



EURO
CITIES



eCopper

Connecting young people and police

In an innovative move to build better relationships between the police and young people, online chat service eCopper was launched by Oulu in 2009. It links young people, the police force and youth workers using an anonymous text-based chat platform hosted by one of Finland's most popular social networking sites.

Reaching the internet generation

Chat sessions happen once a week, on a Monday evening between 16:00 and 18:00, and attract around 200 users per session.

The sessions are hosted by a youth worker and allow young people to chat freely and anonymously with police workers on issues that affect their daily lives. Common topics include traffic rules, drug and alcohol use and personal security. The sometimes strained relationships between police and young people often stem from a distrust or misunderstanding between the two parties. This chat service helps to clarify uncertainties and build trust.

With the internet being one of the most popular forms of communication between young people, eCopper allows the police to reach out to more young people and on a more informal level. Participants are aged between 12 and 18 years, and the police and youth workers verify their profiles so that users can be certain they are communicating with the right person. While the service is first and foremost targeting young people in Oulu, the nature of the internet means that many participants are based further afield. Visitors can either participate actively, or can join as observers to the conversation.

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It is important to have the opportunity to chat with police. Online it is much easier to ask questions and air our concerns compared to face-to-face communication or by phone. Many people, including me, don't dare discuss our concerns with the police.

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eCopper user

cities in action

February 2013

where: Oulu, Finland
what: knowledge society, social affairs
when: 2009+

Open to chat

With some 2,000 visits each month, the figures show that young people have welcomed the service. Consultations began in 2008 to gauge the opinions of young people, revealing that 70% were open to the idea of having an interactive chat service with the police.

The city is encouraged by the enthusiasm of the participants, and also encourages the organisation of real-life meetings, for example at youth centres and summer camps, which have also proven to be a success.

The service, a collaboration between the city's youth affairs department and the police force, has been very simple to set up. Police and youth workers have incorporated it into their normal working hours so it has not incurred extra cost in terms of working time.

The platform itself is run by a private company that, Somia Dynamoid Oy, as a not-for-profit activity and they do not charge the city for the service.

The operating costs for the city are therefore relatively low at €434,000, with 60% of the funding coming from the European Social Fund.

The success of the project has led the city to begin developing a guidebook on working with social media for other professions, such as nurses. Based on the success of eCopper, this initiative may help the city to start expanding the service to other sectors.

Surfing towards success

Nevertheless, it has not been without a few obstacles. The timing of the chat sessions, early Monday evenings, was a change from the original time of later on Friday evenings, but occasionally the topics being discussed became inappropriate so setting the earlier time has helped address this problem.

The police and youth workers communicate with each other from their respective locations using a microphone so that they can discuss how to respond to the topics being raised.

The project is achieving its goal of building trust and better relationships between young people and the police.

The project has been recognised both on a national and European level for its success, receiving an honourable mention at the European Crime Prevention awards in 2009 and winning the EUROCITIES award in the innovation category in 2012.



Posting questions about for example, mopeds and penal responsibility, interests me. There are laws about these but who has the time to search for them? And they need to be translated so that young people can understand them, since we either don't understand the language or don't have time to read through long pages of information. So, in brief, we want a yes/no answer and the reasons behind it.

eCopper user

