



Practice Note 21

Fordoun Underpass Project

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Project Background and Aims

Fordoun is a community of approximately 900 people in Aberdeenshire located approximately 10 miles south of Stonehaven. In March 2008, a report was received of obscene graffiti displayed on the wall of an underpass which extended under the A90, linking the local primary school with the community. The vandalism offence was detected and four young people were subsequently cautioned and charged. However, the two police officers who attended the complaint noted not only the reported graffiti, but also the dark and dismal state of the underpass.

Street lighting was placed on the approaches to the underpass but the light was obstructed by foliage. Also, the fencing bordering the approach paths on both sides of the underpass was damaged. Consequently no physical barrier existed between the path and wooded areas bordering the paths. This was viewed as especially problematic as the route was used daily by approximately 40 children as they walked to and from Redmyre Primary School. Picture 1 overleaf shows the underpass prior to the production of the mural. (However, it should be noted that Picture 1 also depicts the improved lighting funded as part of the project.)

The Fordoun Underpass Project was thus established in 2009 with the aim of reducing acts of vandalism at the underpass and making the area in question safer and brighter. The project was also seen as a good opportunity to build links between the local community and the police, particularly local beat officers working with young people.

Picture 1: Fordoun Underpass Prior to Intervention



The project was driven by a partnership between Grampian Police, Aberdeenshire Council Education Leisure and Learning, Aberdeenshire Council Transport and Infrastructure, BEAR Scotland¹ and the community.

Outcomes

National 11: 'We have strong, resilient and supportive communities where people take responsibility for their own actions and how they affect others'.

Resources

Funding: Aberdeenshire Community Safety Partnership, Grampian Police Community Initiative Fund, Aberdeenshire Council Arts (South), BEAR Scotland.

Partners: Grampian Police, Aberdeenshire Council Arts Development, Aberdeenshire Council Community Learning and Development, the Fordoun community.

Monitoring and Evaluation

¹ BEAR Scotland manages and maintains trunk roads in the North East and South East of Scotland on behalf of Transport Scotland.

An informal evaluation exercise was carried out after the project was completed. Feedback sessions were held with everyone that partook in the project, including children from the primary school.

Activities

The lead police officer consulted with a wide range of local stakeholders to decide what could be done to improve the approaches to the underpass and therefore make the journey less intimidating for pedestrians and young people in particular. Consequently, Aberdeenshire Council Arts Development (South) and Community Learning and Development came on board the project. The partners agreed that lighting and the approaches to the underpass would be improved, vegetation cut back and a mural painted on the wall of the underpass. It was decided that the mural would be produced in collaboration between pupils at Redmyre Primary School and a Project Artist.

From the outset a strong emphasis was placed on partnership working between local agencies and a community-led approach. At an early juncture, for example, a public meeting was held at Fordoun Village Hall to engage meaningfully with the community. At the public meeting the project team emphasised that although crime trends in the community were not significantly high, instances of antisocial behaviour, such as the vandalism to the underpass, could lead to more serious offences in future.

The post of Project Artist was advertised nationally, applications were received from throughout the UK and a short list was drawn up. Interviews then took place at Fordoun Village Hall with members of the community deciding on the successful applicant. Along with the Project Artist, members of the Project Team participated in design workshops which took place at Redmyre Primary School and Mearns Academy, Laurencekirk, the local secondary school. A further meeting was held in the village to seek the views of the wider community regarding the design of the mural. The Project Artist then designed the mural based on the wishes of the community.

During this period members of the community cut back dense foliage in the vicinity of the underpass, and lighting was improved. Members of the Project Team attended all the sessions co-ordinating all aspects of the work.

Work on the underpass commenced on Monday 6 July 2009 and was completed by Friday 17 July 2009. Approximately 60 members of the community aged from 8 to 72 years participated in the work and at its conclusion, the whole area was brighter, more attractive and, most importantly, safer.

On 17 July 2009 a community celebration was held in the village to officially reopen the underpass. This was attended by the local media and the project received significant positive coverage.

On completion of the project a pack containing postcards of the work and a DVD was produced. The DVD held images of the work as it was being created, verbal accounts from members of the community who participated in the project and a recording of the opening ceremony which was broadcast on Mearns FM, the community radio station. The pack was distributed to all those who participated in the event including partners who contributed to the projects undoubted success.

Impact

Two years following the completion of the project the underpass has not been damaged and the vicinity suffers from no significant antisocial behaviour. The underpass has been referred to as an 'Art Gallery' which has improved the environment and the community has taken pride in their work. Thus, the mural is a lasting tribute to the hard work of all the participants. Picture 2 below shows the improvements to the underpass.

Picture 2: Forduon Underpass After the Intervention



The project also established strong links between the community and Grampian Police. The two local police officers have become well known members of the local community and created a positive image of Grampian Police. During the project the officers were readily available to members of the community, which afforded the opportunity to discuss wider aspects of policing in the locality and develop public reassurance.

The project had wider impacts beyond the regeneration of the underpass, enabling participants to develop new skills and providing young people with a stimulating and worthwhile project, both at school and during the school holidays. Moreover, by working together Fordoun residents, who were otherwise unknown to each other, came together creating an enhanced sense of community. The interaction between the community and the partner agencies also gave the villagers a greater understanding of the services available to them.

A year on the project team held another session in the village hall. By then, the project had been nominated and shortlisted for various awards. The Fordoun Underpass Project came second and was highly commended in the 2010 Grampian Police Excellence Awards, shortlisted and highly commended in the 2010 Scottish Policing Awards and shortlisted for the 2010 Herald Excellence Award.

Lessons Learnt and Sustainability

Grampian Police worked very closely with other partner groups and agencies and harnessed their skills to ensure the project had a successful outcome. A lot of the work was delivered in kind and this allowed the project to be completed for a relatively small cost.

The community were actively engaged in the early stages of the project to ensure they were consulted and empowered to make decisions regarding the eventual outcome of the project and take responsibility for their own environment. Thus, a key component of the project was to enable the community to participate fully in the delivery of the project.

Work on the underpass coincided with the commencement of the School Summer holiday period and gave the Police the opportunity to engage positively with young people from the area. During a feedback session one parent said, *'Watching the children work together. No arguing, no fighting. A good mix of children working together, getting on together, it's been brilliant'*.

Summary

The Fordoun Underpass Project was implemented in 2009 to transform an intimidating and threatening passageway used by children as they walked to and from school into a bright, pleasant and safe place. This joint venture involved many partners including the community and was instigated and driven by Grampian Police. The project placed a strong emphasis on engaging and empowering the local community to achieve the project goals. The underpass was regenerated and a mural which decorates the walls was produced in collaboration between a project artist and children from the local primary school. The project has been shortlisted and highly commended for several regional and national awards.

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