

Spotlight on...

A safer Polish community in Wakefield

What the need was and how we identified it

There is a significant Polish community in Wakefield District. Although the majority have lived there for many years, some are new arrivals: economic migrants and their families who've arrived in West Yorkshire over the last 3-4 years. Employment opportunities in manufacturing, industry and warehouses in South Elmsall in particular, have encouraged their arrival.

Some of the newest members of the community lack confidence speaking the English language and are unfamiliar with the role of a Fire and Rescue Service or the benefits of smoke alarm ownership. Many have different cultural attitudes towards home fire safety, relating to the safe use of electricity and electrical equipment, for example. It's also not unusual for them to experience poor housing conditions, multiple occupation, poverty and other forms of deprivation, anti-social behaviour, racism, hate-crime and arson attacks. As a result, this section of the Polish community has been identified as high risk.

Despite this, attempts by Wakefield crews to engage with this community were relatively unsuccessful because of the cultural and language barriers encountered.

What we did and the difference we made

This position started to change in 2009, when a new Wakefield District Clerk was recruited, whose first language happened to be Polish.

Working with the District Commander and crews, the District Clerk visited the local Polish Community Centre to promote WYFRS and fire safety messages. They also gave a presentation about the role of the Fire Service and the services we provide to the 30 to 40-strong congregation following a local church service.

It wouldn't be unusual for crews and the Prevention team carrying out Home Fire Safety Checks at Polish community members' homes to call the Station and ask her to translate over the radio/telephone.

At an incident in South Kirby in May 2011, South Elmsall Red Watch discovered a deliberate ground-floor fire at a block of flats, with most of the occupants still inside, ignoring the fire alarm.

Red Watch made limited progress with a Hot Strike, so they asked the District Clerk to accompany them on another visit.



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WYFRS received an immediate positive reaction. Discovering that false alarms were frequent, and residents often experienced anti-social behaviour and vandalism because fire exits were left open. Residents were provided with fire safety advice and encouraged to take responsibility for proper use of fire exits in their building. Fire Protection staff also provided support with the fire alarm. The District Clerk's telephone contact details were also given to residents.

Outcomes

Employing a member of staff with a community language enabled staff to better target vulnerable, at risk members of the Polish community. Communication barriers were immediately overcome, enabling crews to quickly engage with community members and deliver essential fire safety advice. Community members now understand the role of West Yorkshire Fire & Rescue Service and are more likely to seek advice and accept support. New smoke alarms were installed in 12 properties and the number of false alarm calls from this property has reduced.

Keys to our success

Promoting strong, consistent messages that WYFRS is an equal opportunities employer, welcoming applicants from diverse backgrounds.

Crews being proactive, making best use of their colleagues' skills and abilities

Contact

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This 'spotlight on' contributes to...



**DELIVERING A PROACTIVE
FIRE PREVENTION AND
PROTECTION PROGRAMME**



**PROVIDING A SAFE,
COMPETENT, DIVERSE
WORKFORCE**



**EMPLOYMENT AND
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