

Croydon Community Fighting Knife Crime Back

Community Engagement Analysis

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Introduction

The current report aims to discuss efforts of Croydon community to fight back knife crime in the area which has increased significantly in recent years. The evaluative report focuses on assessing current community initiatives on the matter, the ways they are promoted, tools used to increase awareness and parties involved. This is then used as a foundation for assessing what could have been done differently and what could have been the tactics to increase awareness of the issue and achieve greater participation, collaboration, diversity and inclusion of different parties. To achieve these objectives, different sources of information are used and researched, so that various community initiatives are analysed. This assessment is of significant importance, as it highlights the ways through which engagement, participation, collaboration, diversity and inclusion of different stakeholders can be increased which in turn could lead to improved social welfare and more effective project completion.

Main body

Community efforts and initiatives evaluation

Croydon became the borough with the highest number of teenage murders in London in 2021. This resulted in coming up with the nickname “the knife crime capital of London” when addressing this region. Recent events and murders in the area provoked local communities to take things in their hands and work together to address the issue and elaborate alternative solutions. The teenage killings in the borough sparked the birth of a new movement – more than 100 people with various backgrounds, experiences, knowledge, skills and capabilities united to fight knife crime back (Hughes, 2022). Representatives of different stakeholders, including youth workers, schools, police, local government, ex-gang members, mentors and many more have united to decrease teenage murders and the level of knife crime in the neighbourhood.

There are many initiatives organised to support this community project. For example, one of the youth workers dedicated to the aim of decreasing knife crime in the area organised a march to increase awareness of young people in regard to the consequences of carrying and using knife on the streets (Hughes, 2022). Hundreds of local community members joined the march to support the idea. The news for the march was also spread by Sky News and BBC, which are among the top media in the country (McKeirnan, 2022). The march passed through some of

the murders' locations in the borough and united many different parties interested in solving the problem, including families of the victims, police, local council's representatives, young people and others. All these groups firmly believe that one of the main reasons of the issue is the fact that the majority of young people do not understand the impact and consequences of carrying a knife and the risks for young people to join gangs due to economic struggles (Hughes, 2022). Thus, it is believed that increasing awareness on the matter is one of the tools for decreasing the number and density of knife-related crimes in the area.

The march was also supported by many different organisations, including United to Change and Inspire (UTCAI) (Hughes, 2022). The support of these stakeholder groups is extremely valuable as, in order to effectively mitigate such crimes, young people should be provided opportunities to progress and integrate in society (Hughes, 2022). Addressing this, the project also includes ex-gang members who mentored more than 1,000 youths in the borough by reaching out to them and increasing their awareness regarding life in a gang and consequences, the potential impact for the future and other relevant aspects (Hughes, 2022). The whole project also has the support of Sky News media – a key for greater promotion and awareness. The project is also supported by Croydon Council, Croydon Business Improvement District (BID), Croydon College, Croydon Police, faith groups, London Ambulance Service, school pastors, Victim Support and Croydon's Young People's Outreach and Counselling Service (Croydon Council, 2022a).

Apart from the march and media coverage by Sky News, the project was also based on a three-weeks term of different events, such as London Ambulance Service demonstrating and instructing how to help people inflicted with knife injuries, awareness initiatives in the local shopping centre aiming at informing young people and encouraging them to seek support, different talk events with representatives of the police, victims' families and local community and many more (Croydon Council, 2022a).

The project also included a Cut It Out local football tournament dedicated to increasing awareness of knife crime-related issues and challenges (Croydon Council, 2022b). Moreover, a part of the project has been dedicated to the development of a study focused on presenting the lives and experiences of 60 vulnerable adolescents; thereby, presenting the struggles of young people and the consequences for those of them who have committed or been a victim of knife crime (Croydon Council, 2022c). It is believed that this series of events uniting so many

different stakeholder groups has the power to reach out young individuals and mitigate knife crime rates in the area.

Reflection on areas of improvement

Apart from the variety of initiatives organised by Croydon Council and the local community, there are other ways and tools which could be employed with the aim of raising awareness of the problem and increasing the collaboration between different stakeholder groups. The activities discussed in the previous section could have been improved by considering their implementation in a different way. As discussed in assignment 1, meetings and digital platforms are two of the main tools which can be used to support the initiatives organised by various parties of interest. These solutions are likely to increase the effectiveness of collaboration between different stakeholders and address their different needs and agenda with the aim of reaching common goals.

Digital engagement is a very good approach for increasing awareness, reached audience and the effectiveness of different campaigns. It has been already proven that the proliferation of social media has had a sufficient impact on the level of engagement between residents, governments, non-profit organisations and other stakeholder groups which, in turn, increases the final outcome of different projects. As the majority of social media platforms are free, such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and at the same time they are widely used, they could be a very effective tool for engaging different interested parties (Medium, 2020).

For example, the organisers of the march could have made an event on Facebook and use this functionality of the social media. This would allow increase awareness of the event, encourage more people to join and would allow Facebook users to share the news, so that more people and different parties find out about it. This is likely to have increased the number of those attending it and would also increase the ‘voice’ power of the issue; thereby, encouraging more stakeholders to put efforts for finding a solution. Social media could have been used for the rest of the activities of the project too. For example, the event related to first aid instructions could have been broadcasted live and recorded, so that those who could not attend it live can still watch the video and be informed. A Facebook discussion forum could have been created in relation to the initiatives in the local shopping centre, so that more information is provided to potential visitors, questions and concerns are raised and addressed and different ideas are

also collected. The football tournament could have also been published as an event, so that more people understand about it and invite friends and relatives to join.

All this would increase engagement of different stakeholders and the publicity of the project. This would, as a result, attract more interested parties to join and the effect of all these initiatives would be greater. Influencers can also be used as supporters of the cause, so that it gains popularity quickly (UNHCR, 2022). The posting and discussion of project-related content and news would also lead to greater transparency and accountability, as well as higher awareness and engagement. Furthermore, social media targeting tools also allow the reach of specific intended audiences, which improves the effectiveness of their contribution. All this would lead to increased comprehension and understanding of the issue and a higher chance for collaboration between parties.

In addition to that, meetings with representatives of different stakeholders could have also been organised. It is reported that meetings, which involve members from various stakeholder groups, tend to improve communication and collaboration, increase alignment of efforts into a more channelled and focused strategy, utilise existing networks and encourage active participation and provision of feedback (CVS, 2022). If such a meeting is organised by all parties involved in the project of Croydon, it is assumed that more alternative solutions will be discussed and implemented and the result would be more effective.

Avenues to promote participation, collaboration, diversity and inclusion

As discussed in assignment 1, participation, collaboration, diversity and inclusion should be promoted when community engagement and projects are considered. Two of the main avenues for achieving these goals are associated with developing opportunities for volunteering and mentoring.

Volunteering is related to the undertaking or expressing the willingness to undertake a service or conduct an activity voluntarily (Volunteer Toronto, 2017). In the general case, volunteering is performed with the aim of achieving a common good without any financial or other gain for the individual or organisation which performs it (Volunteer Toronto, 2017). In the case of Croydon project, social media can be used to attract volunteers who can help with the organisation and conducting the events and initiatives related to the project with the aim of decreasing knife crimes in the borough and the rate of teenage murders in the area. This would

also increase the diversity of volunteers attracted and, respectively the collaboration and participation of parties involved.

Community mentoring brings volunteering on another level. Community-based mentoring involves volunteers within a given community providing mentor support to those in need (Durham University, 2013). In the case of Croydon project, the ex-gang member involved in the program, has already mentored more than 1,000 young adults and successfully turned their lives around (Hughes, 2022). Community mentoring is often referred to as ‘peer support’, as it involves volunteer mentors from backgrounds or community settings which are very similar to those of participating mentees (Durham University, 2013). This is why mentoring is so important in the currently discussed case – it is perceived as a tool which would reach out to vulnerable individuals easier and would encourage them to seek support. Mentoring initiatives aim to facilitate mentees’ self-development and contribute to improving their social networks (Durham University, 2013). In the current case, this directly addresses one of the main sources of the problem and can further increase the effectiveness of the initiatives implemented to solve it. Effective mentoring increases the collaboration between different parties and maximises inclusion and participation, especially when vulnerable groups are considered. This is also contributed by the fact that mentoring meetings can also be conducted in different setting, depending on the preferences, convenience and needs of mentees. In the case of Croydon project, this is essential, which is why it is recommended that mentoring and volunteering are utilised at a higher pace.

Conclusion

To sum up, community projects and initiatives achieve best results when they involve different stakeholders and are based on high participation, collaboration, diversity and inclusion. The current report discussed the case of Croydon neighbourhood in the light of the issue of widespread knife crimes and teenage murders. Different interested parties gathered together for a series of initiatives aiming to raise awareness of the problem, increase collaboration between different stakeholders and encourage young adults to seek support. Many different activities have been organised to achieve these goals. The community project has also received the attention of main media and government institutions. However, the effectiveness of these initiatives would have been better, if public meetings and social media channels have been better used and utilised. These tools have the power to increase awareness of the issue rapidly and attract different parties to join the cause. Volunteering and mentoring have also been

recognised as important avenues for increasing participation, collaboration, diversity and inclusion, especially in the case of Croydon.

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