



OWL Shows Communities Do Give a Hoot

Award Winning Watch Management & Public Communications

Joint press release issued by Flintshire Neighbourhood Watch Association & Direct Path Solutions Ltd

4 August 2011

A third of people say they now worry less about crime since they signed up to OWL, the award-winning public communications system. Flintshire Neighbourhood Watch Association (FNWA) working with North Wales Police & Community Safety Partnerships in Flintshire & Wrexham recently conducted a survey asking the public for their views on how OWL has affected their attitudes. The results, said Denise Edwards, CEO of FNWA, clearly indicate that local people feel they are genuinely benefitting from this crime & community safety initiative.

96% agreed that receiving OWL messages (by email, phone, fax and SMS) has helped them to become more informed about crime, events and other initiatives in their area. 93% said they would benefit to hear from their local police officer via OWL when local incidents occur. Hearing about local crimes through OWL does not generally increase fear as the survey reveals 31% worry less about crime now compared to only 14% who say they worry more. The net result is 73% claiming to be more aware of scams and dodgy cold callers and 62% are more vigilant in protecting their property and themselves since signing up to OWL. Half of those responding are thinking more about home security improvements.

The July 2011 survey reached out to 1000's of watch members from neighbourhoods, farms and rural properties, businesses and schools. It was conducted online and on paper - for those without Internet access.

While the Government is promoting The Big Society to encourage communities to help and support each other, our survey reveals that 58% are now willing to help their neighbours **more** compared to before they started receiving OWL messages.

OWL and the operators for North Wales (Flintshire Neighbourhood Watch Association) aren't just succeeding in building community spirit, but dramatic increases in police confidence have been logged by the survey with 47% saying they have since **increased** their confidence in the police. 62% have increased their confidence in Neighbourhood Watch.

Denise Edwards went on to say the OWL & Watch schemes enhance the roles of the Community Safety Partnerships and Neighbourhood Policing teams at local level. "Communication is playing a vital role to inform and change people's attitudes and behaviour towards crime and community problems by stemming opportunities for crime to take root as well as helping to add strength to enforcement against organised crime. The system is innovative and, as evidenced by the survey results from local people, is helping in safeguarding them, their communities, in turn helping to reduce vulnerability to becoming victims of crime. It is helping to raise awareness of the threats and methods of organised criminals as well as providing the public and businesses with information to enable them to protect themselves and ensure closer working with partners."

"People in Flintshire & Wrexham are clearly benefitting and helping to bring crime down. Communication plays a vital role to inform and change public attitudes and behaviours towards crime and disorder. "

Continues...

The types of messages sent out via OWL were broken down into 10 categories and the public were asked to rate how useful each type of message is. At the top of the popularity list are local crime alerts closely followed by scam alerts. Third were alerts sent via OWL from Trading Standards.

To provide balance to the doom and gloom messages, watch members rated good news stories as the 4th most useful. This would include news of criminals being arrested or sentenced, missing people being found, or successful recovery of stolen goods or drug raids. The other most useful messages, in descending order, are Fire & Rescue initiatives (e.g. free safety checks), appeals for missing or wanted people, initiatives for over 50's, health issues/alerts, county-wide crime alerts, and initiatives for under 18s. The lowest average ranking for any category was "quite useful" from the choices of not useful, a little useful, quite, and very useful.

OWL has made a significant impact in Flintshire & Wrexham where well over 1,000 watches operate. 90% said the service provided by OWL was good or excellent and many revealing comments were left by participants of the survey. (*Editors: A small selection of comments are on the following page*)

Gary Fenton, inventor of OWL and director of Direct Path Solutions, said "I always knew that OWL can make a genuine impact on people's lives and is a true force for good and a golden tool for people who want to do good in their communities. But this survey turns that into actual statistics and statements and backs up the case studies we already have. OWL is not just a piece of software, it represents community and confidence and together with its familiar name and logo it has installed those things into many areas across Flintshire & Wrexham. I have to pay tribute to the Flintshire Neighbourhood Watch Association who believed in the great potential of OWL right from the start and I'm so pleased they've had such fantastic results."

The chair the All-Wales Neighbourhood Watch Group, Julie Goodfellow, said "OWL is giving the community the ability to support itself and the police. It acts as an enabler to support crime prevention, reduction in crime and fear of crime. We are already beginning to see positive results."

OWL recently celebrated its 5th birthday and renewal of contracts from Hertfordshire, Staffordshire, Gwent, North Wales and Dyfed-Powys. Statistical highlights include:

- 8 million messages & alerts sent out to the public via OWL by email, phone, fax and SMS.
- 100,000 households and businesses signed up.
- 17,000 watches managed on OWL.
- 1,000 police officers trained and set up with access to OWL.
- 30,000 individual incidents, warning, appeals and notices published.
- 51 different types of watch schemes running including Neighbourhood, Pub, Farm, School, Rural, Shop, Dog, Business, Taxi, etc.
- 3 million messages were sent out just in the last 12 months.

In December OWL won its latest award at the Network Wales Awards. Previous awards include an e-Government National Award for innovation in local strategy and a Microsoft award for innovation as "Britain's Digital Elite".

Continues...

Some comments left by members of the public during the July 2011 survey include:

- “ All messages are making me feel safe as I am able to act on them and make my home and property safe. OWL is the best service to help others to be informed to help keep crime down and our property ours.
- “ OWL and NHW has brought 2 communities that I'm aware of closer. With the reduction of police presence in the areas this will give comfort to those who are feeling vulnerable.
- “ Really appreciate the messages, makes me more aware of issues to tell my neighbours.
- “ Thank you, excellent delivery and concise information.
- “ Getting messages so quickly is extremely helpful and enables people to be more aware of what to look out for.
- “ Each and every message received is another reminder we all have to remain vigilant. All OWL messages are gratefully received and always passed onto neighbours/residents/friends. THANK YOU SO MUCH.
- “ Knowing there are people we can contact and trust is great.
- “ A modern, fast and effective means of communication to keep local communities informed. To be forewarned is to be forearmed! Keep up the good work.
- “ We should have had owl a long time ago.
- “ The more info received educates people to the potential dangers and support that is out there.
- “ It was good to see how little crime there is in my area and it made me feel a lot happier that I have my finger on the pulse of what is happening crime wise.
- “ It's great as I have elderly neighbours and if there is something I think they should know is going on in the area I can protect them as well
- “ If this questionnaire is to justify cutting budgets think again - Owl is the most efficient, cheapest way to communicate and warn people of potential dangers
- “ It helps the area to feel more secure knowing we have a direct line to police services.
- “ OWL as made me more aware of what is going on around me that may harm me or my property. I am so grateful to be able to STOP and keep the crimes down. I feel safer in my home and know that if anything bad is about I am in the first line to be told and given the opportunity to reduce anything happening to me or close neighbours.

Notes for Editors:

OWL, located at www.owl.co.uk, is a highly secure web-based system for police and CSPs to manage watches and groups and to quickly send targeted information directly to the public. Most importantly the public can manage their own details by logging into OWL while coordinators can manage local or county-wide watches themselves within a security model which removes a significant administrative burden on the police or CSP. OWL provides confidence through communication where typically alerts warn residents and businesses of scams, thefts and burglaries in their immediate area. In addition it's used to appeal for help finding missing vulnerable children and adults, and to send important information from councils and Trading Standards.

For press, police or local government enquiries please contact Direct Path Solutions on 01438 812873 or email info@directpath.co.uk.

Images available:

- OWL logo: http://www.owl.co.uk/misc/public/images/OWL_original_logo_6000px.jpg