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Operation Respect - Practice Exemplar

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Introduction

Inverness CSP have run the multi-agency, Operation Respect (OR) over the Winter festive period, since 2008. It is an operation that has developed over time and has achieved great success.

Situation

OR's original aim was to reduce street violence and disorder and incidents linked to alcohol consumption within licensed premises over the festive period. Over time, OR has evolved to include tackling ASB, safety of lone females and support for vulnerable people in the wider area over the festive period, particularly those in a mental health crisis.

Action

To best meet these aims, every year, OR takes a multi-agency approach which sees all partners working closely. Partners are: Highland Council, Police Response Team, Inverness CSP, Inverness Business Improvement District, Inverness Street Pastors, Scottish Ambulance Service, MERT Highland First Aiders, and Highland TSI.

OR runs from late November until the early January. Strands of the project include: social media; response policing; Security Task Team (STT), police mobile office; harm reduction vehicle (HRV), safe space café, pastoral care and first aid volunteers.

In 2022, there was a high level of dedicated police officers for OR. Aims for the OR street teams (police, STT, volunteers) were to carry out routine patrolling, have high visibility presence - especially at licensed premises, identify vulnerable individuals and refer to multi-agency partners for support., usually through the HRV and safe space café.

A mobile police office was instated within the city centre during OR to provide a focal point for police staff and referrals and to provide public reassurance.

The extra focus on women's safety saw street teams tasked to patrol common routes home. Extra focus on vulnerability tasked street teams to engage pro-actively with those concerned. The HRV was manned with a mental health practitioner, paramedic and police.

A dedicated phone number and 'shop safe' radios were given to all businesses in the area, for immediate information sharing and response by OR partners.

The safe space café was used to accommodate those needing assistance and provided food, drink and first aid/referrals.

Outcome

As the HRV was manned with a mental health practitioner, paramedic and police, this meant police were only there as back-up and the mental health crisis was dealt with by more appropriate professionals, which partners received positively. The joint working approach resulted in a much reduced burden on each partner.

Evidence gathered saw a steady reduction in demand in incidents over the past three years. It also shows how much the pandemic increased incidents pertaining to concern for a person, and how effective OR was in addressing this. Evidence also showed the STT significantly helped the police in assisting the public, prevention of ASB and crime detection. Reported incidents of shoplifting showed a 20% decrease from previous years in 2022.

Due to the success of OR, there are hopes it be replicated in some format in Summer (especially regarding water safety) and that it will run again over the festive period. A permanent HRV is being considered. Street pastors have kept open a 'warm space' for continued support and are having their volunteers trained in mental health and suicide intervention.

Reflection

Overall, OR was well delivered and received. Close working with partners allowed more commonality and understanding of roles to develop. In particular, the HRV's tripartite approach, helped to reduce impact on NHS services which were under heavy strain due to the time of year. It was felt the impact of the harm reduction vehicle having mental health practitioners present for those in crisis could not be undersold in terms of early intervention and prevention.

Challenges to OR included- the volunteering resource due to winter illness and not enough awareness of the police mobile office, which it is hoped will be addressed through raising the profile over social media in the future. In addition, anticipated budget cuts will most likely have an impact of the level of service that can be delivered in the coming year.

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