

## ShowCase

### Reducing graffiti vandalism

**Topic:**

Antisocial behaviour

**Organisation:**

Brent Council; Uscreates

**Location:**

Brent (London)

**Dates:**

2007 to ongoing

**Website:**

[www.uscreates.com/case\\_studies/reducing-graffiti-vandalism](http://www.uscreates.com/case_studies/reducing-graffiti-vandalism)

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### Overview

In 2006, Brent Council was spending approximately £450,000 a year cleaning up graffiti. A review by Brent's Anti-Social Behaviour Steering Group led to the formation in 2007 of the Brent Graffiti Partnership Board, a multi-agency partnership aimed at reducing graffiti in the borough.

Based on insights gained from engaging with young people, graffiti offenders, victims of graffiti vandalism and local residents, the Brent Graffiti Partnership Board decided that stronger investigation and enforcement, combined with diversionary activities, was needed to steer young people away from taking up graffiti vandalism.

Activities have included: community public artworks; workshops in street art with 'draw off' competitions; parkour (free running); football sessions; ASBOs (antisocial behaviour orders); fines for prolific 'taggers'; and a responsible trader scheme whereby spray paints are not sold to those underage.

This dual-pronged approach has resulted so far in 40 prolific taggers being apprehended, a reduction in graffiti vandalism and an increase in the percentage of residents who feel that the clean streets are a good thing about Brent.



In 2005, the total cost of removing graffiti in London was at least £23 million per annum. However, including damage to economic development and loss of capital value to people's homes, this figure would rise to over £100 million. At this time, the average spent by London authorities to remove graffiti each year was £204,000. In 2006, Brent Council was spending approximately £450,000 a year cleaning up graffiti.

It was clear that something needed to be done to tackle this problem. A review by Brent's Anti-Social Behaviour Steering Group led to the formation in 2007 of the Brent Graffiti Partnership Board, a multi-agency partnership aimed at reducing graffiti and the subsequent costs of removing it throughout the borough. The Partnership Board was made up of representatives from:

- London Borough of Brent Council
  - Street care
  - Anti-Social Behaviour Team
  - Trading Standards
  - Cultural Development
  - Youth Services
  - Housing Crime Unit
- Brent Housing Partnership
- Metropolitan Police
- British Transport Police
- Transport for London and Network Rail

The Partnership Board funded a Graffiti Case Officer to work with the Anti-Social Behaviour Team to increase investigation into graffiti in the borough, take enforcement action and create provisions for diversionary activities aimed at decreasing uptake of graffiti 'tagging' (the repeated use of a stylised signature or symbol, often to mark 'territory').



In 2008, social and behavioural change agency Uscreates was engaged to aid the Partnership Board in gaining deeper insight into graffiti vandalism in the borough. These insights would feed into an action plan of activities aimed at reducing the levels of graffiti, and specifically the uptake of graffiti vandalism by young people in the borough.

The Partnership Board had (and still has) no budget, so financial resources were drawn from contributing service units or partner agencies. The action plan therefore needed to be built around the approved policy and strategic objectives of the contributing agencies. Piggybacking on existing strategies was a deliberate and necessary approach to deliver 'more for less' and create a unified public service approach to tackling behaviour change.



Having formed a partnership of key organisations, the Brent Graffiti Partnership Board wished to gain insight from all those who live in Brent and who have an 'interest' in graffiti vandalism – those who had been victims of graffiti vandalism, graffiti vandalism offenders, young people and the wider community. Various research techniques that were suitable for each type of audience were used.

## Public survey

A survey was administered to understand the community's attitudes and perceptions towards graffiti vandalism. A paper version was mailed out to around 1,600 members of Brent's Citizens' Panel and 87 StreetWatchers in early November 2008, and made available in all Brent libraries and One Stop Services. An online version of the survey was also featured on BRAIN – Brent's community website and the council's website Consultation Tracker. Brent Council's StreetCare team attended Brent's community meetings (Area Consultative Forums) to raise awareness and encourage a wider participation from local residents. The survey closed in mid December, with a total of 772 completed surveys.

## Filmed interviews

Uscreates' RANT BOX™ - a portable 'diary room' (in the vein of reality TV) - visited four schools in Brent to interview young people about graffiti, in a way they find engaging. The RANT BOX™ was set up in designated areas of the schools and students were interviewed in small groups. In total, around 80 young people gave their views on graffiti vandalism, why they thought young people did it, and what they thought could be done to prevent it.



"Young people loved sharing their views in the RANT BOX. We had queues waiting to come and talk to us. Young people were surprisingly open and honest on film telling us about their experiences of being involved in illegal graffiti vandalism." (Zoe Stanton, Director of Uscreates)

## Interviews with young graffiti offenders

Five one-to-one interviews were conducted with young people who were or had been illegal graffiti 'taggers' to gain a deeper understanding into why they engaged in the activity. The interviews were conducted by a street artist from Monorex (an urban art creative design agency) so that the young people felt comfortable enough to be honest and open and were able to speak with someone who also understood the language of street art.

## Focus group with 'victims' of graffiti vandalism

A list of 42 Brent residents who had reported graffiti to Brent council's StreetCare unit and had indicated a willingness to discuss their experiences alongside 500 Brent Citizen's Panel members were contacted about attending a focus group. Of the 26 who expressed initial interest, 9 attended the focus group to discuss: graffiti experiences, reporting graffiti, reducing and preventing graffiti, sanctions against offenders and recommendations.

## Key insights

This research highlighted the following key insights about why graffiti vandalism occurs in Brent and what could be done about it:

- **Who:** Most of the groups of graffiti vandals are made up of males aged 13 to 17 who are from deprived backgrounds with a history of family problems
- **When:** The vast majority of tagging occurs during the summer months
- **How:** Graffiti vandals are usually made up of one tag designer with a crew of taggers
- **Why:** Graffiti vandalism provides young people with the buzz or thrill of potentially

getting caught, alongside feelings that graffiti art is 'cool'

### **Barriers to young people stopping graffiti vandalism**

Grffiti vandals often lack a responsible older male role model, and while mothers are very powerful influencers they need support. This hinders the role parents can play in stopping these young people from taking up graffiti vandalism.

Prolific taggers did not see a connection between the tagging designs they worked on and using the same skills and approaches in a commercial setting. They viewed art as something abstract and forced onto them at school and seemed unaware of its large-scale commercial applications (for example in graphic design and shoe design). They therefore did not see an appealing non-illegal channel for their artistic capabilities. There were hints that taggers did not associate the design ability they apply to graffiti vandalism with work prospects because of a lack of confidence, aspiration and/or experience, such as the view that "nothing good ever happens to me, so I won't imagine anything better".

### **Preventing graffiti vandalism**

- Graffiti offenders and young people said they would prefer physical diversionary activities, which could replace the 'buzz' that graffiti vandalism provided and was seen to be a 'cool' activity
- Graffiti offenders and young people wanted more visually interesting environments to apply their artistic skills to: texturally (type of materials and surfaces), geometrically (shape of buildings and public spaces) and decoratively (creative lighting, artworks, colour, living walls)
- When asked to choose measures the Council might adopt to discourage young people from doing graffiti, respondents to the residents survey said:

- Young people should have more sporting activities on offer than is available currently (61 per cent)
- There should be more youth clubs provided (60 per cent)
- Regular creative art workshops should be organised (60 per cent)
- Spaces should be provided where young people can do graffiti legally (55 per cent)
- Half of respondents who responded to the residents survey also said they would like to see more public art in Brent
- Victims of graffiti vandalism had varying views of how to reduce and prevent graffiti, including:
  - Prompt clean-up
  - Greater use of CCTV
  - Providing legal graffiti spaces
  - Providing more education
  - Creating more leisure and recreational spaces for young people
  - Issuing fines and criminal offences
  - Naming and shaming graffiti offenders
  - Involving parents of graffiti offenders in the cleanup process

### **Target audience and behavioural goal**

The primary research conducted in Brent supported previous research into graffiti vandalism, which concluded that the majority of offenders are young people, particularly young men. Subsequently, the Brent Graffiti Partnership Board established the target audience to be:

- Those who were involved in graffiti vandalism in the borough, with a focus on young men aged 13 to 17 years

The Partnership Board agreed that the behavioural goal for this target audience was:

- To not commit graffiti vandalism - specifically this could be achieved through young people taking up diversionary activities instead of graffiti vandalism



The insights gained from the insight phase were presented at a collaborative design event facilitated by Uscreates, where stakeholders included young people, the Metropolitan Police and the Transport Police. Ideas were generated around how these findings could be translated into an action plan for the Partnership Board, with a particular focus on developing diversionary activities for young people. Based on the principals of co-creation theory, this event sought to involve key stakeholders within the community in identifying their own common problems or goals and then developing strategies for achieving them. The core principle is that because social problems occur in communities, the community should be involved in the solutions.

The stakeholders began by mapping existing services for young people geographically across the borough to highlight any obvious gaps in provision. From here, a number of brainstorming exercises were utilised to generate ideas for diversionary activities for young people to reduce graffiti vandalism, including:

- Involvement strategy for young people to support the creation, development and delivery of services for young people
- Online directory of diversionary activities and services
- A youth enterprise with and for young people to function as a diversionary and training activity
- Diversionary activities (such as sport) that could provide the same physical 'buzz' as graffiti vandalism and would appeal to males aged 13 to 17

- Urban art workshops to develop taggers' skills and confidence in applying their talents in art or graphic design
- Public art developed in collaboration with schools

It was identified that all diversionary activities would need to be coordinated with enforcement activities. However, since there was a lack of specific funding, interventions would need to fit under cross agency objectives and budgets. For example, since Youth Services had a need to create 'positive outcomes for young people' and the Met Police had a need to 'identify those causing antisocial behaviour', a coordinated plan was created to target Police Community Support Officer patrol routes to apprehend vandals, and then use the Youth Panel to divert them into diversionary activities. This would then draw additional funding from Cultural Development.

## Responsible Trader



The Brent Graffiti Partnership Board used the ideas and report from the collaborative event to inform the design of its graffiti action plan and ideas were fed into appropriate departments to inform the development of their services. A dual-pronged approach was taken to reduce graffiti vandalism:

### 1. Investigation, enforcement and deterrents

The Graffiti Case Officer, in coordination with partners (Police, Streetcare, Safer

Neighbourhood Teams and neighbouring boroughs), would lead on interventions to deter graffiti vandalism, including:

- Greater investigation into graffiti vandalism in the borough
- Increased enforcement activities
- Work with retailers through the 'Responsible Trader' scheme to stop the sale of spray paints to underage customers
- Deterrents, such as growing and training the plant pyracantha (otherwise known as firethorn) up walls to hinder graffiti vandalism

## 2. Diversionary activities for young people

The aim of the diversionary activities was to provide taggers and potential taggers with a replacement for the thrill or 'buzz' that taggers get through graffiti vandalism.

Specifically, it was agreed that a programme of workshops for young people would be run by professional graffiti artists Monorex, in collaboration with Uscreates. This would build young people's skills in illustration, creativity, organisation and teamwork and would provide a forum to debate what graffiti and art are. The goal was that these workshops would open young people's eyes to the vocational potential of their artistic abilities (often currently used for graffiti) and direct their interest and skills towards positive channels.

Sessions would include illustration, marketing and promotional techniques and a visit to Monorex's unusual studio in an old tube train in East London. The sessions would culminate in a secret wars 'draw off' - a friendly competition where teams would demonstrate their illustration skills creating oversize pieces of urban art in front of an audience. Teams would have to adhere to the following rules:

- They have 60 minutes
- No pencils
- Black and white only

- No aerosol
- Keep it clean



"What I find interesting about the 'draw off' is that it sets some clear rules. There is a blur between graffiti vandalism and street art, but the draw off makes it clear what is allowed or not" (Zoe Stanton, Director of Uscreates)

Other diversionary activities would be developed and implemented by the Brent Graffiti Partnership Board as new funding and partnerships arose.



The urban art workshops were launched in January 2008 at Brent Town Hall and ran during April and May 2008. The launch event brought together Monorex, representatives of the youth council, students from local schools,

councillors and others. Young people were able to sign up to the workshops, watch live street art demonstrations from Monorex and use a voting wall to comment on all the urban art samples. Culminating the workshops with the secret wars 'draw off' competitions was particularly successful.

The workshops not only provided a diversionary activity, but they also inspired and built up the confidence of participants:

"I was really nervous at the beginning but now I feel great." (Participant)

"I really loved visiting the tube train studio, it was really inspirational." (Participant)

"It's a really great opportunity for them to express themselves and to keep them entertained so they are not getting into trouble. I know my daughter has loved it." (Participant's parent)



Following the success of the urban art workshops, Brent Graffiti Partnership Board was able to utilise partnership opportunities to deliver the following diversionary activities:

### **Community engagement murals**

Later in 2008, a community engagement project was held in the Harlesden area of Brent to address the problem of recurrent tagging and graffiti in the area. As a result, a mural was created which investigates the simplistic way in

which society often judges, categorises and occasionally demonises young people and the inherent long-term dangers that such negative stereotyping poses for communities and the children in them. The mural was created by artist Mat Hand and features 25 panels across a section of wall, with the portraits of children from Harlesden Primary School painted in monochrome.



Following this, in 2009 local young people worked with Kamala Arts (a local artist) and Groundwork West London to create and paint a mural around the outside walls of St. Raphael's Community Centre, which previously had been covered in graffiti. This formed part of the wider Brent River Park project.

### **Manga art and poetry workshops**

Between February and June 2009, poetry and manga (Japanese comic book style artwork) workshops were run for 11- to 19-year-olds in Willesden Green. After the completion of the workshops, a celebration was linked to the Libraries, Arts and Heritage's 'Story of London' event, where the young people's poetry and art were exhibited.

### **Urban art course**

Brent and Camden councils teamed up to run a free urban art course for young people aged 10 to 17 years from South and North Kilburn. The theme of the course, held in July 2009, was 'Love and War'. Participants were involved in discussions around postcode tagging (young people tagging their postcode across the

borough and London) and why territorialism exists among young people today. Participants were required to draw designs around 'Love and War', using spray paint and banners/canvasses, and to take part in a one-day workshop on graphic design. All attendees who completed the course received an accredited urban art course qualification.



**Kickz**

Free football sessions are provided for 12- to 18-year-olds by professional FA qualified football coaches from Queens Park Rangers at two schools in the borough, four evenings a week.

**Parkour workshops**

From January 2011 Brent Council and South Kilburn Neighbourhood Trust came together to run parkour (free running) workshops for 11- to 16-year-olds in the South Kilburn area, as part of the Parkour/Alleyways Public Art project. The workshops are run by parkour experts, Parkour Generations, who train young people in parkour and encourage them to explore public spaces in a new and unique way.

Meanwhile, Karen Palmer, a professional film maker, teaches young people how to capture the shapes and movement they created with the use of flip cameras.



**Rates of graffiti vandalism**

The main aim of the work developed by the Brent Graffiti Partnership Board is to reduce graffiti vandalism in the borough. This was measured by the BV199 indictor, which was later replaced by the NI195 indictor, one of 198 national indicators designed to measure local environment quality, including levels of graffiti. The indictor results are obtained from independent surveys conducted three times a year.

Due to the nature of graffiti vandalism, peaks are often found in summer months when compared to winter months, but on average the number of sites failing the BV199 graffiti standards fell by 25 per cent between 2006/07 and 2009/10.

**Enforcement activity**

Prior to the establishment of the Brent Graffiti Partnership Board there had been no apprehensions of graffiti vandals. Since the



board was set up, the following enforcement activities have occurred:

- 40 individuals apprehended, some with court fines or warnings - those apprehended have been mostly under 18-years-old)
- Three ASBOs
- Seven Acceptable Behaviour Agreements
- One person was apprehended for serial tagging along the Jubilee Line -the council is applying for a Post Conviction ASBO and the police are charging the suspect with criminal damage

### Residents' views of Brent

A key driver behind the need to remove graffiti was to improve resident's views of the borough. As a 2009 survey highlighted, 41 per cent of Brent residents prioritise the cleanliness of streets (strongly associated with graffiti) as one of the most important aspects in making somewhere a good place to live.

The Brent Residents' Survey 2009 was conducted by Ipsos MORI. Results were ascertained from 2,243 face-to-face interviews with residents aged 16 and over, with just over 100 interviews carried out in each of the borough's 21 wards. This survey found that when asked 'Which of these things, if any, would you say are the good things about living in Brent?' 21 per cent answered the clean streets. This was up from 13 per cent in 2005, prior to the work of the Brent Graffiti Partnership Board, and Brent Council concludes that the work of the Partnership Board played a key part in this improvement.



Learning from the project has been shared with a range of wider stakeholders through

contributing to case studies and workshops. The work has been shared with organisations such as the Design Against Crime Research Centre at Central Saint Martins College of Art and Design.



Monorex has built on the success of the 'draw off' in Brent to launch School Wars UK-wide. Sixteen schools from across the country came together to compete in a 'draw off' in London with big brand sponsors providing equipment and prizes ([www.theschoolwars.blogspot.com](http://www.theschoolwars.blogspot.com)).

Following results from the NI195 indicator, Brent Council has sought to make improvements in reducing graffiti in areas categorised as 'Other Highways', such as alleyways, underpasses and bridges. These areas often go unnoticed by residents as this graffiti is 'hidden' in areas not often visited. As part of this work Brent Council's army of volunteers – StreetWatchers – were asked to look out for graffiti in specific 'hotspot' areas. Based on initial achievements, these volunteer patrols of 'hidden' graffiti are planned to be continued across the borough.

The Graffiti Partnership Board will now be partnering with the Ward Working Scheme, which provides £20,000 in each ward to address concerns raised by residents. The scheme is member-led and allows councillors to respond directly to specific issues in their wards. As it is increasingly highlighted that graffiti is an issue of great importance for residents, Ward Working funding will be used

to pilot further initiatives to tackle graffiti hotspots. The Ward Working manager now sits on and currently chairs the Graffiti Partnership Board and so is able to provide an effective link, bringing together intelligence from partners with resident and councillor information to identify hotspots and potential projects.

## Lessons learned

### Successes

Speaking directly with the main target group (young people) in a familiar setting (such as a school) was effective in getting them to talk openly, and using a unique consultation tool (the RANT BOX™) attracted young people to give their views individually or as small groups. The RANT BOX™ also helped to raise the profile and awareness of the work amongst stakeholders.

Using established urban artists to talk directly to graffiti offenders in a familiar environment, where they could use the same language and terminology, was vital. As it was a sensitive subject, the urban artists' ability to talk from their experience before asking the offenders about their motivations for making graffiti assured the offenders that they could talk openly and honestly.

A key element that contributed to this project's success was the partnership work across agencies, although this requires sustained hard work. When working with multiple partners, it is important to ensure all contributing agencies have an active role, that the project and key milestones are monitored regularly, and that all were given positive feedback. To make sure all parties had a stake in the success of the work, graffiti objectives were aligned with existing strategic objectives.

### Issues

A lack of a proper budget for diversionary activities was a hindrance. However it forced the board and its partners to be more

imaginative about the diversionary activities developed.

Diverting taggers onto art courses was not always successful. Most preferred physical activities that emulated the risk and thrill of tagging (like parkour), whereas very few were interested in the graphic or artistic design element. This highlights the importance of building in an exchange component in any social marketing project that is informed by clear insight about what the target audience currently gets out of the behaviour the project seeks to change.

The behaviour control orders (such as ASBOs) were not effective in preventing re-offending. Again, these reinforce the thrill of getting caught, rather than trying to replace that thrill with different socially accepted activity or behaviour.

