

Research Project: Behaviour Change and Social Marketing: Project Bernie.

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Background: BRASS has regularly sought to extend the use of social marketing to novel settings. This included a theoretical exploration of the potential for social marketing to be applied to behaviours that were of interest to UK Fire Services. This idea was then taken forward in partnership with South Wales Fire and Rescue Services (SWFRS) as a piece of action research to tackle the problem of deliberate grass-fire setting in the South Wales Valleys communities. Such fires consume and divert Fire Service resources, risk lives, damage the environment, impact wildlife and blight communities and the local businesses within them. They also cost SWFRS around £7 million per year to tackle.

Aims & objectives:

- To test the potential of social marketing in the context of fire-related behaviours;
- To trial a community-based social marketing intervention to reduce fire-setting (with a target of by 15% in the trial community in the first year);
- To examine the potential for a social marketing intervention to improve stakeholder working relationships and practices.

About the research: The research was founded on key respondent interviews and focus groups used to understand deliberate grassfires as a social phenomenon, to plan a practical intervention with stakeholders and to evaluate its effectiveness and impact. The research was conducted in a target community which was one of two with the highest grassfire incidence (Tonypany), with the other acting as a control (Aberdare) to account for external influences, particularly the weather. Local youngsters were involved and engaged with via a 'Youth Advisory Board' of youngsters drawn from Tonypany Community College who helped develop and test the intervention's strategy, messages and outputs.

Results and outputs: The research within the target community revealed that:

- the fire-setters were predominantly young males, but included a wide range of youngsters, not just the obviously disaffected ones;
- their motivations were boredom, thrill-seeking, attention seeking, peer pressure, natural curiosity and experimentation;
- fires were perceived as a nuisance, but starting them as relatively '*harmless*' and '*risk-free fun*';
- community members viewed fire settings as both a seasonal tradition and a social norm;
- people underestimated the costs of the fires and overestimated Fire Service resources;
- many believed that '*something should be done*', but there was little belief that the situation could be changed.

This research formed the basis for the development of a practical intervention developed with SWFRS, which provided alternative activities for youngsters that met the same needs as fire-setting, promoted positive behaviours and a message of valuing the local environment, integrated the project themes with educational efforts, and prompted Police, SWFRS and local communities to work together more effectively to deter fire-setting and apprehend those responsible. This included statistical evaluation of fire data during and after the intervention period; pre and post-intervention questionnaires (1517 in total) completed by school age children in both target and control communities; and a programme of follow-up interviews with key project stakeholders.

Statistical analysis of the impact of the Bernie intervention encompassing the Easter 2010 SWFRS data for both towns (Tonypany and Aberdare) demonstrated a best estimate of the reduction in

fires in Tonypany (based on comparisons with historical trends and the control community) during the 6 week intervention period of 46% - three times the original target. The direct cost saving to SWFRS from the reduction in fires was £285,655. The reduction in fires and fire damage also provided benefits to the local community and other stakeholder organisations such as the Police and Forestry Commission. The research results demonstrated:

- the practical potential of a social marketing intervention to tackle anti-social behaviours such as fire-setting and bringing together a range of stakeholders to tackle the problem – in this case the Fire Service, local schools, local councils, local community leaders and youthworkers, local shopkeepers, the Police and probation services and the Forestry Commission;
- the value of the *Total Process Planning* model and *Strategic Social Marketing Mix* as a framework for the development, implementation and evaluation of an intervention;
- the potential for spin-off benefits in terms of improved working relationships within a sponsoring organisation, and between the organisation and the community within which they operate, and with other stakeholder organisations they interact with;
- The research also contributed to knowledge as one of the first large-scale behavioural change interventions to apply the National Social Marketing Centre's *Total Process Planning* model and their *Strategic Social Marketing Mix* model as a framework for intervention design and implementation.
- Peattie, S., Peattie, K. and Thomas, R. (2013), [Social marketing as transformational marketing in the public services: The case of Project Bernie](#). *Public Management Review*, 14 (7), 987-1010
- Peattie, S. (2010), [A Social Marketing Project to Reduce the Incidence of Deliberate Grass Fires in Wales, UK](#), BRASS Research Report for SWFRS.
- Peattie, K. (2008), [Social marketing: A strategic approach to fire prevention planning, changing behaviour, reducing risk and inefficiency](#), paper presented at: *UK Fire Service Conference*, London, UK, September 2008.

Impacts achieved/potential for impact: The project had a direct impact in terms of reducing fire-setting in the target community but (according to local police figures) also reduced overall crime in those areas and improving fire-service/community relations. The project was also awarded the Chartered Institute of Public Relations 2011 Excellence in Communications Award for its Public Sector category, the judges comments noted that it '*Sets a new standard in behaviour change campaigns*'. Other aspects of impact include:

- Featuring as an example of excellence in research impact in the publication ESRC (2010), "*Britain in 2011: The State of the Nation*", *Economic and Social Research Council*: Swindon and selected as a REF case;
- Selected as a case study for the ESRC's 2011 "*Celebrating Social Sciences*" booklet and video showcasing "case studies of research making a difference, across all sectors of society" and has been further developed into an ESRC Impact Case;
- Presented to an audience of Commander & Chief Officers from the combined Armed Services of UK & USA at the National Defense Academy Shrivenham as an example of best practice in '*Winning Hearts and Minds*';
- Used as an exemplar of using an evidence-based approach in public services by Equality & Human Rights Commission Wales at Equality Exchange Network Conference 2012 and accompanying YouTube Case Study video;
- The Wales Audit Office explicitly mentioned Bernie in the Fire Service Improvement Plan for Wales as best practise in consultation and engagement for public services.