

introducing

the
Widerton
motor
project

first report

62211

ILDERTON MOTOR PROJECT MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

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(to May 1978: Robert S. Marriott, J.P.)

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Councillor Ernie Rowing
(to May 1978:
Councillor Frank Smith, B.Sc., F.B.I.S.)
Ann Reed

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NCJRS

SEP 27 1979

ACQUISITIONS

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Inner London Probation &
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Lewisham Voluntary Associates
(National Westminster Bank Ltd)
Lewisham Voluntary Associates
(Scripture Union/Frontier Youth Trust)
Lewisham Voluntary Associates
Metropolitan Police (Traffic Division)
Metropolitan Police (Juvenile Bureau)
Lewisham Social Services
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FOREWORD

In 1975 we heard about an old, empty slipper baths, the property of Lewisham Borough Council, which was available as short-life property. It had been costed as a hostel and found to be too expensive for this use. At the same time we had been collecting local information about the growing number of young motoring offenders appearing on probation officers' caseloads. There seemed to be little research into new possibilities of working with these offenders even though the 1970 Report of the Advisory Council on the Penal System had recommended special centres for young motoring offenders.

A low-cost plan for conversion of the bath-house into a motor workshop was put to the Lewisham Borough Council and application was made for an annual grant to be administered by a voluntary management committee which the Council initially approved for a trial period of three years. The Inner London Probation and After-Care Service appointed an ancillary worker as a full-time project leader.

With the help of Community Service for Offenders and Community Industry the upper part of the building was stripped of its baths and partitions giving a good area of space. Underneath this and at ground level at the rear of the building, the coke cellar which ran the whole length of the building was cleaned and one of the floors concreted and a pit installed. This became the main workshop area with other areas on the upper and lower floors becoming small off-workshop/offices. Heating and lighting was added or re-arranged. All the safety features essential to such a building were incorporated.

The centre now has a fully equipped workshop with four bays and a bench shop; there is also a yard. Facilities include spraying and welding equipment.

When Mr. Kennedy joined the project in 1977 he added Banger Racing at Wimbledon track to the activities of the project. In 1978 the centre became registered for Intermediate Treatment as an alternative available to the Juvenile Courts. The centre has continued to develop and we are grateful to the efforts of Mr. McKennedy and his volunteers who have contributed to the success of the centre.

We would wish to give a special tribute of thanks to Bob Marriott, who has been Chairman of the Management Committee since the project began and who has never failed to "produce the goods". We are sorry he has to retire due to ill-health and wish him well.

Ron Conn
Ann Reed
(Trustees)

INTRODUCTION

At a time when the number of young auto-crime offenders is continually increasing and they are becoming younger, the Probation Service and the Social Services are concerned and looking for new ways of dealing with young people at risk and who are a possible danger to others. The Ilderton Motor Project is the first project to specialize with young auto-crime offenders.

The centre has been open for two years and has grown from an idea into an exciting and worthwhile venture. The first year was spent in building the project and experimenting with ideas brought from youth work. It became apparent that a totally new approach was necessary and a philosophy began to grow out of experience. This year has seen the centre fully in use and no longer just experimental. Interest has come from as far afield as Japan, and of the many visitors, all have expressed their support for such a scheme. Visitors have included the Minister of Justice, Netherlands, and the Director of the Probation Service, Netherlands, John Silkin, M.P., Mrs. Nicholas Hinton, J.P., and many other Magistrates. There has been a good deal of interest displayed in the local and national press and on the radio networks of Radio London, Capitol Radio, BBC Radio 1, 2, and 4. ITN, Thames Television and CBS (USA) have filmed, the latter producing a news documentary for showing in America.

There has been very little research into young auto-crime offenders which reflects the limited investments in schemes for rehabilitation or an understanding of the problem. During a short experience of working with auto-crime offenders, we are just beginning to understand some of the reasoning behind their behaviour and at the same time making a positive intervention into the careers of clients attending the centre.

The Ilderton Motor Project has a voluntary management committee which receives an annual grant and lease of the premises from the London Borough of Lewisham and is staffed by the Inner London Probation & After-Care Service.

THE YOUNG OFFENDER & THE MOTOR CAR

A "car mania" subculture has already established itself amongst many young social groups. An individual's development can depend very much on his position within the group which has its own hierarchy, language and, of course, its own standards of acceptable social behaviour. The hierarchy system centres on status. For the person lucky enough to own a "custom car", their position will be high because of the idolization process of their peers. Those with "real" mechanical knowledge will hold safe positions within the group as their skills are frequently called upon. For the rest, life in the group is one of constant competition which all too often involves T.D.A. It is interesting to note that most young T.D.A. offenders have an accomplice. This accomplice is usually present to witness and confirm achievements. Others will learn as many mechanical terms as possible so that they may appear to be knowledgeable. Competition between young people is not new; indeed some will argue that it is positively healthy. In a controlled situation this is acceptable, but in a "car mania" culture competition can prevent emotional development and even result in death! To explain how "emotional development" is retarded a situation that occurred in the workshop is recorded:

"One evening I noticed one of the clients gazing at his car completely unaware of anything that was happening around him. He looked as if he were in a trance. His car, which he had recently purchased, was as he bought it, just like any other Mini. After a short time, I interrupted to ask what was going on in his head. He explained to me that he was imagining what his car was going to look like when he had finished customizing it. He then described to me how he was seeing the car in his mind. Then it dawned on me that he was describing how he likes to see himself and suddenly a lot of loose jigsaw pieces fell into place."

My interpretation of this situation led me to consider the following: that the jigsaw pieces were the emotional ties between the person and his motor car; the motor car is used as an abstract on to which the personality is projected. An assault on the individual is ineffective, but if the assault is on his car the reaction is immediate and highly charged. Therefore, an individual's emotional growth can depend on the development of his car, and that depends on his skills, resilience and finance, any one of which he may not possess. The relationship between the individual and his car is without doubt one of love and hate, with all the trials and tribulations associated with human relationships.

The motor car is as much a part of everyday life as is television; and, as with television, the best quality is to be found in the wealthiest home. The motor car has become an integral status symbol in all classes of our society and car manufacturers spend billions of pounds to ensure that it remains so. Vast sums of money are spent to seduce the public into desiring a motor car and the seduction process applies to all people of all ages, but the legislation prohibits anybody under the age of 17 from responding in the way advertising expects. The desire to possess a car is knowingly implanted in people's minds at a very early age but this desire must be frustrated until the age of 17. Frustration becomes the main ingredient in a recipe for disaster.

In other comparable spheres, it is easier to protect young people from "adult joys" such as drinking and erotic films. Protection extends to prosecutions should an under-age person weave his way onto the premises. This parental-type protection is understandable because parents keep such places alive in our community but it is not afforded the young auto-crime offender. In this case the compassionate approach is not available for their simulated adult behaviour. Responsibility for their actions is put squarely back on their shoulders and not on those who seduced them in the first place.

The legal dilemma

In theory the method used by the Court to deal with young motoring offenders is to impose a sentence that will encourage good behaviour. Re-offending will mean more encouragement until eventually a custodial sentence is seen as the only option. Fines, endorsements and disqualifications are usually the first forms of punishment the court uses. These are soon exhausted. Yet in looking for a short-term remedy the court may be creating a long-term problem. Endorsements and disqualifications mean very little to an offender who is not even old enough to qualify for a driver's licence. It seems futile to attack the offender's driving licence when he has already displayed no respect for it. Eventually the offender may have half a dozen endorsements and one or two disqualifications without any of these penalties having had the desired effect. Yet at some later stage the offender will give serious thought to going about motoring legitimately. He may feel that his career as a motoring offender is way behind him but as soon as he seeks insurance cover his past stands in front of him. Insurance companies demand the declaration of all endorsements and disqualifications received in the last five years—in some cases ten years! The more you have, the more you pay. An endorsement is valid for three years in a court of law, but insurance companies demand their declaration for periods up to 10 years. It is suggested that insurance companies should only be entitled to such information for the same period and that the question as to whether insurance companies are sometimes contravening the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974 needs looking into.

For a young ex-offender, this could mean an insurance premium of £300+ for third party only, and each year thereafter he will pay more than anyone else. It may be argued that the offender should have considered his future and has only himself to blame but I doubt if anybody brought to his notice the way his insurance would be affected in the future. Drastic changes have to be made if we want to reduce the number of times a young motoring offender appears before the court. There is no law that will prevent the hard-core young motoring offenders becoming involved with cars except placing them in institutions. Young persons are going to become motorists one way or another and if we want them to become responsible motorists then we must educate them towards this goal. Perhaps this should be part of a modern education process as in the U.S.A. with more centres geared to young motorists, linked with the courts so that in dealing with auto-crime offences magistrates have a practical alternative which specialises in auto-crime offenders.

WHAT WE DO

In an age where the treatment of offenders is undergoing a rapid change away from custodial penalties, the Ilderton project is making its contribution in the field of auto-crime and similar projects are coming into being elsewhere. Referrals are received from probation officers and social workers on behalf of clients who are young motoring offenders or "at risk" with motor cars. The centre accepts them on a voluntary basis and attempts to maintain their interest and to influence them. The special reward among others is that they can earn the right to take part in Banger Racing. Enrolment at the centre is on a contractual basis where the client understands that his continued attendance is dependent on his good behaviour inside and outside the project.

On 7th October 1977 the Centre was officially registered as an Intermediate Treatment Centre and began to take auto-crime offenders sentenced at the Juvenile Courts. This group of youngsters have already taken part in Banger Racing. There is an emphasis on education to enable any client who has an aptitude for motor engineering to develop their knowledge and also to link up with recognised training courses.

There have been a number of referrals and enquiries from Education Welfare Departments concerning young truants and disruptives. As a result of this and because some young truants have a considerable auto-crime background, it seemed the project should become involved. One idea was to organise a "day release" scheme whereby the pupil would be able to spend a day or two at the centre provided he agreed to attend school for at least the same period of time. A number of young truants approached with this suggestion appeared to be enthusiastic. However, the scheme would require additional staff at the Centre and until the I.L.E.A. produce the required finance, the idea will have to be deferred.

When we first gave thought to introducing Banger Racing we had no idea that it would become the dominant feature of the Centre. Banger racing is a sport that gives the cars of yesteryear an opportunity to make one last grab at glory. In five minutes a car endures more collisions than ever before in its lifetime—a sight to be seen. An unrecognizable heap of wreckage screaming its heart out and still able to limp on in a cloud of steam is what the spectators pay to see. As far as the Centre is concerned, the appeals of banger racing are very different. The legalities involved in banger racing are minimal. You only have to be over 16 to participate and whether you are disqualified from driving makes no difference. Although the driving skills displayed on the track seem dangerously similar to those of a 'kamikaze' pilot, very few drivers are hurt. In fact minor bruises and cuts are the very worst that might happen. This is due to the very strict safety regulations laid down by Spedeworth International—our banger racing organising body.

Old bangers are not too difficult to obtain. The local council provides quite a few and occasionally we receive unwanted vehicles from private sources. Most of the value of banger racing lies in the build-up to the actual race and the effect of this on the clients promises to be very interesting. Preparing a banger involves mainly the dismantling of unwanted parts. Not much technical know-how is required. This puts more backward clients on a more equal footing. Attached to each banger is a team of one driver and one mechanic. Each pair will be totally responsible for the vehicle from beginning to end. The total amount of work involved in preparation is quite extensive, including some modifications and welding, both carried out under instruction. As the teams have no say in when the races occur, they are forced to plan well ahead and ensure that they see it through. All have made a commitment and accept that "dropping out" would incur some recrimination. The two clients in each banger team are working together towards the same goal. They are constantly having to resolve difficulties in reaching decisions, difficulties of joint responsibility, joint effort and, of course, the big one—"who's going to drive on the night?"

Banger racing offers competition, companionship, sportsmanship, excitement and achievement in return for effort.

Rebuilding of dilapidated vehicles was one of the first ideas we had. It seemed appropriate for the project to incorporate such a scheme within its framework as the idea appeared to have a lot of potential. When the project re-opened in August 1976, when a new project leader was appointed, the first two clients attending undertook to refurbish a Triumph Vitesse convertible that a well-wisher had donated to the project. Although it was in need of great repair, it had the potential to become a valuable asset. Work started on the vehicle immediately, with the two clients putting enormous effort into it. After a number of weeks they began to experience several difficulties. To restore a car from top to bottom requires a great deal of technical expertise which was not available. It proved impossible to find a volunteer with such a broad spectrum of technical and practical skills. This led the clients to become increasingly frustrated. The next problem was the commitment needed to see such a task through to the end. Perhaps if there were greater incentive there would have been greater commitment but, as it stood, learning by mistakes was the only reward and that is not very rewarding. Technically, the project is not allowed to profit from its possessions. No cash incentive could be given to the clients upon the sale of the vehicle.

Passing over ownership of a vehicle to more than one person is, of course, a recipe for domestic unrest, apart from which clients may be currently banned from driving. Nevertheless, we believe the scheme to be a desirable one, so long as some realistic system of reward can be developed. Owing to the severe limitations on working space available, the scheme is unlikely to be reintroduced within the foreseeable future.

Some young offenders own their own vehicles. Not surprisingly, the cars are not new. Usually they are immobile; they have failed the M.O.T. or they are considered just not flash enough. The centre is now able to offer solutions for all these problems. Allowing the car-owning client access to equipment such as welding, paint-spraying, body-building and engine-tuning, they are able to develop a greater interest in their cars and return them to roadworthy condition which they may have been unable to afford. At the same time they are exposed to whatever influences exist at the centre. The ideal is that by the time the clients have finished whatever they are doing to their cars, some form of re-education has taken place and they may have come to realise that to drive within the boundaries of the law is the least troublesome form of motoring. However, of six clients who did have their own cars at the centre, three were banned from driving and one could not afford the £360 insurance premium, third party only. The remaining two clients are the only ones who could reap any real reward from their efforts. We are faced with an uncomfortable contradiction. On the one hand trying to support a client's interest in his car and on the other trying to get him to realise that any future relationship with his car may be inviting re-conviction. All the six clients had been attending the centre for some months and what had happened was most encouraging. Earlier two of those who were banned and the other with the insurance problem were all adamant that they would have driven their cars regardless of any restricting legalities. If their cars had been mobile at that point I am sure they would have driven them. Over the months there had been a slow, step-by-step change in their attitudes. They gradually accepted some realisation of the futility of a negative attitude towards the laws governing motoring and found other ways in which they could achieve their goals.

SUMMARY

When the Ilderton Motor Project first came to life some three ago, there were, of course, many anxieties as to its feasibility. The first one and a half years were devoted largely to grappling with these anxieties in an effort to develop a programme that would work. The following one and a half years saw the justification of the efforts of all those involved in the project. The Ilderton Motor Project is no longer experimental; it has proved its worth as is witnessed by the widespread publicity that the project has attracted and by the fact that other social work agencies throughout the country are seriously considering, and even in the process of planning, parallel schemes. In the view of the fact that the project has operated on a very small scale, with a very limited budget, in premises that leave a lot to be desired, it has been able to discover a considerable amount of new information concerning the young motoring offender.

What has emerged is that the whole way in which young auto-crime offenders have been dealt with needs to be reappraised in the light of information that the Ilderton Motor Project has uncovered.

Perhaps this new information has only come to light because of the Project's radical way of attempting to deal with the problem of these young, T.D.A. offenders; for it is quite unusual in our society for a rehabilitative project actually to set out to give the offender what he was seeking to obtain by committing those offences. As the project has been set up to deal primarily with offenders this leaves us in a questionable position; but only because the kind of facilities which we offer are not generally available. For many of our young people, the days of ping pong and snooker are out and the motor car is in; and when eleven year olds are taking and driving away motor cars, it becomes obvious that motoring is no longer exclusively an adult joy. It would be naive to think that there are any enforceable laws that would remove the desire in young people to become involved with motoring. What we are doing is formulating a scheme whereby those young people who are infatuated with motor cars can legitimately become involved in the motoring world; and, more important, in an arena that promotes responsible attitudes towards motoring.

ATTENTION!!!

In 1976 there were over 14 million private motor cars on the road; the majority of these motorists would consider themselves to be responsible motorists. But just how responsible?

In the Metropolitan area alone, in 1976 there was a staggering 1,592,520 fixed penalty notices issued for illegal parking. There were also 223,493 other traffic offences in the same period, and that does not include the figure for road tax evasion. There is colossal "black figure of crime" in relation to motoring offences (i.e. what people get away with) and we begin to see a strong ambivalence towards some traffic regulations. Certain traffic offences have become acceptable motoring hazards and considering the complexity of traffic law it is not surprising to find that the average motorist has a relatively negative attitude towards a number of traffic regulations. Many adult motorists may say they are responsible motorists, yet will admit that they have violated some traffic law at some time. If some traffic offences have become acceptable social behaviour, how do the younger generation interpret this contradictory behaviour? Apart from the "Green Cross Code" there is very little education at school which would help young people to gain a firm perspective of the motoring world. They are forced to learn by the example set by others, who are not always the best qualified to do so.

We are indebted to the following:

W. Pearce, Esq., Chief Probation Officer, Inner London Probation & After-Care Service, for his support.

The Members of Lewisham Borough Council and Officers concerned who contribute in many ways to the Project.

John Clark and his staff at Spedeworth International (Wimbledon Banger Racing)

Geoff Goodchild and his employees at G.S.G. Autos, Camberwell, without the help of whom we would find it impossible to race.

Rosemary Brown, who acts as unpaid secretary, with tolerance and fortitude.

We wish to thank the following who have provided us with practical aids:

Ford Motor Company

Duckhams Oils Ltd.

Chrysler (U.K.) Ltd.

Nissan Motors

Greater London Council

STATISTICS

Year to November 1977

Individuals referred by probation officer or social worker	31	still attending
Attending for whole of year	9	9
Attended for 9 months	3	2
Attended for 4 months or under	19	-
	<hr/>	<hr/>
	31	11
Referred by Sherborne House		
I.L.P.A.S. (Community care and treatment unit)	10	
Referred for intermediate treatment	6	
	<hr/>	
	47	

*6 referrals came under Community Service Orders (two orders were completed while at Ilderton)

8 were currently under statutory supervision.

Known to have re-offended

6 (12.8%) all within the first 8 weeks of attendance)

Offences included in above but not connected with auto-crime

2

Total known auto-crime re-offenders

4(8.5%)

ILDERTON ROAD RESOURCE CENTRE

Statement of Account as at 31 March 1978

Grant received 1977/78	3,500.00
Monies carried forward from previous year	<u>104.49</u>
	<u>3,604.49</u>
Expenditure	
Heating, lighting and gas	624.67
Cleaning	300.92
Telephone	262.46
Office Administration and Insurance	114.29
Specialist fees and training aids	1,254.61
Centre transport	402.29
Miscellaneous	288.96
Security	200.00
Rubbish removal to be repaid at a later date	<u>120.00</u>
Total Expenditure	<u>3,568.20</u>
Reconciliation	
Total Expenditure	3,568.20
Cash balance at Bank	22.94
Cash float	<u>13.35</u>
	<u>3,604.49</u>

INCOME AND EXPENDITURE ACCOUNT 31 March 1978

<u>Income</u>			<u>Expenditure</u>
Total Grant received	3,500.00	Total Expenditure	3,568.20
Monies c/d forward	<u>104.49</u>	Balance of monies available	<u>36.29</u>
	<u>3,604.49</u>		<u>3,604.49</u>

G J WELLS
Treasurer

END