



The Big Society approach to anti-social behaviour

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Low level anti-social behaviour could be tackled through the introduction of conflict resolution training for public sector workers, volunteers and citizens, according to a new report published today by the Royal Society of Arts (RSA).

The Woolwich Model - How citizens can tackle anti-social behaviour concludes that while public concern for low-level disorder remains high, citizens have little or no confidence to intervene.

The report says that 'statist' or police -centred approaches to tackling the problem have only had limited success – and that there could be great gains if people, including those directly responsible for managing the local public realm, are trained in basic community safety skills.

The report argues that giving people the capacity to respond to anti-social behaviour and defuse conflict could, if pursued alongside continuing support for other forms of community policing, help reduce the problem and people's concern about it, while bringing wider benefits.

It suggests replicating 'the Woolwich model' – in which first aid training spread across the globe after courses were first established in Woolwich in 1878.

Commenting on the report, author Ben Rogers said:

“We argue that community training will build up a culture of intervention beyond the police and equip citizens and public servants more generally. If we're to tackle anti-social behaviour then communities need to be given the confidence that they can solve their own problems without always resorting to state-led interventions.”

The report concludes that:

- A number of factors have declined the public's willingness to intervene including: a) a decline in the presence of local 'authority' figures such as caretakers, milkmen, street sweepers b) changes to the character of local populations that have loosed social ties c) the spread of liberal or permissive norms d) a rise in the perception that the system is weighed against people who 'take a stand' e) a rise in the fear of crime and disorder itself.
- Training should be focussed on the local public realm workforce and frontline public servants including park keepers, public transport workers, street cleaners, parking enforcement officers, caretakers, teachers and other school staff, social workers, community and youth workers and neighbourhood managers.
- People who are not in public service but present and potentially influential within their communities could also benefit from training including shop-keepers, publicans and postal workers.
- The training would make people more employable and would look good on their CV. It would also make the local area safer for their families.
- Training should include a) self-protection and restraint – what physical steps to take to minimise the risk to oneself b) how to 'read' a situation, to appraise when it's appropriate to walk on by, when its safe to intervene, or when to call the police c) skills in conflict resolution and mediation – how to defuse and argument, forge an agreement and where appropriate elicit an apology.
- Some organisations are beginning to teach these skills, and all the is that they can be quite easily taught. People enjoy the classes and report that the training in mediation and conflict resolution is particularly helpful and has wide application beyond anti-social behaviour.

Notes to Editors

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