April	2	0 (i.d suite closed)

Time and Money

As discussed it would take two officers an average of four hours to organise volunteers for an identification parade. Using 'The Bridge' this now takes two ten minute phone calls. This is a saving of 3 hours and forty minutes per officer per parade. The average hourly pay for a police constable is £18. For two officers per parade this is a saving of £132. The Bridge has been used 39 times between October 2001 and April 2002, this is a total saving of £5148. This has also saved 274 hours of police officers time.

As a result of this £400 has been paid to 'The Bridge' for their involvement. A further £4000

has been paid to the student volunteers (this is not an extra cost, volunteers are always paid £10 each).

Sources

In addition to the questionnaires I spoke to each of the departments again to ascertain their views on the initiative. In general the feedback was positive. It was felt that the scheme was easy to use and efficient. All officers appreciated the fact they did not have to search the streets for volunteers. They thought the service they received from 'The Bridge' was very professional and as a result the identification parades ran smoothly giving a more professional and positive image of Lancashire Constabulary to members of the public.

The Criminal Justice Service (CJS) felt that there had been a 50% decrease in officers returning to them with a cancelled identification parade. They stated parades are still being cancelled but this is usually due to the unavailability of witnesses or timing rather than problems with volunteers.

Response officers felt better informed about organising identification parades as a direct result of the poster campaign at Central Division. All the posters had my contact name on and many response officers spoke to me about the initiative even though they were not requiring the service, so that they would know what to do should they need to organise a parade.

Students

The students were asked to comment on the scheme as the spoke to the staff from 'The Bridge'. It was felt that this was better than circulating a formalised questionnaire as these are often unsuccessful within the student body. Staff at 'The Bridge' stated that the feedback was mostly positive. They informed me that some of the students are becoming 'regulars' who can do up to three parades a week earning a steady income. These students now attend 'The Bridge' asking for information on forthcoming parades. In response to this there are now posters

displayed in 'The Bridge' with descriptions of volunteers that are required, this has had a good response from both regulars and new students.

At present there are currently some 2,500 students registered on the database.

The following are some comments received from the students:

- 'Interesting to do, shows a different side to the Police Force' 'Its easy money, cash in hand'
- 'They tend to be in the early evening so fit in with my lecture timetable and social life.'
- 'Its not a long term job with loads of commitment its just a one off walk in walk out get paid which suits me.'
- 'I'm doing law so its an insight'
- 'I'm thinking of joining the Police Force so its a good way to find out what goes on behind the scenes.'
- 'It wasn't what I expected and I found it intimidating and nerve racking standing next to the suspect, I was surprised I came into such close contact with him.'

Success?

The initiative is a success. The system is quick and easy to use, providing a good quality and professional service to front line police officers, thereby supporting them in their role. Cancellations of parades are fewer, although they are still being cancelled for other reasons. There has been a large reduction in police officers' time spent on organising parades and which improves the quality of service

Lancashire Constabulary provides to the public. Parades are now run more professionally with less time spent waiting around for volunteers and with a generally more organised approach. Finally, the financial savings are substantial and this will increase as time goes on.

Problems

The main problem with this initiative has been the analysis stage. The information available has been limited. There has been no information retained regarding parades that have been cancelled. Although this information is available from 'The Bridge' for the period October to April there is no data prior to this to compare it to. Using 'The Bridge', only one cancellation has taken place on the actual day of the parade. When parades are cancelled, such cancellations take place days before the parade for reasons other than lack of volunteers. These cancellations average 1-2 per month.

Other problems have involved the physical descriptions on the registration forms, which initially were not varied enough. This was addressed by changing the form. A continuous liaison with 'The Bridge' was maintained throughout the project in order that any issues could be dealt with.

The database at present is rather limited with most students being between 19-26 years. The project has yet to be tested over the summer months, although a large percentage of the students are local to the area and can be contacted when required.

The future

This project is open to adaption and expansion. In the new academic year it will be heavily publicised to the minority groups within the student body i.e mature students, ethnic minority groups and staff, in order that the database can be widened.

At present I have little input into the project other than regular meetings with Alison to

review it. This should continue although as the project develops the necessity for these meetings will lessen. The responsibility for this project will always be that of the university's beat manager and will be written into the job description in the future, should I leave the post. The financial responsibility will remain with a PACE inspector.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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