

Low Participation Areas: Case Study 2 – Preston City Council

Improving participation – a communications campaign for transient student populations



Preston City Council has developed a communications campaign to target students living in privately rented housing and halls of residence. As part of the campaign the council conducted a review of services to identify where improvements could be made.

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Preston City Council: Student Communications Campaign

Background

Preston is a socially and culturally diverse city with a population of just over 130,000 which has been broadly stable for the last decade. Recently, however, it has seen substantial growth in its transient student population following expansion of the University of Central Lancashire (UCLAN). It is estimated that some 15,000 students (11% of Preston's population) now make Preston their home each year, living in halls of residence and privately rented accommodation (split approximately 45% in halls and 55% in private housing). This massive influx of student numbers living in halls and private rented houses generates a significant amount of residual waste. Engaging with this community has been key to increasing recycling participation and resulting tonnages within the city.

Aims

The principal aim of this ongoing project is:

To promote the council's kerbside recycling service and increase participation amongst the local student population and at the same time tackle the bulky waste (fly tipping) issues associated with high density student housing.

Identifying low participation areas

Preston's experiences of low recycling participation amongst its student population are not uncommon to most inner city student communities. Council officers decided a comprehensive student campaign was required to connect with all higher education students living throughout the city.

Understanding the issues

A large number of complaints made to Preston's customer call centre showed that local residents in areas with a high student population were very concerned about the large amount of waste generated by their student neighbours.

Furthermore, the council knew it had rigorous waste management targets, which it was determined to meet by increasing participation in recycling services. The student population fell into both the 'hard to reach' (those in flats) and 'hard to engage' (those in private rented accommodation) categories. The students in private accommodation have the same recycling system as all residents i.e. a yellow box for glass, cans and paper and a red box for (plastic and card). Halls of residence have mini recycling centres (MRCs) and these are being rolled out to all halls.

Feedback from residents suggested that students living in privately rented houses did not know when to recycle or what to put out for recycling. A review of the council's existing communications revealed that, although an annual recycling calendar and leaflet were being distributed, this took place in November - after most students had already moved into their accommodation. It was felt that for this target audience it was important to get information to them at the beginning of their tenancy e.g. the start of term. Furthermore, owing to the transient nature of the student population, previously distributed materials were not being retained and were therefore not available to the new occupants of student housing when they moved in at the start of the academic year (each September).

The council knew that students living in halls of residence only had limited access to recycling facilities: they could not use the kerbside scheme and were expected to take their recycling to bring banks on campus, some of which were located further away than each hall's designated refuse facility.

Anecdotal evidence also suggested that areas of student housing were becoming more densely populated as students tried to economise and the number of occupants in their houses increased beyond that of the average family size. They suspected that many of these houses either did not have a recycling box or that one was not sufficient.

As well as the sheer volume of students and their transient lifestyles which bring their own challenges. Preston is also home to a high proportion of Chinese and other far eastern students from wealthy backgrounds for whom recycling is not the cultural norm and in their own countries would be carried out by household servants.

Aware that there were both service provision and communications issues relating to students, the council very quickly established that it would need additional resources to tackle the issues. As such, Preston City Council officers were successful in securing funding from two sources outlined in the campaign budget section below.

Defining the target audience

The target audience for this campaign was students living in halls of residence and privately rented accommodation across the city.

Developing communication solutions

In September 2006, Preston City Council launched its new, high profile, student communications campaign which was initially set to run over a two year period. The campaign targets a large number of students early on in the academic calendar - at the annual Fresher's Fair and in the following weeks in the university and surrounding student residential areas.

The Council recognised that managing and taking responsibility for household waste is not top of a student's agenda when they first arrive in the city. In order to build up a contacts list for students, links with the university housing office were made. This was further developed through the "Beans means recycling" campaign (see below). Officers also attended student induction meetings and included information about waste and recycling in the student induction packs.

In order to engage students in the campaign the council decided a campaign gimmick was required and offered free "emergency tins of baked beans" to students. Cans of baked beans with specially designed labels - branded with Preston City Council and carrying information about the city kerbside recycling scheme, the bring sites in university halls as well as council contact details. Promotional cans that were recycled within a fixed competition period were automatically entered into a prize draw for a laptop computer. The competition could be entered by either using special competition bins at existing halls of residence bring sites, at the Students Union or by placing the can in a kerbside recycling box.

Free Limited Edition, Baked Beans

Preston City Council wants you to recycle, whether you live in student halls or in a shared house. If you have a go at recycling with this tin, you will be automatically entered into our prize draw, with the chance of winning some great prizes!

Place this tin of beans, once it is clean and empty, in any of Preston City Council's recycling bins or boxes between 01/09/06 to 30/11/06. Recycling sites and special promotional bins will be placed throughout the university campus. You can also place your tin in your yellow-topped council recycling box for kerbside collection, if you live in a house in a residential area. For further details please contact the Recycling Helpline.

The winner will be chosen at random from all valid entries. Entrants must produce a valid student I.D. to claim prize.

Closing date 30/11/06. Terms and conditions apply, to see full list see website www.preston.gov.uk

Recycling Information

If you live in a shared house you should have the following:

- 1 grey bin (For: Non-recyclables)
- 1 yellow topped recycling box (For: Paper/Glass/Cans)
- 1 red topped recycling box (For: Plastic Bottles/Cariboards)
- 1 brown bin for garden waste (For: prunings with garden)
- 2 green kitchen waste containers (For: prunings in the kitchen waste bin area)

Contact Information:

For further information on your recycling sites in your area, collection day details or if you require extra recycling boxes, please call our Recycling Helpline on: 01772 966906 quoting reference BEANS1 or Email any requests to: Beans@Preston.gov.uk

recycle your BAKED BEANS CAN + win prizes

Preston City Council 415g

recycle

Preston City Council

Over 2000 cans were given away in the first year of the campaign. As the cans were distributed, each tin was numbered and contact details of each student were taken. This allowed the council to build on their database of student properties and also to contact the winner at the end of the promotion. This database can now be

used to undertake mail-shots to student properties at the beginning of the student year to distribute comprehensive waste and recycling information including collection calendars.



This mail-shot has been an invaluable tool in helping inform students about refuse/recycling collection days and how to use their local schemes.

Campaign budget

The student campaign was funded through Defra's Waste Performance and Efficiency Grant (£121,000 each year over three years) allowing for two full time recycling assistants (not solely for the student campaign) and a European Metals Recycling Reload fund of £16,000 over two years.

Achievements and results

Work in October 2006 resulted in 500 extra recycling box requests in one student area. This work helped increase set-out rates for the kerbside recycling scheme by 10% in the target area. A total participation rate of 57% was achieved over the period of the 'Beans' campaign, which is much higher than other inner city terraced areas dominated by student rented occupation.

The campaign also generated extensive local media coverage, which helped publicise the council's recycling message to students in Preston. The media coverage also helped promote the campaign to local residents (the press article is shown below).

Press Release sent

Students get beans in recycling drive



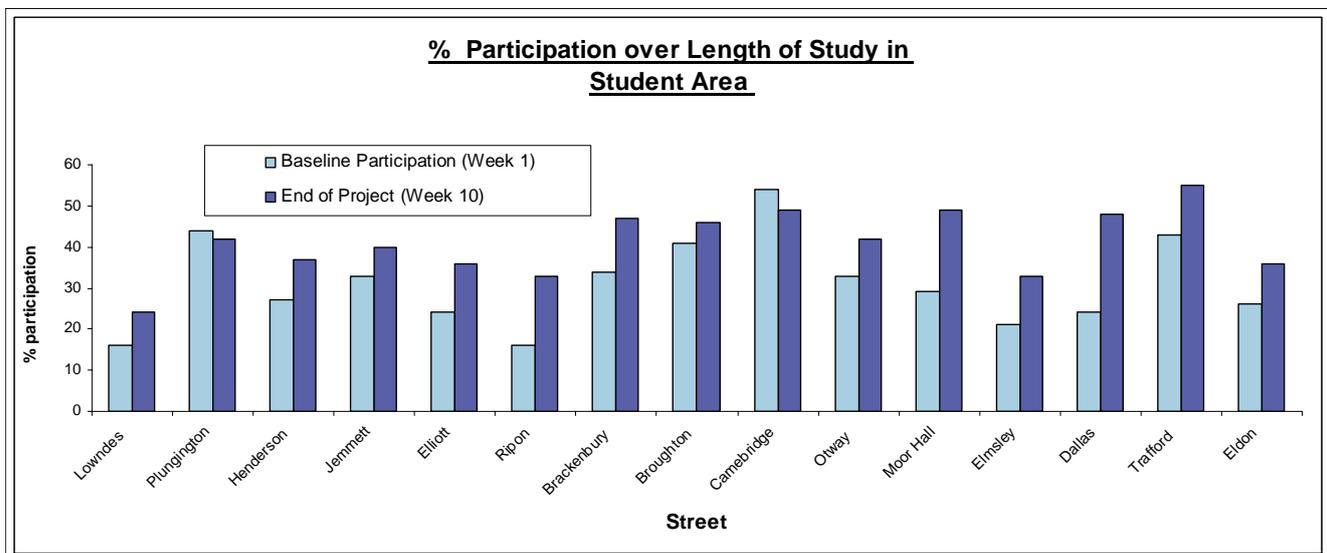
Thousands of students are being given tins of baked beans in a bid to spread the recycling message. Each new UCLan student will be offered a tin and in return they will be encouraged to recycle and have the chance of winning a range of prizes, including a laptop computer. The £2,600 bill for the beans will be met by European Metal Recycling (EMR).

Andrew Cutts, Preston Council's recycling communications assistant, said: "The tins are a great way of encouraging students to recycle and use the facilities at their halls, or the household recycling scheme if they're in private accommodation."

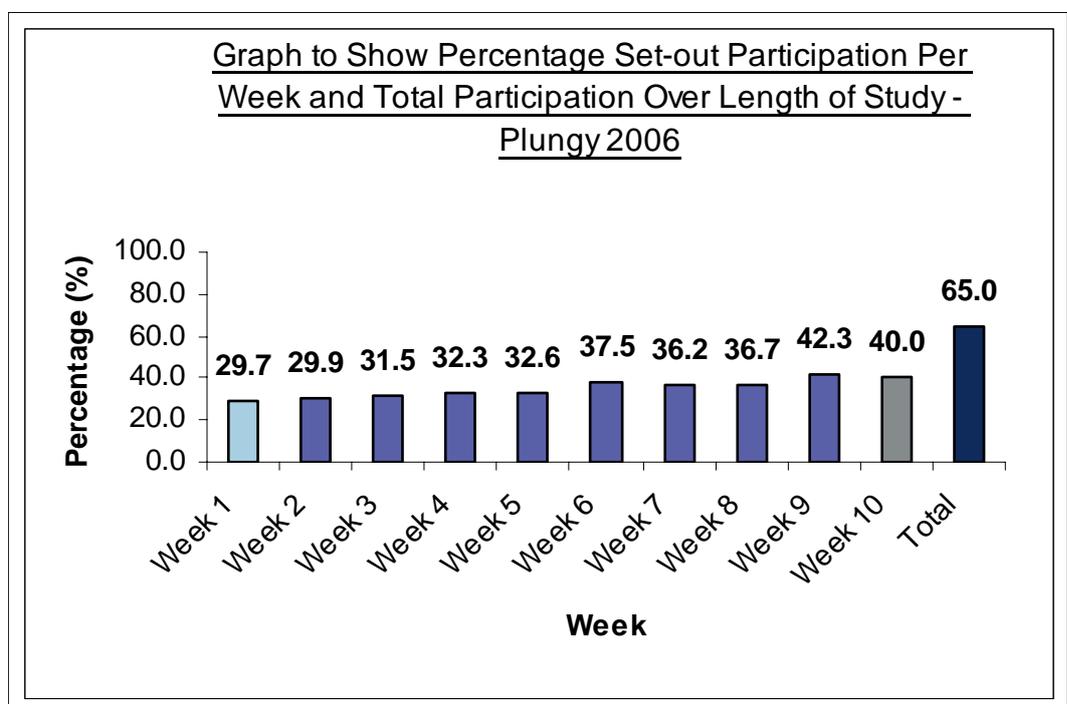
The tins are being given away at UCLan Students' Union Intro Fair on Wednesday and throughout Intro Fortnight. It marks the start of a two-year campaign to encourage UCLan students to recycle.

Rebecca Fairclough, UCLan Students' Union President, said: "Campaigns like this are a superb way of showing students how to use Preston's recycling scheme."

The graph below demonstrates the increase in participation for streets in the Plungington Road area, one of the principal target areas near to the university with a high proportion of student accommodation. The baseline (light blue) was measured in the week before the 'Beans' campaign started.



The graph below charts the percentage of houses that were setting out a recycling box for collection over the campaign's ten week period. As some residents did not set out their boxes every week the 'true participation rate' i.e. the percentage of householders participating in the recycling scheme across all ten weeks is shown in dark blue.



The campaign also had the support of the university housing office and the Student Union. The 'Beans' campaign is part of a much wider waste strategy, which the council is developing with the university. A councillor from the University Ward and the Senior Recycling Officer from the council now sit on a steering group with representatives from University Housing, Security and the Student Union. The steering group has also worked together to produce leaflets for the landlords regarding their responsibility towards waste.

Lessons learnt

The three key lessons learnt can be summarised as follows:

- Target students with communications at the start of each term/academic year as this will help avert the usual build up of waste materials and subsequent complaints from neighbouring residents;
- The “Beans means recycling” campaign allowed council officers to develop a database of students with which they could deliver follow-up communications campaigns;
- The steering group formed out of a partnership between council officers, the university housing office and student union and the University ward councillor has proved to be a progressive partnership for resolving issues early on and for agreeing the best communications approach.

For further information, please contact:

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