

NEW EVALUATION OF COMMUNITY SAFETY INITIATIVES FOR NOTTINGHAMSHIRE

By Tom Simpson and Viv Brunsden

THE work of emergency planners is necessarily entwined with the emergency services and the effectiveness of one of these groups inevitably makes the other group's job easier. Nottinghamshire Fire and Rescue Service (NFRS) has recently begun an exciting new research project, in partnership with the Emergency Services Research Unit at Nottingham Trent University, which aims to evaluate community safety initiatives. More specifically, the project hopes to determine how effectively NFRS community safety activities reduce risk in the Nottinghamshire area, and will lead to the development of effective evaluation tools and methods for a wide variety of initiatives. The systems developed during the project will be embedded and maintained within the organisation so that they can continue to be used after the project is completed. In addition it is intended that the final evaluation toolkit, which will be useful for any evaluation activity and not just those focussed on community safety, will be made available to other organisations. The partnership received financial support from the Knowledge Transfer Partnerships programme (KTP). KTP aims to help businesses to improve their competitiveness and productivity through the better use of knowledge, technology and skills that reside within the UK Knowledge Base. KTP is funded by the Technology Strategy Board along with the other Government funding organisations.

NFRS currently carries out a large proportion of its community safety interventions in conjunction with other local authority agencies, through partnership working across the county and within individual districts, as well as through the delivery of multi-agency educational events. Therefore developing

methods to evaluate the outcomes of such schemes and interventions will demonstrate the risk reductions which partnership working leads to, and will potentially highlight ways to improve the schemes and interventions, benefiting all local authorities involved.

The Fire and Rescue Services Act (2004) states that a fire and rescue service (FRS) must promote fire safety in its area. The FRS is able to do this by providing safety information, publicity and encouragement to the general public. All UK FRS have implemented a wide range of community safety programmes, with the intention of creating safer homes, safer roads and safer neighbourhoods. Interventions take various forms including those focused on home fire safety, schools education, road safety, youth engagement, fire safety for older people and arson reduction. These activities are intended to support and sustain communities in becoming more resilient. However, interventions are rarely evaluated in terms of the risk reductions they actually achieve. In order to accurately evaluate the risk reductions of schemes and interventions there will be a need for the sharing of information between NFRS and other organisations, including local and county councils, concerning incident-related data and the outcomes of individuals.

Although national performance indicators show a decline, not only in the incidence of fires but also in related deaths and injuries, there is currently no way of knowing which particular interventions have been responsible for these improvements. This research project will help NFRS to measure the effectiveness of its community safety initiatives, allowing the organisation to focus

its efforts on those areas that result in the most improvements. It will consider whether or not different community safety initiatives are being targeted towards the groups of people in communities who are in greatest need of them. This knowledge will enable resources to be targeted in the most cost effective way while still reaching the most vulnerable members of the community. Potentially, in the long term, such intelligence would not only reduce the response demands of the fire service but also that of the other agencies they work with. Importantly, the findings from the project will provide hard evidence that demonstrates the worth of funding community safety activities, which takes on an even greater significance in the current financial climate where budgets have already been heavily reduced and likely to see further reductions in the near future.

As the fire and rescue service now works together with partner agencies to deliver on a shared agenda for their communities and to determine priorities for improvement in their local areas, it can be difficult to disaggregate the effects of their various interventions, not only from one another, but also from the effects of other agencies. For example, when home fire safety checks are carried out they can alert home owners to other risks such as general security, potentially reducing the risk of burglary, yet this added benefit cannot currently be measured. Conversely, it is also difficult to assess how much fire safety has been improved by initiatives such as local councils improving the social capital of previously run down areas. Despite the difficulties in sifting these multi-layered effects, this project hopes to begin the better assessment of the true value of FRS initiatives.

Local needs will vary from FRS to FRS and a particular community's needs also change over time. Although demographics are constantly changing, many of these shifts are predictable to a certain extent; for example the local profile in terms of an ageing population. The project will assess the needs of the local community, both now and in the future. Mapping likely future trends in demographics will allow an evaluation not only of how well current initiatives fit the community at present but also how well they will fit in the future. This will allow the development of a strategic and proactive, rather than responsive, plan for community and partner engagement. There will also be dialogue with the community in order to see how well initiatives fit their subjective desires in terms of FRS engagement, desires which may or may not map onto their actual needs but which do need to be taken into account by public services. Obtaining this understanding of perceived versus actual needs will allow better promotion, and hopefully take-up, of the prevention and educational services that the UK FRS offer.

As the project progresses there will be a need for the sharing of community safety evaluation methods and targeting strategies between NFRS and other public organisations involved in promoting resilience and responding to risk. It is hoped that other agencies such as county and local councils, NHS Trusts, other emergency services and relevant third sector organisations will see the potential benefits of this project for community safety, not just in Nottinghamshire but across the UK. More importantly it is hoped they will offer their usual high level of collaborative support if approached during the course of the project. Many of the project's outcomes will be transferable, and beneficial, to other public service organisations. It is therefore the project team's intention to publish throughout the project in order to provide regular updates of its progress and findings – so watch this space!

Authors' Profiles

Viv Brunsden is a Principal Lecturer in Psychology at Nottingham Trent University where she is also the Head of Emergency Services Research. Viv's personal research interests are currently focused on violence towards emergency service personnel, wildfire prevention initiatives, and improving community safety. She also has a longstanding interest in humanitarian assistance in the response and recovery stages. She is an expert in both advanced quantitative and advanced qualitative approaches to research. She is a member of the EPS Education committee, and various committees at the British Psychological Society including the Ethics Committee. She is the Editor in Chief of

the International Journal of Emergency Services (IJES) published by Emerald.

Thomas Simpson BSc (Hons) studied psychology at The University of Liverpool. Following this he gained a variety of research and administrative experience within the higher education sector. He worked as a research support worker at The University of Manchester and then as a health audit coordinator, focusing on the delivery of trauma care to patients, at Nottingham University Hospitals. In November 2010 Thomas became a member of the Emergency Services Research Unit at Nottingham Trent University working as Associate on a two year-long Knowledge Transfer Partnership project with NFRS.

Members Upgrade

The following Full Members of the Society have been invited to Fellowship, having completed successful upgrades and confirmation by the board:

Elizabeth Dobson	Scottish
Debbie Lewis	London
Stephen Corrigan	North Western
Paul Siner	North Western
Alan Young	Welsh
Tracey Fielding	South Western
Claire Wise	West Midlands
Kenneth Martin	Blackburn North Western
Paula Ireland	East Midlands
Alan Boyd	West Midlands

The following Associate Members had their applications to Full Member of the Society confirmed at recent meetings of the Board of Directors:

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David Bestwick	Yorkshire & Humber
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Steve Glassey	International
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