How to run a road safety X-Factor project

“How The Road Safety X Factor is about making road safety relevant to children by injecting a bit of fun and theatre into it, whilst getting the message about keeping safe on the roads across. It’s a fine balance but just by making the day special it generates a lot of interest in the subject and it has worked very well over the past 3 years.” – Aisha Butt, Hounslow Traffic, Transport Planning and Road Safety Team

Hounslow Council and Ealing Council continue to invest in junior road safety officers (JRSOs) – children who are supported to promote road safety among classmates in their primary schools. The JRSO scheme is part of overall work to reduce the number of children who are killed or seriously injured (KSIs) on the roads in the borough.

Over the last three years (2012-14) the councils have developed an innovative approach based on ITV’s X-Factor which gives road safety a higher profile in the schools and thanks the JRSOs for their work. The project received the London Road Safety Council’s Laurie Bunn award for Innovation in Road Safety education, training and publicity in 2014.

The method can easily be replicated in other local authorities and the project team are keen to share what they have learned. This article covers how the programme works and sets out a ten step plan so you can do the same in your area:

- The project in a nutshell
- Background
- A ten step plan for running a similar programme
- Running the Road Safety X-Factor Final
- Learning over the three years
- Filming the event

1. The project in a nutshell

Almost 50 pupils from six Hounslow and Ealing schools battled it out to be crowned Junior Road Safety Officer X-Factor champion in an event a Hounslow’s civic suite in June, 2014.

The event saw the children perform their own road safety-themed acts, having won the right to represent their schools in the final through auditions throughout the year.
The content for the event was led by the children themselves. The performers had all passed auditions in their own schools which were organised by each school’s own junior road safety officer – a child who works to promote road safety among classmates– and all the acts had been written by the children themselves.

Celebrity lookalike judges and glitzy decoration and lighting gave the event a glamorous feel. The format is something the children can really relate to, and makes learning about road safety fun.

All the performances were about road safety, walking and cycling.

As well as the performances, the pupils (JRSOs and the performers) took part in three road safety themed workshops to develop their knowledge and skills – including a BMX skills session, Treasure Hunt and a Crime Scene Investigation scenario.

All pupils and teachers got to vote for their favourite act and the winning act in 2014, Street Wise from Hounslow Heath Juniors, had written lyrics to the music from the Pharrell Williams song ‘Happy’.

2. Background

The project grew out of a Transport for London (TfL) awards day for JRSOs which included a ‘Rhythm and Rhyme’ category which involved writing a rap, song or poem about road safety. This awards day was cancelled and this idea was developed in its place, riding on the popularity of the X-Factor TV show format. Aisha Butt has been running the programme as part of her work as a School Travel Adviser. She explained:

‘The X-Factor thing exploded and everyone was interested in that, so I thought why not make the JRSOs in the school the X-Factor judges, have them run their own auditions and boot camp – make it more interesting.’

The approach has evolved over the three years. At first it just took place in individual schools in Hounslow, and then links with a neighbouring council, Ealing, led to the idea of having a Hounslow-Ealing final where the performers could show off what they had been doing.

The target group is KS2 (ages 7-11 years old) but some schools open it to KS1 (ages 4-6 years old) as well. The aim is to increase road safety awareness among children in anticipation of them beginning to travel to school more independently by the time they are in year 7. Injury rates shoot up for pedestrians and cyclists in this age group across the country.

Aisha sets out a ten step plan on how to go about running your own programme which would culminate in a Road Safety X-Factor final in June.
3. A ten step plan

**Step one:** Book the venue and date for the final well in advance (January). Hounslow and Ealing use Hounslow’s local civic centre which has professional conference facilities and is located in parkland which is suitable for outdoor activities. They cater for a total group of 60-70 people including children and teachers. The event takes place in school time 10:00am-2:30pm and parents do not attend.

Run through the broad requirements with the venue including room layout, decoration and lightening arrangements. You can see from the videos of the events (see weblink below) that the set-up has become more glitzy as the Hounslow-Ealing event has evolved.

**Step two:** Get the schools on board. In Hounslow, 15-20 schools run JRSO schemes. 5 schools are invited to take part in the X-Factor programme each year, with involvement rotating so that the same schools do not take part each time.

**Step three:** Start meetings with JRSOs soon after Easter. Talk with the JRSOs and give them a guide a written guide that breaks down the activities that they need to carry out. Advise the JRSOs to book an assembly date to launch the project and also to set aside an audition week. They also need to set a date for the final assembly in their school (before the end of May) when their winner will be selected.

**Step four:** Give the JRSOs tips on running their auditions. Suggest they use classrooms at lunchtime, take a year group every day, and choose the top two acts to go through to the final assembly. Ask them to be constructive in their feedback and to choose the best acts; ensure that the acts have a name; dress up and practice for their performance at the final assembly.

**Step five:** Give the JRSOs tips on how to run their final. For example, teachers might be the judges who comment on each act, but that the pupils should be the ones to vote after all the performances have taken place. Decide whether parents are able to attend the assembly. A common method for voting is to put discs (casino chips) into yogurt pots that identify the respective acts. Aisha says that she is also always invited to be a judge. After the winner has been chosen in the individual schools, advise the JRSOs to encourage their acts to keep practising.

**Step six:** Book the judges for the final including the celebrity look-alikes and agree who will be MC/compère. Also book the workshops. The event is not just a singing dancing show. The workshops are aimed at boosting the road safety knowledge of the JRSOs and so they are better able to provide input at school and mentor acts next time.

**Step seven:** Set up the arrangements for those attending the final. Ask for the names of the schools’ winning acts, the number of JRSOs and teachers that will attend, and ensure permissions for photos and video are in place for all pupils. Assign a table at the venue for each school. A maximum of 10 people per school attend – four performers (one act), four JRSOs and two teachers.
Step eight: Order the trophies; create a scoring sheet for each attendee; make up voting boxes (with pictures of each act); prepare voting discs; make up goodie bags for JRSoS winners. Also, source exhibitors – e.g. Safer Neighbourhood Police, ‘Smoothie bike stall’ (see video) and prepare materials so the children can make their own badges with a badge machine. Prepare a Powerpoint presentation which makes the timetable clear; introduces the judges; provides the names and pictures of each act and the details of the workshops including pictures of the facilitators.

Step nine: Send the final numbers and dietary requirements of the attendees to the venue.

Step ten: Run the Road Safety X-Factor final! – see below.

After the event, use the momentum that it creates to promote the JRSoS scheme. The children go back to their schools saying, ‘it was amazing’. This excites potential new members. Advise the JRSoS to select the new group before the summer ends, telling them what they get to do in their role.

Evaluation

Every school is given an evaluation form for them to review the event as a whole including the workshops. The teacher usually fills it in with comments from the pupils which are collected at the end of the day. This is carefully reviewed and the event had improved as a result of these comments.

4. Running the Road Safety x-Factor final

The final follows this format:

- Arrival, refreshments, badge making, exhibitors
- Welcome and introductions
- Acts 1-4 [5 mins per act]
- Workshops (3 in parallel)
- Break
- Acts 5-8 [5 mins per act]
- Workshops (repeat)
- Lunch
- Workshops (repeat)
- Voting and group photo with mayor
- Winner announcement and photos

Fifty minutes are set aside for lunch with allows time for catch up if the programme overruns.

Aisha welcomes everybody and hands over to the MC for the day – a local DJ who has been very involved in the Safe Drive Stay Alive campaign. His engaging manner
relaxes the children. He introduces and has banter with the judges. He also speaks to the acts after they perform.

**The judges**

The judges usually comprise one from each of the two local authorities plus the celebrity lookalikes. Ealing’s Transport Projects and Policy Team Manager was a judge in 2014. The judges give encouraging feedback and do not state preferences.

The idea of celebrity lookalikes as judges was a response to feedback from the children after the 2012 event. They wanted the final event to be more like the X-Factor on TV – more glitzy. It was decided to hire lookalikes to imitate famous TV judges. In 2013 the star was ‘Simon Cowell’ and in 2014 they was a double-act – ‘Gary Barlow’ and ‘Sharon Osbourne’. These performers have added the glamour required and have participated fully including taking part in the road safety workshops, chatting with the young children and posing for ‘selfies’. The young children have been happy to ‘believe’ in them and their involvement as been a big hit. It has helped raise the profile of the role of the JRSOs, as the children talk a lot about the event afterwards and mention this element at school assemblies and in newsletters.

**The voting**

The children are encouraged not to simply vote for their own school. Even when this has happened it tends to be counterbalanced by the votes of teachers and exhibitors. To ensure this doesn’t happen at any future events, as each school is called up to vote the box with their schools act will be taken away, and returned once they have voted.

**Awards**

The winner/s of the final each get a trophy. All the performers and JRSOs get a certificate.

There are also prizes for the winner of the treasure hunt and the BMX workshop (those who completed the tasks quickest). They get to pick a prize from a goody bag which includes items like bike lights, pencil cases etc.

‘Gary Barlow’ sang a song whilst the votes were being counted.

**The workshops**

The aim of the workshops is to inform and empower JRSOs in their role and also to pass on road safety information to the performers in an engaging way. The three workshops are run in parallel – once in the morning and then two sessions in the afternoon. They covered three topics and the children attend all three:
A. Treasure hunt
B. BMX skills
C. Crime Scene Investigation (CSI) – road crash investigation

A. Treasure hunt: this popular 30 minute workshop takes place in the parkland immediately outside the civic centre and has featured in each of the project’s three years. There are 25 questions and the children use the clues to find the answers. All the questions are related to healthy lifestyles/road safety. The children return when the group leader blows a whistle.

The session is facilitated by Hounslow’s school crossing patrol leader, and teachers from the schools also keep an eye on the children. Being outside gives the children a chance to run around and let off steam. The facilitator offers these tips:

- Have a clear line of vision so you can see all the areas the children could go
- Do a risk assessment before and a sweep of the area on the morning of the event, to clear hazards like broken glass before the start
- Count the number of children at the start and end
- Be aware of who else is in the park
- Provide high viz vests for the children
- Give them clear instructions to work in pairs and how long they have
- Ask the teachers present to walk around with their pupils
- Make arrangements for pupils using/supervising (if public) toilets

B. BMX bike skills: this 30 minute workshop, which was also run in the park close to the conference venue gives the children the chance to use BMX bikes on a track set up for the event. It supports the aim of promoting active travel and, like the treasure hunt, gives the children the chance to do something physical. They try out the bikes and the fastest person round the course wins a prize at the end of the day.

This workshop has evolved since 2012, when it was more of a maintenance session. Pupils were shown how to fix punctures and were taken through all the components of a bike. This was interesting to a few pupils who liked cycling but didn’t keep all pupils engaged, so it was changed to a more active session with races in 2013 and 2014. It has proved to be very popular with all pupils – boys and girls.

C. Crime Scene Investigation: This workshop was new for 2014 and rated a great success by the children. The 30 minute session was run indoors by the Theatre company – The Riot Act which developed the format based on a brief from Aisha. It presents the children with a scenario – there has been a crash and a young person has been killed. They enter the room to see a Zebra crossing with a child’s body on the floor covered by a blanket. The child had been wearing a hoodie and was using earbuds (phones) when he was run over. Actors play characters and each tell their story – providing information about what happened. The children attending the workshop are the investigators. They are given a crime scene number. They are asked to find out what happened and who is responsible.
The children listen to the young person’s friend’s account first and then others involved such as the driver and the paramedic who attended the scene. They hear that the driver did not see the child until it was too late. They get the chance to take part in a role play where they try on a dark coloured hoodie and realise how hard it can be for someone you to see you. Two real police officers also took part in the workshop, playing the roles of the first people on the scene and asking pupils to investigate.

The children take the activity very seriously and ask the characters searching questions. The purpose is not to scare the children but to show how a range of factors contribute to road crashes and that it may not simply be the driver being at fault. Was playing a ball game near a road a contributory factor? What about visibility?

5. Learning over the three years

Managing the process

Having one person to lead the process fits in well with supporting other JRSO work. On the day of the final, additional staff are needed, particularly the workshop leaders and a colleague to manage the badges for the young people. Having the children’s teachers present also helps. This enables the overall co-ordinator to ensure that all is going smoothly including liaising with the centre’s audio-visual team which manages the venue’s microphones, backing tracks for the performances and the lights.

Evaluation

Feedback from the children and teachers has played a key part in shaping the development of the process over the three years. The children were positive about the 2012 event but wanted it to be ‘more glitzy’. The 2013 event made better use of lightening and decorated the room with Star Cloth. Entry into the main room was delayed to create a big ‘reveal’ – a ‘wow’ moment. It was also the first year a professional look-alike took part. The ‘Simon Cowell’ character added further authenticity.

The CSI workshop was added in 2014 after luke-warm feedback the previous year about the road safety quiz workshop. The CSI workshop proved particularly popular and several of the teachers that attended it have subsequently commissioned it to be run in their own schools.

The main aim of the evaluation has been to ensure that the event is relevant and delivers the right messages. It has also shown the value of this kind of work, which can help secure funding and the goodwill of senior managers and councillors, especially in difficult times when budgets are being cut.
Sustainability

The cost of the project, including the event in the civic suite, is funded from the two councils’ existing budget, funds provided by Transport for London (TfL). The model is now sufficiently strong that Aisha believes it can be continued by colleagues now that she has moved into a different role. She will still be able to mentor her successor.

Looking to the future, there is scope to attract greater press coverage and more involvement from local businesses – including being involved as judges.

6. Filming the event

Photos and videos of the project a good way of showing children what happens at the final. As the project has developed, it has produced higher quality videos of the event each year. These short films are uploaded to YouTube and are very successful ways of promoting the role of JSROs. The film is made by the AV team in the council. There is an internal charge but it is much more effective than using an external company. Photos of the events have been uploaded to a Flickr account. They give a great sense of how the day works. The web-links for the YouTube and Flickr accounts are below.

Further information

Junior Road Safety X-Factor videos on YouTube –
www.youtube.com/channel/UC3p7xI3dC3Ej7GJBj8b0-w/videos

Junior Road Safety X-Factor videos on Flickr –
www.flickr.com/photos/hounslowroadsafety/sets/72157645244011814/

Hounslow Council has also produced a Junior Travel Ambassadors’ Toolkit which covers the wider work of the JSROs. It can be downloaded from CAPT’s Making the Link website – www.makingthelink.net/sites/default/files/resources/JTA-toolkit.pdf

Contact: Aisha Butt, Transport Projects Officer, Hounslow
Aisha.Butt@Hounslow.gov.uk 020 8583 2563

Related links

Children give road safety the X-Factor – www.makingthelink.net/case-study/children-give-road-safety-x-factor

Safe Drive Stay Alive – www.safedrive.org.uk

Child Accident Prevention Trust – www.capt.org.uk