

Making Good:
Community Engagement
in
Unpaid Work

Pilot project summary
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by

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1. Introduction

Making Good is a part of a three-strand project funded by the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation to increase public and judicial engagement with community-based sentences in order to promote confidence in their use as an alternative to prison. The Esmée Fairbairn Foundation funded Thames Valley Partnership to conduct a three-year pilot project from December 2005 to December 2008 to develop and test out different methods of engaging communities and community organisations in finding and allocating unpaid work to offenders. It seeks to test whether the wishes of the community can be met within the framework of an Unpaid Work Requirement, as well as integrating a reparative element into the nature of the work completed by offenders in their own community.

The project has been piloting new approaches to community engagement in four areas of the Thames Valley, namely Bicester, Wycombe, Milton Keynes and Slough, chosen for their diversity and for the capacity to build on existing community relationships to test out some new and challenging ways of working.

This report summarises the findings of the project to date and aims to suggest ways in which Making Good can be replicated in other areas. A central tenet of the project has been the fact that each area has different community structures and the Making Good project has thus evolved differently in each of the four pilot areas, learning important lessons along the way about effective methods of community engagement.

2. Summary of key learning points

Community engagement

- The baseline awareness levels of Unpaid Work were very low in all the communities.
- There are no short cuts to community engagement. Time, patience and perseverance are needed to find and develop the appropriate model for the specific community.
- In order to develop and maintain community engagement, it is necessary to invest resources in dedicated staff, trained in community development and with good local knowledge and networks.
- Success in community engagement often involves finding champions, but it is important to ensure methods of sustainment that do not depend on individuals alone.

Partnerships

- Developing realistic community expectations are crucial from the outset.
- It is not possible to operate a 'laboratory' approach; each community is individual, and appropriate links need to be found.
- Working with smaller community organisations has been more productive than with larger organisations such as Local Authorities, where there is a greater level of conflicting interests and agendas.
- There are major gains to be had in working with the Youth Offending Service.
- Neighbourhood Action Groups could become a natural conduit for the Making Good community engagement model, but they too are in a learning process as regards community representation and participation.
- There are huge benefits to be had in involving Police Community Support Officers, who can be central to assisting with the identification of community-led projects.
- Awareness of the possible tensions between Local Authorities and 'the community' is important when developing community partnerships.
- It is necessary to be aware of and sensitive to the importance of going through appropriate channels to seek permissions for planned work. Ownership of land and property can sometimes be complex to ascertain.
- A mixed economy for Unpaid Work, with a combination of large scale projects probably sourced through the Local Authority, and community involvement projects through the Making Good model, is a viable approach to the sourcing and delivery of Unpaid Work placements.
- Identified community concerns tend to be environmental: removal of graffiti, litter, clearance of walkways, conservation work, redecoration and refurbishment. What is different to 'traditional' unpaid work is the way it is sourced and managed.

- Over time, sustained working relationships are likely to lead to normalization of the process, and to increased awareness and confidence not only by newsletters and websites, but also by word of mouth.

Training

- Training community volunteers provides opportunities for more individual placements, and for larger scale projects as well as greater community cohesion.
- Probation Unpaid Work Placement Managers need experience of and/or training in community development and networking.
- There is a need for training in presentation skills and effective participation in multi-agency meetings for relevant Unpaid Work staff.

Publicity

- Use of local newsletters is a highly effective tool to publicise the community engagement model and its benefits to a wide audience.
- Well-developed portfolios of photographic evidence of successful projects would enhance the professionalism of presentations to potential beneficiaries.

3. Making Good and the Probation context

The Probation Service has been responsible for the delivery of Unpaid Work or Community Service, as it was traditionally called, since the 1970s. In recent years Unpaid Work projects have tended to be sourced through links with Local Authorities, referrals from existing placement providers, and 'cold-calling' charities and voluntary organisations to 'sell' the concept of Unpaid Work. The approach has in general been reactive to the needs of the Probation Service in fulfilling the requirements of the volume of Unpaid Work hours going through the Courts.

The Making Good project aims to test out the viability of involving the community more directly and more equably in the choice of Unpaid Work placements so that offenders are not only making direct reparation to the community, but the community is taking an active part in both deciding what work it wishes offenders to undertake and possibly in supervising the work as well.

The project has operated within a rapidly changing Probation context, both nationally and locally. The Community Payback initiative has been piloted and launched nationally across the National Probation Service Areas, and the single Community Order has led to a significant increase in the number of Unpaid Work hours supervised by the Probation Service.

Community Payback aims to make Unpaid Work more visible by branding the work completed by offenders on Unpaid Work with plaques, and by publicising the work being done by offenders through displaying the Community Payback logo at work sites. Community Payback also aims to make Unpaid Work more representative of communities' needs through setting up websites and distributing information cards to encourage community organisations to contact Unpaid Work teams with requests for work to be undertaken by offenders. The aim is for local people to be able to have their say as to how offenders should make amends for the harm they have caused. This scheme has therefore been running alongside the Making Good initiative, and shares similar aims in some respects.

4. The structure of Making Good

During the first year of the project the Making Good Project Co-ordinator devoted her time to accessing appropriate channels through which to promote and develop key relationships with community organisations under the Making Good ethos in the four pilot areas, as well as to developing new ways of working with Probation colleagues.

By the end of the first year suitable and varied links had been developed in each of the four areas, and Probation staff had been introduced to the Project. Initial work projects had taken place or were being planned in the majority of the identified areas.

The central theme of the second year was to mainstream Making Good into Probation, and the final year is focusing on promoting individual placements, promoting the use of volunteer supervisors, making more use of opportunities for publicity, continuing to mainstream the approach throughout the Probation teams, and extending and developing existing partnerships.

5. Making Good in Bicester

Bicester is a relatively small, but rapidly growing town in Oxfordshire. At any one time there are approximately 20 offenders on Unpaid Work from Bicester.

The Making Good pilot in Bicester has three strands:

- Developing a partnership with the Town Council,
- Developing links with the Youth Offending Service,
- Developing adult referral panels.

a) Developing a partnership with the Town Council

- In the first year of the project the Project Co-ordinator set up initial meetings with various possible partners, including the District, Parish, Town and County Councils.
- Town Councillors were enthusiastic and further meetings were held with the Town Clerk and Councillors, at which potential projects were identified.
- The Town Clerk was central to the development of the project, championing the Making Good principles and their practical application.
- Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs) have been actively involved in the promotion of suitable projects, and useful links have been established with the PCSO team.
- Four Town Council staff have been trained by the Unpaid Work team to supervise offenders during their working day in the Town Council office, the cemetery, parks and gardens.
- The Probation Area and the Town Council are working towards a Service Level Agreement.

The Tollgate Seats Project

The first project to be worked under the Making Good banner was Tollgate Seats, a concrete area of land in the town centre that attracted daytime and evening drinkers. The Town Council approached a local school, which planned a new design for the area. The Town Clerk and the lead Councillor met with the Unpaid Work Supervisor and the offenders to discuss the design and ask for offender input. Offenders then completed the project, and feedback indicated that they felt a sense of ownership of the project. As it was in the centre of the town, the project also achieved high visibility.

Learning points

- Negotiating your way through the politics of different organisations can be both challenging and time-consuming.
- It is important to find a 'champion' such as the Town Clerk.
- Training staff in community organisations to supervise offenders strengthens the links with the organisation and ensures sustainability.
- The attitude of the Unpaid Work Supervisor is crucial to the success of the project.
- Engaging offenders in pre-placement consultation with the partnership agency can give offenders a sense of ownership and value.
- High visibility projects can lead not only to greater awareness of the public, but to greater motivation of the offenders.

b) Developing links with the Youth Offending Service

- The Project Co-ordinator made contact with the Youth Offending Service (YOS), which is involved in directly reparative projects with young offenders, to discuss joint work.
- Initial projects were discussed in which the Probation Unpaid Work team could work with the YOS when the YOS have insufficient capacity to meet the outstanding commitment to work.
- A joint project was successfully worked, and this has resulted in further collaboration, currently on a large-scale project in Oxford.

North Bicester Doctors' Surgery

A project was being undertaken by the YOS as direct reparation for an offender assaulting one of the doctors. The work was taking longer than anticipated, as the work commitment for young offenders is substantially less than for adult offenders. As a result, adult offenders sentenced to an Unpaid Work Requirement helped to complete the project, and the collaboration was deemed positive and purposeful.

Learning points

- It was essential to clarify the roles, expectations and practice standards of each agency, as it emerged that working practices differed greatly.

- There is great potential for collaborative reparative work between the Youth Offending Service and Probation.

c) Developing adult referral panels

- The Making Good project aimed to build on the experience of referral panels in the Youth Offending Service. The youth referral panel scheme would be adapted to suit adult offenders, with local panel volunteers deciding what work a particular offender would do to make reparation to the community.
- The YOS manager was supportive of this initiative.
- Several panel members expressed interest in taking part.
- The Project Co-ordinator rewrote the guidance to make it relevant to adult offenders.
- Specialist training for adult referral panels was organised.

Challenges

In an area as small as Bicester it was difficult to find suitable offenders, taking into account risk factors and the need for consent from the offender to participate in an adult referral panel. Additionally, there was no guarantee that the availability of panel members could be coordinated with the identification of a suitable offender.

Solution

Consequently, it was decided to pilot the use of Panel Referral members for adult panels in Oxford, and it is hoped that suitable and willing offenders will be found to go before the volunteer panel members in the near future.

Ideally, direct reparation through Unpaid Work would be combined with a Restorative Justice Requirement, another sentencing option available to the Court when there are identifiable victims.

Learning points

- This very positive initiative is likely to be best suited to a large area, where there is a bigger pool of offenders.
- Panel guidance needs to be adapted to suit adult offenders.
- There needs to be a guarantee of a pool of suitable offenders in order to maintain the motivation of volunteer panel members.

6. Making Good in Wycombe District

Wycombe District is a local government district administered by Wycombe District Council, serving a population of 162,000. It includes the towns of High Wycombe, Marlow and Princes Risborough. The area has a diverse community, including a high concentration of Asian residents in some wards.

The Making Good pilot in Wycombe District developed into three strands, namely developing links with:

- the Local Authority
- Neighbourhood Action Groups (NAGs)
- 'the Asian community'.

a) Developing links with the Local Authority

- Initial consultation work was at the Local Authority level. Attendance at meetings with varying and complex agendas proved to be less productive than envisaged and, as a result, development of key relationships was slower than hoped for in the first year.
- As engagement at the Local Authority level was not proving at that point to be an effective conduit for Making Good, a decision was made to try and form more direct links with the community through other channels of communication.
- As a result, the Neighbourhood Action Group (NAG) forum was identified.

b) Developing links with Neighbourhood Action Groups (NAGs)

- Neighbourhood Action Groups are volunteer working groups made up of representatives from the community, including residents, police and local authority and other organisations, with the aim of addressing key issues identified by the community. There are nine neighbourhoods in the Wycombe Urban Area.
- With the support of the Making Good Advisory Group police representative, it was agreed that Unpaid Work would be systematically considered in the roll-out of NAGs, so creating an infrastructure to support and sustain a flow of work from the community.
- Attention was focused initially on the Downley, Micklefield and Castlefield NAGs in High Wycombe, areas of diversity and relative disadvantage.
- The Probation Scheme Manager has attended NAG meetings to explain and promote the Making Good project to NAG members.
- This has resulted in several joint projects sourced directly through the NAGs and thus responding to local community concerns.
- Police Community Support Officers have been an important link in the process.

Castlefield Clean-Up

Offenders with an Unpaid Work Requirement were involved in a weekend tidying the community together with the Forestry Commission, residents, the Police and the Fire Brigade. This was sourced through links with the NAG and was a visible and participative community project.

Learning points

- Direct involvement with the community is more likely to be achieved through smaller neighbourhood/resident groups, such as NAGs, than through larger bodies, such as the Local Authority.
- Larger bodies are likely to be more appropriate vehicles to coordinate the planning of work for 'traditional' high-volume Unpaid Work schemes.

c) Developing links with the Asian community

- The Asian population in High Wycombe accounts for 16% of the total population and 14% of the population are Muslim (High Wycombe Local Community Area Profile, February 2007, Buckinghamshire County Council).
- The first step in Wycombe was to make contact with key individuals and organisations/groups who had knowledge of and contact with the Asian community and who were involved in local initiatives.
- This included speaking to voluntary groups, community development workers, the Police, the Racial Equality Council, faith leaders, councillors and local community activists.
- What became clear was that, apart from the Mosques, there were few central points of contact and few community groups where it was possible to develop participation in the Making Good project. There was also a sense of consultation fatigue.
- The emphasis has therefore been on building relationships, increasing knowledge of community sentencing, and exploring ways in which the Making Good project can be taken forward in a practical and sustainable way.
- Work is now being focused on involvement with a newly formed residents' association, the Castlefield and Oakridge Residents' Association, in High Wycombe, chaired by a member of the Asian

community. It aims to be an inclusive community-based association, and an encouraging number of residents have become members.

Particular considerations

- The need to discuss the potential impact of offenders working visibly in their own community.
- Language has sometimes been a barrier.
- The fact that 'the Asian community' is not a homogenous community, and therefore members do not necessarily share the same priorities or interests.

Learning points

- There is not a single 'Asian community' in High Wycombe.
- Patience and persistence are necessary to pursue and develop links, and devoting time to do is beneficial in the long term.
- Perceptions of community issues may differ, thus making it more difficult to identify suitable community projects.
- There is likely to be a lower baseline of knowledge about community sentencing.
- Key to possible successful community involvement is working with local organisations, such as Residents' Associations, and key individuals.

7. Making Good in Milton Keynes

The Borough of Milton Keynes has been a unitary authority independent of Buckinghamshire since 1997. Milton Keynes has a highly devolved local government structure and a parish-based approach to community safety, with local neighbourhoods informing community safety priorities.

The Making Good pilot in Milton Keynes has focused on:

- working with Urban Parish Councils,
- the development of links with Neighbourhood Action Groups.

a) Working with Urban Parish Councils

- The Local Authority was the starting point for making links for Making Good, and the Community Safety unit advised the best route would be to work directly with the Urban Parish Councils.
- Four parishes were initially identified.
- Initial findings through attendance at local meetings indicated that Milton Keynes' communities were not generally aware of Unpaid Work.
- The Probation Quality Assurance Manager attended further Parish Council meetings, and gave a talk to all 45 Parish Councils.
- Encouragement to 'think outside the box' has been needed to develop suitable projects for the benefit of the community.
- The Probation Quality Assurance Manager has developed a working model, which includes the offer of an estate walk with key members of the Parish Councils to identify environmental improvements that could be made, and has built up a network of individuals in the community who wish to engage with the Making Good ethos.
- Placements have tended to be environmental in nature, reflecting the concerns of the community.

Shenley Church End pond clearance

The clearance of a pond in Shenley Church End involved local residents, offenders and scouts, and was a true community event, both visible and constructive. The Parish warden stated in the Parish newsletter that he was trying to use the Probation service as much as he could, and encouraged residents to come to him with ideas.

Learning points

- An estate walk with key partners has been effective in identifying areas for improvement within the local community.
- Maintaining links through regular attendance and visibility at Parish Council meetings is essential.

b) Developing work with Neighbourhood Action Groups

- To further extend the Making Good pilot, the Probation Quality Assurance Manager (QAM) has been involved in the rollout process of the Neighbourhood Action Groups in Milton Keynes through attendance at NAG meetings and liaison with key individuals.
- Finding a way through the various priorities of the key agencies represented at NAGs was initially challenging.
- Gaining entry into new Neighbourhood Action Groups has proved difficult.
- Developing links with senior police management has been productive.
- NAG-related work, particularly with Residents' Associations, is proving effective in finding suitable placements that represent community issues.
- Police Community Support Officers have expressed willingness to supervise offenders in the future, which could prove an invaluable resource for individual placements or for larger group placements.

Bradwell Common Estate

Collaboration between the NAG and Residents' Association led to offenders clearing an alley identified by the two groups. The project was reviewed at a NAG meeting, and the Police were involved and supportive.

Learning points

- Building up relationships with key individuals is central.
- Establishing a presence at NAG forums can require persistence.
- PCSOs are an integral link in developing work with NAGs.

8. Making Good in Slough

Slough is a Borough and unitary authority and has an ethnically diverse population totalling approximately 120,000. It has strong existing community structures and a vibrant voluntary sector.

The Making Good pilot in Slough has concentrated on:

- The development of a working partnership with the Slough Federation of Tenants and Residents.

a) Working with the Slough Federation of Tenants and Residents (The Fed)

- In the first year of the project, attendance at various meetings in Slough kept leading back to The Fed, The Federation of Tenants and Residents. The Fed has links with the Council and most tenants' and residents' groups are affiliated. The Fed has all fourteen main housing estates in Slough involved and a highly participative structure.
- The FED chair was from the start enthusiastic about Making Good.
- A successful working partnership has been established in conjunction with People 1st Slough, the Arms Length Management Organisation (ALMO), a not-for-profit housing organisation managing 7,500 homes on behalf of Slough Borough Council. The involvement of their Community Participation Officer has been central to this process.
- Regular meetings for feedback, review and future planning have been key to the success of the partnership.
- Some FED members have agreed to undertake training to help local communities identify suitable work for offenders, and also to train as FED volunteer supervisors to supervise low risk offenders on individual projects, such as small-scale garden projects.

Challenges

Initially, a certain amount of frustration was caused by misconceptions as to what kind of service the Unpaid Work team could provide, and it was necessary to ensure clarity as to the parameters of the work.

Solutions

To this end the Probation Scheme Manager and a Thames Valley Partnership Associate, experienced in community development, facilitated two workshops at the FED conference in June 2007, which gave the Making Good project a higher profile and the opportunity to clarify expectations. They have since participated in the 2008 FED conference, at which the Thames Valley Probation Assistant Director was a platform speaker.

An article in the People 1st newsletter in September 2007 further clarified expectations. The FED committee now has a handout outlining the rules of engagement, and a structured referral form.

Moreton Way Sheltered Housing complex

This involved refurbishment of benches in the shared seating area of the housing complex, a visible project for the beneficiaries, and one which enabled some myths about offenders to be dispelled through contact with the Unpaid Work group. Feedback was very positive.

Learning Points

- A Residents' and Tenants' organisation has proven to be a valuable route into the community.
- The support of the FED chair and the People 1st Community Participation Officer have been key to the success of the partnership.
- It is vital to understand and clarify expectations of each agency from the outset in order to develop appropriate plans.
- Devoting time to regular meetings with partners to review progress and plan ahead is central to developing good working relationships.
- Good and regular written communications can sustain interest and maintain involvement.

9. The role of Probation Unpaid Work teams

- Central to the sustainability of the project is the involvement of all Unpaid Work staff.
- The Making Good approach requires a good deal of groundwork before a partnership comes to fruition. Real involvement by and from the community, understanding of each other's perspectives and the development of sustainable links requires time and effort.
- When it does come to fruition, there are gains in terms of positive feedback, public perceptions of offenders, a consistent flow of work, and visibility.
- There is a need for training in community engagement for Placement Managers.
- Unpaid Work supervisors are key to promoting to offenders the benefits of the Making Good approach and to building relationships with beneficiaries.
- Both the community and the Unpaid Work teams need to have realistic expectations of each other and of what can be achieved.
- A commitment to resource the time needed for developing and sustaining community development initiatives is central to the success of the Making Good approach.

10. Individual placements

Individual placements have always been an integral part of Unpaid Work schemes, and have tended to be sourced through charity shops, day centres and luncheon clubs, to which low risk offenders have made significant contributions. These placements are supervised by the beneficiary organisation.

One of the original objectives of Making Good was to develop individual placements which can provide a more meaningful form of reparation and a greater variety of work opportunities, sourced through direct local community involvement.

Experience in each of the four areas is that this has to date been difficult to achieve. It has become evident, as the project has developed, that it takes time to foster trust and confidence between the Probation Service and partnership agencies. However, the training of community supervisors, as at Bicester Town Council, shows that individual placements can evolve as a result of the cementing of that trust.

Learning points

- Individual placements are likely to evolve from the emergence of trust and confidence between organisations, and this takes time to build.
- Individual placements are thus more appropriately 'second phase' development priorities.
- Volunteer supervisors are the key to the provision of individual placements.
- Finding suitable, low risk offenders for individual placements could be an issue, particularly in small areas.

11. Involving the media

The Making Good project hopes to increase the confidence of the public by developing good links with the local media in order to ensure the reporting of stories about Unpaid Work and to encourage participation by the public.

To date the bulk of the publicity for Making Good has been achieved through newsletters, such as the People 1st newsletter, parish magazines and articles in local newspapers. There has also been representation at the Fed conference and promotion of Making Good through the National Association of Town Councils.

The Probation Service needs to ensure that it can provide well-developed portfolios of photographic evidence of projects for presentation to potential beneficiaries. Unpaid Work teams need to be provided with the necessary equipment to make best use of opportunities to generate publicity.

Learning points

- Local newsletters are effective channels of communication, which reach a wide local audience, and should continue to be used whenever possible.
- More use could be made of local media, including newspapers and radio.
- National organisations, such as the National Association of Town Councils, can be used effectively to promote Making Good to a wider audience.
- Making use of such opportunities as The Fed conference can provide wider publicity.
- Well-developed photographic evidence and histories of Making Good projects would be a useful publicity tool.

12. Community engagement – added value?

Evidence from the four pilot areas shows that the Making Good model, which promotes active community involvement and a more pro-active approach than has traditionally been the case, can be time-consuming and resource-intensive. However, feedback from beneficiaries and the Probation staff involved indicates that there is added value in this way of working:

- Making Good work is not 'one-off'; organisations want to be involved on a longer-term basis, and are making repeat requests.
- The quality of well-supervised work leaves a legacy.
- Community engagement can result in benefits to all parties, including greater understanding of each other, which could in the longer-term lead to greater community cohesion.
- Perceptions about offenders can change as a result of community involvement, which could lead to perceptions of a safer community.
- High visibility community engagement projects can result in increased confidence in offenders by the public.
- Developing long-term relationships with community organisations can 'normalise' the work of offenders in their community, and thus begin to change public perceptions of community safety.

13. Community engagement – awareness-raising?

It was evident from the start of the Making Good project that baseline knowledge and awareness of Unpaid Work was very low.

Since the project began, contact has been made with significant numbers of people in the community through the Parish Councils, Neighbourhood Action Groups, Town Council, Residents' and Tenants' Associations, and District and Borough Councils by attending meetings, brokering partnerships and delivering projects. There has in some areas been considerable publicity of Making Good through local newsletters.

It would seem fair to conclude that the community engagement model has increased awareness of Unpaid Work considerably among certain sectors of the community and that, if this way of working is sustained, awareness will filter down to other sectors of the community through its visibility, increase in capacity and its 'normalisation', thus increasing the likelihood of perceptions of community safety changing in a positive direction.

14. Sustaining engagement

A key objective of the Making Good project was to develop sustainable models. Examples of sustainability include:

- The training of four Town Council members of staff to supervise offenders on Unpaid Work
- Working towards drawing up a Service Level Agreement with Bicester Town Council.
- The FED meetings have a standard agenda item regarding Making Good projects.
- A working agreement has been drawn up with The Fed.
- Regular Probation attendance at Parish Council and NAG meetings maintains a visible presence.
- Community organisations are making repeat requests and are devoting time to develop and maintain working partnerships with Probation Unpaid Work teams.
- Probation Unpaid Work resources have been allocated to devoting time to maintain links made with community organisations.

15. Conclusion

The Making Good project in the Thames Valley has shown that successful community engagement can be achieved in Unpaid Work by developing and sustaining links with key local organisations that represent community interests.

Using the key learning from this project to extend this way of working to other areas is likely to raise the profile of and confidence in Unpaid Work to the communities in which it is applied and in the longer term to achieve a greater sense of community safety and cohesion.

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