



Hunt the House

This was an awareness-raising pilot project carried out on Canford Heath in Poole to show the importance of having visible house numbers to local residents. The project was funded with a Community Grant from the Dorset Police & Crime Commissioner's 'Safer Dorset Fund' and run by voluntary organisation Ideas2Action.

Background to the project: Monique Munroe, Ideas2Action co-ordinator was a police observer on a night shift in February 2016. During the shift she was concerned to see the amount of time the police wasted looking for properties in the dark. She estimated that at least 10 minutes was wasted on just the one shift she observed by police officers looking for house numbers.

Her experience raised her own awareness about the issue of poor numbering and the full extent of the problems both police and paramedics face:

- the amount of valuable police time which could be better spent solving crime and
- in the case of paramedics (and the police in serious crime situations such as physical violence), the time could literally be a matter of life or death.

Aim:

Ideas2Action successfully applied to the Dorset Police & Crime Commissioner's Safer Dorset Fund for a community grant to run a pilot awareness-raising project on Canford Heath in Poole. This would show local residents the importance of having visible house numbers and hopefully encourage those with poor numbering or none at all, to take action to improve them.

After the project finished, what Ideas2Action learned would be shared across Dorset via the Neighbourhood Watch network in the hope that other areas would raise-awareness in their local areas.

Ultimately any action taken by the public could save a life or help police to save a crime from being committed.

What we did:

- We started by speaking to a retired paramedic. With his many years' experience spent searching for house numbers he was able to give us some valuable advice to pass onto householders to help the emergency services. We put his 'tips' on our website and we referred residents to these in our publicity material. Please see our website for the tips. <http://www.ideas2action.org.uk/hunt-the-house/>
- We placed an advert in our local community magazine alerting people to the tips and asking them to keep an eye out for a postcard we produced.

- We asked Canford Heath Neighbourhood Watch members, via e-alert, to contact us if they felt their house numbers could be hard to find, either because of poor numbering, or because the road numbering itself was unclear.
- With offers of houses to find, we asked 4 volunteers (working in pairs) to take part in what we called a 'find-the-house' exercise. This involved them going out in their pairs to find house numbers in various roads. One pair went to one address and timed themselves. They then added a larger, more visible number and the second pair had to find it. The journeys were timed. When more visible house numbers were attached it showed they found them faster, one by 2 minutes and another 1 minute 35 seconds.*
- We asked a company selling reflective house numbers if they would offer a discount to anyone on Canford Heath who ordered from them. This they agreed to and we mentioned this in our publicity. Four residents took up the offer.
- We went to speak to groups of people including a carers group, badminton club, the Association of Poole Watch Groups and also spoke to people who visited the Canford Heath Neighbourhood Watch stand at a community event. In addition we talked to residents who were out shopping and asked them if they thought the emergency services could find their house quickly. The majority thought they could, but there were two who admitted they didn't even have a number.
- We organised a free competition with prizes donated by Canford Heath Neighbourhood Watch of reflective house numbers. Those who entered said that they were now more aware of the importance of having visible house numbers. One did not have a house number, another realised the importance when they had a frail husband whose condition had deteriorated and another was an 'out of hours' driver taking GP's to people's homes who said, "*It has been one of the biggest bug bears, even using a Sat Nav, finding a house within an urban street or in a country lane because of in adequate size or position of house number or name.*"
- We produced a postcard-size leaflet which was hand delivered to 5,800 homes. This gave details of the competition and alerted people to the delay in finding house numbers as well as referring people to read the tips on our website.
- We raised the issue with our local MP and looked into house number bye-laws.
- We also calculated, (using figures provided by the police and the estimated 10 minutes wasted by the police looking for properties during the police observer session), that an estimated cost to Dorset police could annually be as high as £80,000 in police time spent looking for house numbers.

* Note: We ran the project in the late spring/summer and therefore it did not get dark until 10pm. We did not want to ask our volunteers to be going out that late to run the 'find the house' exercise, so if you want to carry out a similar exercise in your area to show how difficult it is to find properties in the dark, it would be better to choose early evening late winter.

From what we learned from running the project we are putting the following recommendations to the Dorset Police and Crime Commissioner:

To set up a focus group which would be made up of emergency service personnel (retired or current) and possibly representatives from other interested parties such as care workers, taxi drivers and those mentioned in number 4, to look at:

1. Ways in which we can promote the importance of visible house numbers in the UK
2. Research how other countries do this – one South African website suggested painting the house number on a householder's driveway.
3. Estate agents/surveyors taking some responsibility for pointing out poorly visible house numbers.
4. Looking at local bye-laws to see how these could be improved around this issue.

Action you can take in your Neighbourhood Watch area

- Use some of our ideas and raise awareness in your area.
- If you are in a more rural area and have mainly house names rather than numbers, discuss ways in which the emergency services could find the properties quicker.

Monique Munroe
Ideas2Action Co-ordinator
3 October 2016