



Police Staff SAFE-T Kiosk: Gainesville, FL

Seeks to Prevent Crime & Victimization in Hospitality Zones

Increased sexual batteries with alcohol, underage drinking, acquaintance rape and hospitality districts as common factors led to an innovative approach to violent crime prevention in hospitality districts. In 2007, Gainesville Police Department launched a SAFE-T (Safe Assistance and Education Team) kiosk staffed with police and trained young adult volunteers with the ultimate goal of reducing “date rape,” robbery, battery and alcohol-related crimes. The program used bold crime prevention and deterrence messaging and personal outreach by police to college-aged adults arriving in entertainment districts, as well as intervention and help to persons in need of assistance when they exited the bars.

Problem Statement

The SAFE-T kiosk was conceived as a crime prevention tool to combat rising violent crime in the City of Gainesville. In the fall of 2006, sexual batteries increased with many involving alcohol, underage drinking, acquaintance rape and hospitality districts as common factors in many incidents. Considerable discussion and research focused on how to provide non-traditional violent crime prevention in hospitality districts.

Objectives of the kiosk police officer focused on deterrence to risky behaviors such as binge, excessive and underage drinking, facilitating use of safe transportation alternatives, and encouraging patrons to use a buddy system and guard their drinks. The ultimate goal was to decrease violent crimes such as sexual battery, battery and other crimes which can lead to trauma and injury such as DUI.

Stakeholders

- University of Florida GatorWell
- PIPSA Coalition – Partners in Prevention of Substance Abuse
- CDS Behavioral Services
- University of Florida College of Health and Human Performance
- University of Florida Student Government
- Gainesville Responsible Hospitality Partnership (GRHP)
- Media providing many positive print and audio pieces

All of these partners have had active and engaged roles. They have advocated funding, provided volunteers, referenced the concept amongst other networks, provided materials such as brochures and messaging, and allowed use of proven effective messaging as part of a social norming campaign.

Process

General fund monies were allocated to utilize a kiosk officer on busy bar nights (Wednesdays, Fridays, and Saturdays) in the University Park hospitality district. This began as a trial during the spring 2007 college semester. Officers were provided guidelines that the assignment was primarily crime prevention and education oriented as opposed to enforcement since other officers were assigned to that task. Edgy messaging, appropriate brochures and literature was obtained both in-house and from other social service agencies in North Central Florida. The hood of a marked patrol car served as the kiosk itself and information and posters were placed on it denoting the kiosk location.

Throughout spring 2007, the assigned officers would approach groups of patrons coming into the bar district and present information in a conversational, non-confrontational manner. In most cases, information was provided such as a "BAC" (blood alcohol level) card. Post bar closing, the same officers would then attempt to deter victimization. This was done by locating overly intoxicated persons, offering alternative transportation options, and making sure solo patrons were matched back up with friends before leaving the area. Kiosk officers were notified of extremely intoxicated and/or belligerent persons by enforcement officers, bar staff and bystanders, which enabled the kiosk officer to respond as appropriate.

The program was promoted to numerous community groups and requests for volunteers were made to boost effectiveness. Community, substance abuse coalition groups and hospitality groups all were educated about the kiosk. The concept received accolades and much media attention. University of Florida graduate students in the College of Health and Human Performance became involved on a volunteer basis interacting and providing information to their peers as well as conducting alcohol consumption research. This volunteer group was partnered with the kiosk as a result of the support of University of Florida Assistant Professor Dr. Virginia Dodd, who oversaw the development of student-designed promotional messaging used in pamphlets, brochures, banners and posters with bold and edgy images that resonated with college age adults. (See examples.)

A Byrne grant award of \$18,000 including \$15,000 for personnel costs and \$3,000 for materials was awarded in July to begin funding October 2007. In September 2007, a webinar discussing the kiosk and other innovative crime prevention techniques in hospitality districts was hosted by RHI. Presenters were kiosk concept originator Gainesville Police Captain Ed Book, Dr. Dodd, and Community Redevelopment Agency Downtown Coordinator Kelly Huard.

Second year funding through reduced Byrne grant funds of \$9,000 was awarded to start October 2008.

Broader based planning for this next year includes:

- Posters and prevention messaging inside bars and bar bathrooms.
- Research into bar ID wristbands with crime prevention messaging.
- Establishing an actual kiosk stand as opposed to a roving police officer located in proximity to the marked police car.
- Introducing new edgy materials and creating bookmarks or other items that college age adults are likely to keep.

Outcome

Commercial Area Impact

The University Park hospitality district is fully aware of the SAFE-T kiosk and is supportive. Further, the adjacent University Park neighborhoods are also supportive and feel that these types of crime prevention efforts will have long term crime reduction implications.

Greatest Accomplishments

The University of Florida has touted this type of crime prevention project as making a difference and the project has been the topic of a large Community Alcohol Coalition presentation.

In grant reporting, police officers documented thousands of personal contacts with patrons. Statistically, sexual batteries and fights within this entertainment district remained about the same as the preceding year (without the kiosk) but it is hoped these will also decline.

By designating the kiosk officer to interact with patrons in a more relaxed and non-confrontational atmosphere, they were able to provide various preventative and educational services, such as connecting intoxicated patrons with alternative transportation and obtaining medical aid for injured patrons. This allowed the other district police officers to concentrate principally on enforcement needs.

In one particularly telling example of kiosk work, a police officer proactively located an underage highly intoxicated female near the hospitality district. She was dazed with clothes in disarray and needed medical attention. When contacted she was unaware of where she was and indicated she may have been sexually assaulted. This contact by the kiosk officer likely prevented further harm to the patron.

In an anecdotal poll, bar patrons, graduate student volunteers and adjacent residents report an increased feeling of personal safety at least in part due to the kiosk concept.

An unexpected outcome was the high level of information 'saturation'. The kiosk became so known in the College Park hospitality district during the fall 2007 and spring 2008 semesters that students and college age adults frequenting bars in that area were essentially "over saturated" with the prevention information. As a result, many of the persons approached by kiosk police officers said they had received information in the past and were already familiar with the messaging. Although the high college student

“awareness quotient” was a positive indicator that students were cognizant of the educational aims and location of the kiosk in the case of an emergency, it is difficult to determine whether the ‘over-saturation’ positively or negatively impacted the effectiveness of the kiosk. Plans to place materials inside bars that reinforce the messages provided by the kiosk officer are currently being considered.

Economic Changes

At this juncture, it is too early to quantify any economic changes.

Challenges and Lessons Learned

Biggest challenges – The largest challenges were first obtaining funding for such an unusual and non-enforcement type of concept within law enforcement. In addition, consistently lining up a trained volunteer to assist the one kiosk police officer was difficult. Many groups pledged support but it was challenging to find reliable volunteers who were willing to talk to patrons.

Lastly, once funding was obtained, internal training for law enforcement officers in the differing concept of this type of citizen interaction and the “mission” of the SAFE-T Kiosk concept was also a challenge. Since different officers work this assignment via sign up, consistency amongst officers is important.

Suggestions for others undertaking a similar approach – Determine a location within a hospitality district where police officers and citizens will be able to interact in a non-confrontational way with patrons. A true kiosk stand is not necessary but a location for volunteers and officers is. Additionally, materials, brochures and handouts that will not be thrown away as soon as they are handed to bar patrons should be ordered and obtained in advance. Determine what community partners will be able to assist and then have a community volunteer schedule other volunteers.

Inform the bars in the area of the kiosk officer so they can contact the officer directly if they need assistance with intoxicated patrons. The law enforcement agency should put together a short one-page or less guideline explaining tasks and what is expected of police working the kiosk. Lastly, engage media who will then publish positive articles publicizing the concept. Internal reports should be generated by every officer who works the kiosk to assist in future reporting.

Jurisdiction

Gainesville, Alachua County, Florida. Gainesville’s population is approximately 121,000 with two hospitality zones: the Downtown and University Park hospitality districts. The SAFE-T kiosk is a grant funded program currently being utilized in the smaller University Park hospitality district. This area encompasses approximately eleven bars, several specialty shops, university paraphernalia and bookstores, and several smaller restaurants. The University Park hospitality district borders a main thoroughfare and lies between the large

University of Florida campus and residential neighborhoods. It is approximately 6 square blocks.

Funding

The Kiosk is a low cost, low overhead project. General City funds provided monies for one overtime officer on a limited basis for approximately three nights a week. Byrne Grant funding was obtained beginning October 2007 for the amount of \$18,000 for one year. \$15,000 is allocated for personnel overtime costs and \$3,000 for materials. For the period beginning October 2008, Byrne grant funds have significantly declined and \$9,000 has been allocated for fiscal year 2008-09 personnel costs.

Spin-off Projects

Other projects or initiatives – Due to the success of the kiosk in the University Park hospitality district, this concept is being replicated on a trial basis in the larger Downtown hospitality district. Graduate students at the University of Florida have also been conducting underage drinking research which has been presented in numerous forums and conferences and will help the kiosk police officers adapt our approach to increase effectiveness. Other aspects of the kiosk whose impact within bars is being evaluated are talking urinals and a “piss-screen” (copyrighted term by vendor). Other bold or edgy messaging being developed includes bookmarks, wristbands for bar entry and posters within the bars themselves in non-traditional areas like bar bathrooms.

Start Date: 10/1/2007 - 11/4/2008

Contact

Ed Book