

AN EVALUATION OF
THE WEST BELFAST AUTO-PROJECT

Acknowledgments are made to the parents of the West Belfast Auto-project, to the Director and staff of the Eastern Organisation and to the representatives of various statutory agencies whose help and co-operation throughout this exercise has been much appreciated.

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Evaluation of the West Belfast Auto-project

Summary

1. This evaluation was requested by the Department of Health and Social Services and the Northern Ireland Office who between them grant-aid 80% of the West Belfast Auto-project's costs.
2. The report describes the establishment and development of the West Belfast Auto-project which was started in May 1980 as a response to an outbreak of joy-riding in the West Belfast area (1.2-1.7). The extent of 'taking and driving away' in Northern Ireland is compared with that in Great Britain (1.1).
3. The first four months of the project when it was managed by a Steering Committee composed mainly of Probation Officers and Social Workers (1.7) and the difficulties of obtaining suitable premises, insurance for clients, staffing and funding are described (2.5, 2.7-2.9). The project was handed over to the Extern Organisation, with certain stipulations, in September 1980 (2.10-2.11).
4. Section 3 traces the development of the project from September 1980, through two changes of premises (3.3, 3.19) an increase in staff from one full-time and two part-time to six full-time workers (3.6, 3.10) and an increase in capacity from thirty to forty-two (3.6, 3.15) to the introduction of a new line manager in September 1982 (3.20). The difficulties experienced by staff in adjusting to the need for a structural and theoretical basis to the project are outlined (3.11-3.13; 3.16) and Extern's role in facilitating change is questioned.

5. Section 4 details the sessional structures developed for the project in response to the siting of a maintenance unit in the premises (4.2), and the two in-service training programmes designed to assist staff members to understand and implement a reward system as part of the new structure are described (4.11, 4.14). New aims and objectives for the project and methods of achieving them are outlined (4.12-4.13). Problems relating to the referral system and a racing outlet are also mentioned (4.6-4.9).
6. Section 5 describes the current state of the project in 'the best equipped garage in West Belfast'. It describes the premises and resources (5.2), management, staffing (5.3-5.4), and sessions (5.5). The length of time that any client may spend at the Auto-project is estimated at twenty-five hours weekly (5.7). The problem of having no 'scrambling' outlet is outlined (5.7). The forty-one clients currently attending are described in relation to age, criminal record, violence towards them and source of referral (5.9-5.12). The main source of referrals since the project re-opened in March 1981 is shown to be Probation (5.10, Table 2). There is a marked trend towards self and project referrals amongst the second intake (5.11, Table 3).
7. Section 6 outlines the West Belfast community's response towards joy-riding which is perceived by parents and joy-riders to be more extreme than the judicial system or the response to any other criminal behaviour within their community. The administering of a tariff system of justice by the PRIA is discussed along with mothers' reactions to it (6.2-6.7).

8. Section 7 describes the Auto-project as a form of Intermediate Treatment, which is defined here as an alternative to punishment. The theoretical basis behind the failure of punishment to act as a deterrent is discussed (7.1-7.3) and the opportunities for moral development in a well constructed and coherent IT programme are outlined (7.4).
9. Section 8 is concerned with the evaluation of the project and describes the techniques used. That the project had no theoretical base is perceived as a factor in slowing down its development, Extern's concentration on externals rather than on project practice is questioned (8.2-8.5).
10. The impact of the project was evaluated through objective and subjective measures. Quantitative data from Jesness Inventory scores indicate the level of delinquency of each intake (Tables 5 and 6); criminal records were used to indicate any alteration in the time between offences comparing average times before and after involvement with the project (Table 8). The decrease in the number of stolen cars recovered in 'B' division since the project opened is also shown (Table 10).
11. Qualitative data based on reports from clients (8.6-8.16) their parents (9.1-9.6) and the referral agents (10.1-10.5), indicates positive reactions towards the project from each of these groups.
12. The Police view is that the project should be encouraged.
13. The report concludes by stating that the project appears to have been successful in helping delinquent clients to reduce and even stop

their joy-riding activities by providing an exceptionally intensive, low-cost support facility that is perceived as a valuable resource to statutory agencies in the area (14.1-14.2).

and joy-riding constitute a more serious problem in Northern Ireland than in the rest of Britain. However, this is not the case. While the rate of car theft (number stolen per thousand registered) remained fairly static at around 1 per thousand in Northern Ireland throughout the early and mid-seventies, in England and Wales it almost doubled from 1.3 per thousand in 1970 to 2.4 in 1978 and has remained at this level since.¹ In 1979, due to the Royal Ulster Constabulary altering its form of record keeping to include 'driving without consent' (DWC) along with car theft, there was an apparent increase of 470 per cent in car theft over the preceding year with a total of 5740 vehicles or 1.3 per thousand being stolen or taken.² Inspection of the figures for each year since 1979 suggests both that the 1979/1980 did rise quite sharply (by 0.3 per thousand) in 1979 over 1978 and that TADA usually accounts for two-thirds of the total number of cars reported stolen. Currently, the rate of car theft/TADA in Northern Ireland is 0.8 per thousand, one-third of that in England and Wales.

1.2 Despite this lower rate of theft/TADA in Northern Ireland it is still causing concern because of its concentration in Belfast (77% of all cars reported stolen) and, particularly, in West Belfast (19%) a densely populated conglomeration of old terraced houses, lacking redevelopment plans and sprawling unutilised housing estates heavily patrolled by security forces.

1. Introduction

1.1 The amount of publicity given to our local joyriders over the past few years might create the impression that the levels of car theft and joy-riding constitute a more serious problem in Northern Ireland than in the rest of Britain, however, this is not the case. While the rate of car theft (number stolen per thousand registered) remained fairly static at around 1 per thousand in Northern Ireland throughout the early and mid-seventies, in England and Wales it almost doubled from 1.3 per thousand in 1970 to 2.4 in 1978 and has remained at this level since.¹ In 1979, due to the Royal Ulster Constabulary altering its form of record keeping to include 'taking without consent' (TADA) along with car theft, there was an apparent increase of 470 per cent in car theft, over the preceeding year with a total of 5940 vehicles or 1.3 per thousand being stolen or taken.² Inspection of the figures for each year since 1979 suggests both that theft/TADA did rise quite sharply (by 0.3 per thousand) in 1979 over 1978 and that TADA usually accounts for two-thirds of the total number of cars reported stolen. Currently, the rate of car theft/TADA in Northern Ireland is 0.8 per thousand, one-third of that in England and Wales.

1.2 Despite this lower rate of theft/TADA in Northern Ireland it is still causing concern because of its concentration in Belfast (77% of all cars reported stolen) and, particularly, in West Belfast (37%) a densely populated conglomeration of old terraced houses, decaying redevelopment sites and sprawling ghettoised housing estates heavily patrolled by security forces.

- 1.3 Police Division B covers most of the area and records³ show that over 40% of all cars TADA in Northern Ireland are recovered in that Division, although only 3% of the population lives there.
- 1.4 While not all cases of TADA involve juveniles/joy-riders police estimate that over 80% do.⁴ If this is accurate it suggests that around 1200 cars were driven (sometimes at speed) by young unskilled drivers through the narrow often crowded streets of West Belfast in 1979 when TADA was at its height.
- 1.5 Despite the fact that joy-riders were known to have caused injury and even death to pedestrians⁵ there is no evidence that joy-riding was considered a serious problem in the community at the time. Local crime reportage concentrated on vandalism, armed robberies and muggings. One community paper carried three times as many reports of bicycle theft than of car thefts during 1979.⁶ The West Belfast community appears only to have become aware of the dangers associated with joy-riding when three young people were shot and killed in separate incidents of driving through military check points during the winter of 1979/80.⁷
- 1.6 These deaths, as well as providing ammunition for the IRA's campaign to remove the army from the area, caused genuine concern to many people both inside and outside West Belfast and led to numerous calls for action to solve the joy-riding problem.⁸ It was largely in response to these that an enlightened probation officer in the area contacted local community-based social workers with the idea of starting a motor project that would provide legitimate car-orientated activities for young joy-riders.

*Source - Statistics Branch DOFP

1.7 The West Belfast Auto-project Steering Committee, with representation from Probation, Social Services, Community Workers and others (Appendix I) met in March 1980 to discuss the establishment of a project based on that at Ilderton in London.⁹ Within two months they had found suitable premises, a worker, a race track and some funding, and the West Belfast Auto-project was in operation.

14. Conclusions

14.1 The Auto-project provides what must be the most intensive Intermediate Treatment programme (at up to twenty-five hours weekly per client) available. Although it has taken almost two years to reach its present position of providing mechanical skills-orientated sessions with educational and socialising components within a reward system, the problems encountered during its evolution have been more obvious to staff and interested observers than to clients. The young people who use the project see their needs for activity, understanding and even affection being fulfilled and are responding by reducing and, sometimes apparently stopping their joy-riding. The slow throughput of clients is a function of the supportive nature of the project and only constitutes a drawback in that there are no available places for the many other youngsters in Belfast who may need similar support.

14.2 Few people could have predicted that this very delinquent client group would have been measurably better behaved after a year or so on a project that seems to have been in a state of constant upheaval and where all the social work input was on a purely intuitive basis within a virtually unstructured context. Possibly the new methods recently introduced (section 6) may hasten the development of the 'moral' outlook which is now becoming apparent amongst the older clients, but that is something which will have to be tested. On the basis of our findings to date, this project, which is unique both in the type of clients with which it deals and the amount of time and support it gives to them, is a valuable resource to the youngsters parents and statutory agencies in West Belfast.