



**Title:** The Leeds Distraction Burglary Initiative

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**SCS topic headings:** Partnership Working, Home Safety, Safety of Vulnerable Groups, Personal Safety

**This document is a REVIEW of effective intervention approaches.**

## **Summary of the intervention's aim**

This report evaluates the Leeds Distraction Burglary Initiative (LDBI) which was a two-year crime reduction project designed to reduce incidents of distraction burglary within the Metropolitan District of Leeds, West Yorkshire.

Launched in April 2001 and funded by a grant of £554,000 under the Targeted Policing Initiative (part of the UK Government's Crime Reduction Programme) the LDBI pursued a combination of crime prevention and law enforcement strategies. Importantly, the crime prevention element of the project focused almost exclusively upon people aged 65 and over. The formulation of the LDBI occurred at a time of rising public concern over the problem of distraction burglary.

## **Outcomes**

The LDBI successfully implemented a range of law enforcement and crime prevention interventions, which focused predominantly upon older people. These interventions included:

- a range of situational crime prevention equipment to enhance domestic security
- a doorstep cold-calling protocol for agency visitors
- a domestic contractors' voluntary registration scheme
- a specialist distraction burglary detective and Scenes of Crime Officer
- presentations to members of the public, the voluntary sector and statutory agencies
- training conferences for agency personnel and neighbourhood volunteers
- drama performances portraying crime prevention messages
- educational crime prevention and detection videos

- a high profile media strategy.

The LDBI took a **multi-agency approach** utilising the expertise and delivery capacity of a range of statutory and non-statutory partner agencies. Volunteers from older people's community groups were mobilised, which helped to extend the project's coverage and disseminate crime prevention advice, assistance and resources to large number of older people. The multi-agency approach enhanced the LDBI's capacity to identify persons at risk and disseminate victim-focused crime prevention advice through a range of agencies that provide services to older people.

A clear objective was to promote the reducing distraction burglary agenda across a range of public, private and voluntary agencies in order to stimulate and 'snowball' further crime prevention activity. Thus a key strategy was to **develop partnerships** with an array of agencies providing services to older people. It then successfully equipped these agencies with the appropriate financial resources, specialist knowledge and tools that enabled the project's crime prevention activities to be sustained after the Home Office funding expired.

Several project interventions obtained continuation funding from local and national sources. For example, West Yorkshire Police and Leeds City Council sustained the project's specialist distraction burglary detective and domestic contractors' voluntary registration scheme respectively. As the project was a relatively short-term pilot initiative, the identification and **sustainability of good practice** was a vital consideration.

Drawing on the findings of the research the authors recommended that:

- crime and disorder partnerships wishing to harness multi-agency interests in support of reducing distraction burglary allocate responsibility for developing partnership structures to a 'Champion'; by encouraging personal ownership over distraction burglary, strategies aimed at its prevention are less likely to slip between the gaps of 'partnership working'.

The authors also recommended that distraction burglary reduction partnerships carry out the following tasks:

- Establish mechanisms for consultation and information exchange with agencies delivering services to older people, such as health agencies, Social Services, social registered landlords, the police, voluntary organisations, community groups, older people's clubs, by engaging with these agencies, partnerships can improve their access to 'at risk' individuals in order to better target crime prevention resources.
- Establish mechanisms for representing and consulting older people. Practitioners are advised to question common assumptions about older people and their behaviour. If the instrumental reasons that underpin the 'risky behaviour' of many older people are misunderstood then their susceptibility to distraction burglary cannot be fully addressed.

- Focus upon vulnerabilities rather than age as the principal characteristic upon which to distribute crime prevention resources. This requires recognition of the diversity found among older people and their different levels of risk. Such an approach enables interventions to be more appropriately tailored and targeted to the needs of individuals and communities.
- Develop holistic educational campaigns that raise awareness about all the dimensions of distraction burglary. The various guises exploited by offenders are a useful entry point from which to explore these dimensions. These include:
  - bogus utility worker
  - bogus public servant
  - bogus domestic contractor
  - other bogus worker
  - other (non-bogus official) types of distraction.
- Although offenders' modes of deception and distraction can be usefully categorised, it may be helpful for crime prevention projects to break down stereotypical understandings of 'distraction burglary' and 'distraction burglars'. The manner of the distraction can vary according to the offending strategy. Sometimes 'distracters' try to gain entry to the dwelling, other times they entice the occupant outside. The characteristics of the offending group also vary. Offenders are not gender-specific (i.e. not always men), nor age-specific (although younger offenders tend to restrict their involvement to 'other types of distraction'), nor do they always work in pairs.
- Promote safety routines (e.g. doorstep etiquette) through interactive and discursive methods that encourage 'deep' learning. These practices also help challenge stereotypes, whilst avoiding a paternalistic approach.
- Manage the content of media strategies in order to depict positive images of older people that prioritise their strengths over their weaknesses. Headlines portraying older people as 'easy prey' risk reinforcing unhelpful notions of vulnerability, both within the minds of older people and the offenders targeting them.
- Develop innovative and systematic implementation strategies that access 'hard to reach' older people. This is crucial because whilst it may be relatively difficult for agencies to engage with those who are socially isolated, cognitively impaired and physical immobile, these characteristics are also considered to be indicators of heightened risk to distraction burglary victimisation.

### Summary of evaluation conclusions

The LDBI successfully promoted the anti-distraction burglary agenda, impressing upon the public the seriousness of the offence, and received much attention at a local, regional and national level, thus raising its own profile while also demonstrating transferable examples of good crime prevention and detection practice.

Overall, the project was not cost-effective in terms of crime reduction outcomes. A comparison of the full project costs with generated crime reduction outcomes produced an estimated cost of £4,172 per offence prevented. In comparison, the Home Office estimates that the average cost to society from a burglary offence is £2,300. Consequently, the aggregated cost following the implementation of the LDBI was around £270,000. However, the project did, however, produce a range of positive outcomes the value of which is difficult to cost.

Importantly, the impact of raising the profile of distraction burglary and establishing a dedicated policing post upon reporting and recording practices meant the project was always unlikely to meet its target objective of decreasing the incidence of distraction burglary by 75 per cent. Despite this, the project occurred simultaneously with an overall fall in the recorded rate of distraction burglaries, both in the target area and the rest of the force area.

Although the identifiable impact of the project on crime statistics was statistically insignificant, the recorded reduction nevertheless represents the saving of a considerable amount of personal misery and degradation of quality of life, if not the foreshortening of lives.

The project's conclusions also highlight the following themes:

- Intelligence-led crime prevention: emphasising 'vulnerability' over 'age'
- Understanding the behaviour of older people
- 'Implementation' as 'outcome': sustaining short-term initiatives.

Interestingly, the research found that in West Yorkshire the average age of distraction burglary victims was 77 years. Almost three-quarters (72%) were aged over 75, with over half (57%) exceeding the age of 80. Most victims (69%) were female. It is estimated that distraction burglaries represent between four and eight per cent of all dwelling burglaries.

### How the evaluation gathered information for findings and conclusions

A range of approaches to gathering data were followed in this research, helping to ensure valid and robust findings and conclusions (page 3). Over a two year period the researchers undertook the project in three stages:

1. In utilising a range of data was collected from the crime recording systems of West Yorkshire Police, an outcome evaluation measured the impact of the project upon recorded crime rates, both within the target area (the Metropolitan District of Leeds) and the wider police force area of West Yorkshire.

2. A process evaluation examined the project's implementation. In so doing, it aimed to identify any transferable lessons that might inform future initiatives. Drawing out good practice lessons involves learning from failure as well as success.

The researchers also **shadowed and observed** the activities of the LDBI co-ordinator, the project-funded detective and Scenes of Crime Officer. Furthermore, more than **twenty interviews** were conducted both with implementing practitioners and key local stakeholders. Undertaking these last two activities would provide important anecdotal evidence from service users as well as staff.

3. Finally a bespoke survey **canvassed local attitudes and experiences** of the LDBI, as well as **crime prevention policies** for older people more generally. Importantly this survey secured a satisfactory number of responses from which to conclude representative opinions and findings.

The document contains a reference list of useful publications that informed the writing of the text background and main discussion points (pages 65-67).

**Further details about the SCS evaluation of this report are available on request.  
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