



Category: Community Relations Campaign

Company: Newcastle City Council, Changing Lives and Northumbria Police

Entry title: Small Change or Real Change?

Brief and objectives:

In the last three years Newcastle has experienced a 700 per cent increase in the number of beggars on its streets from 25 in 2015 to 200 in 2018. Austerity and poverty are cited as some reasons along with the public giving money.

According to research, many beggars have drug addictions. By giving cash, it is believed the public is feeding the addictions and unwittingly preventing them from seeking professional help.

Newcastle City Council, Changing Lives and Northumbria Police launched a campaign to raise awareness, and attempt to discourage cash donations by promoting other ways of giving. The objectives were:

- Raise awareness of begging
- Raise awareness of the link between begging and drug-taking
- Promote alternatives to giving cash
- Promote services that offer beggars positive life-changes

Rationale behind campaign, including research and planning:

At the heart of the campaign was a belief that cash donations were doing more harm than good, growing Newcastle's begging population and entrenching their street lifestyles. Research to test the link between begging and drug taking was undertaken.

In October 2017 Fulfilling Lives Newcastle Gateshead and Newcastle's Multiple Exclusion Team conducted a project with seven beggars. Six males and one female were asked structured questions to find out why they begged. The sample was small, but the findings were clear. The report said: "Generally their reason for begging was not to support their basic needs for food or housing or clothing but to secure money to support an addiction to

drugs." It concluded: "Any response to tackling this complex issue should explore solutions to breaking the cycle of chaotic substance misuse."

Beggars consistently claimed they could earn £100 to £300 a day. The campaign would need to challenge the public's cash-giving if we were to break the cycle of substance misuse.

Strategy and tactics, including creativity and innovation:

The strategy would discourage giving cash by promoting alternatives and saying beggars really needed professional help not coins.

In 2016 Nottingham City Council was told to take down some of its anti-begging posters by the Advertising Standards Authority who ruled they caused widespread or serious offence. To avoid making the same mistakes we consulted Nottingham and the ASA and avoided using messages on our posters that were sweeping and unsubstantiated.

Our tone would be neutral and mindful of the tragic circumstances that people who beg often find themselves in, avoiding the criticism we were demonising them. We would stop short of insisting that people do not give cash and instead highlight the possible consequences were they to do so and promote alternatives.

For credibility we needed an authentic messenger. After weeks of gentle persuasion, a recovering drug addict, 'John,' who begged in Newcastle for eight years agreed to meet us. We interviewed him in the presence of his support worker and learned a great deal about street life. He agreed to work with us and his subsequent interview became the basis of the campaign and led to the creation of its slogan Small Change or Real Change? To safeguard his on-going recovery, he remained anonymous and had his voice distorted by the media. We remain indebted for his co-operation.

Tactics:

- Design a poster with the slogan Small Change or Real Change? and display prominently at begging hotspots; bus and Metro stations and Northumberland Street via the large digital screen
- Poster to direct people to council web page with information about begging and how to help
- The same information used to design and print 1,000 leaflets for public buildings and city centre businesses
- Changing Lives would attract less hostility as a charity than the council or the police so they agreed to front the campaign
- Launch campaign in their Recovery Centre where the media could learn about professional help

- John to tell the media why he backed the campaign. Other interviewees: Stephen Bell, Chief Executive of Changing Lives, Chair of Safe Newcastle. Cllr Nick Kemp and Chief Insp David Pickett would all support him in his testimony
- Post interviews on social media with a positive hashtag #ChangeNewcastle and encourage a debate about begging
- Inform staff of the campaign via e-bulletins
- Article in the council's residents' magazine Citylife
- A 1,200-word article in the Journal after launch day explaining the rationale for the campaign

Implementation of tactics:

- Aug: call for campaign
- 19 Oct: begin research
- 7 Nov: photo shoot for poster
- 23 Nov: issue media ops note to attend launch on Nov 30, heavily trailing John
- Nov: inform voluntary and community sector of rationale for the campaign to avoid confusion/criticism
- 28 Nov: poster and leaflet designed and printed by Northumbria Police
- 30 Nov: posters go live; campaign unveiled to the media at The Recovery Centre and videos posted on social media
- Nov: article published in Citylife
- 1 Dec: J2 published in Journal
- 7 Dec: leaflets distributed to 35 businesses by NE1
- Jan 3: 2018 a video of a second beggar turned pianist, 'Paul' backing the campaign posted on Facebook

Measurement and evaluation:

Media who attended launch:

- Tyne Tees audience 240k
- BBC 310k
- Made in Tyne and Wear 46k

- Chronicle
- 280k views of large digital screen over three days source: Cityoutdoormedia
- John's facebook video viewed 13k times; reached 32k people, shared 39 times and received 157 engagements
- Paul's video was viewed 3.5k times, reached 6.9k, shared 13 times and received 102 engagements
- Article in Citylife reached 120k households
- Article in e-bulletin reached 1,500 staff
- Website: 557 page-views

Evaluation:

- Research carried out six months after launch
- 32.5 per cent said they had seen the campaign
- 62.5 per cent said they agreed with encouraging non-cash donations
- 65 per cent said they were even less likely to give cash to beggars as a result of the campaign
- Campaign attracted interest from the BBC in Hull and Cardiff City Council
- Comments on facebook videos echoed campaign messages
- "Why people give money is beyond me – give food if must. I work in a bookies and we see a lot of 'homeless'. Give to charitable organisations – not to people begging!"
Lizzie Henderson
- "I have actually bought food/hot drinks before. Suppose that's the best thing to do but it takes a little more time." Lucy Elizabeth Johns
- Cabinet Member for Environment in Newcastle, Cllr Nick Kemp, said: "People who beg are among society's most vulnerable. They need our sympathy and understanding.
- "Giving money is perfectly understandable – we've all done it, but it's not the best way to bring about real change in their life and that is what this campaign was about."

Budget and cost effectiveness:

- Poster and leaflet printing £195.43
- Officers worked as part of their day job
- Use of large digital advertising screen was free for council