

FAIR OAK: Church run scheme praised by police and may spread to city

Guardian angels see drop in village crime

By Duncan Eaton

duncan.eaton@dailyecho.co.ukFor up-to-the-minute news and information - dailyecho.co.uk

A CHURCH-run guardian angels scheme has been credited with a dramatic drop in crime in a Hampshire village.

Violence, thefts, criminal damage and rowdy behaviour have all been slashed since street pastors began their patrols.

Police targeting of regular trouble spots has also helped cut the number of offences recorded in Fair Oak.

But officers have praised the street pastors who act as "guardian angels" to residents as they leave pubs, clubs and youth centres on Friday nights.

The initiative, spearheaded by St Thomas Church, began last February.

The *Daily Echo* understands that the scheme may be introduced in Southampton. It already operates in neighbouring Portsmouth.

Police have now compared the number of crimes committed in the ten weeks between April 1 and June 18 this year with the same period in 2007.

Violent crimes fell 55 per cent from 29 to 13. Incidents of shop theft have dropped by a massive 94 per cent from 33 crimes to just two and criminal damage from 54 to 18, down almost 67 per cent.

Rowdy and inconsiderate behaviour, which can affect large numbers of residents, has fallen by 34 per cent from 100 incidents to 66.

Vicar of Fair Oak, the Reverend David Snuggs, who is chairman of the street pastors' management committee, was delighted that they had made an impact in such a short time.

He said: "It does feel a lot quieter round here. This is a step in the right direction but we would want to guard against complacency."

"The presence of the street pastors has diffused volatile situations and we have been able to head off potential fights."

Sergeant Sally Allgrove, of



Hampshire police, added: "We are really pleased with these results which have been achieved through a concerted effort between residents and other agencies who were determined to help reduce the number of reported incidents of low level crime that had started to blight the area."

Key issues

"By talking to residents at beat surgeries and while out on patrol officers were able to gather information that enabled us to identify the key issues of concern."

But thefts from motor vehicles rose slightly from 16 crimes to 19 for the same period. Officers are working hard to address this by raising awareness and ensuring that motorists remove items of

value when they leave their vehicles.

Not even problems caused by high spirited youngsters returning to the village after Wyvern Technology College prom night in Winchester on Thursday could overshadow the good news.

Several residents called police complaining about teenagers acting inconsiderately.

Head teacher Sheila Campbell told the *Daily Echo*: "It was attended by 206 children and 50 staff and nobody had any alcohol at the event."

"We had a delightful day and lovely evening."

"There was no poor behaviour and we do a lot of work on anti-alcohol initiatives."

Commenting on the incidents which happened in the early hours of yesterday morning, Miss Campbell added: "It is unfortunate but it is caused by the minority."

Street Pastor David Blackburn talks to girls on a night out down the pub.

COMMENT ONLINE
dailyecho.co.uk

Street pastors

STREET pastors was launched as an inter-denominational church response to urban problems, engaging with people on the streets to care, listen and dialogue.

The initiative was pioneered in

London in January 2003 by the Rev Les Isaac, director of the Ascension Trust.

It has seen some remarkable results, including drops in crime in areas where teams have been working.

Each city project is set up by Ascension Trust and run by a local co-ordinator with support from Ascension Trust and local churches and community groups, in

partnership with police, council and statutory agencies. Street pastor schemes have been rolled out in other parts of the country. Until now it has been targeted at inner city areas.

So far 19 Street pastors have been recruited at Fair Oak and have gone through an intensive training programme which had included social awareness, drugs awareness, mentoring and counselling skills.

The Street pastors come from a wide cross section of the community and are easily recognisable with their distinctive blue uniforms.



Street Pastors Mark Burden, Catherine Greenwood, David Blackburn, Brian Ewers and Claire Joyner.