

Domain: Public Transport

Luisteris

Outline:

Luisteris is a prevention programme established in order to reduce aggressive behaviour by young train passengers by making it a topic of discussion. Luisteris focuses on social safety on trains, in railway stations, and around railway tracks. The programme involves sending ticket inspectors and engine drivers, who have been victims of violence, to secondary schools to talk about the consequences of this aggression. The programme was developed by the NS (Dutch Railways) under their own management.

Problem and risk analysis:

NS employees, and ticket inspectors in particular, experience violent behaviour during their work almost on a daily basis. Physical violence accounts for 10% of all incidents. Research shows that the number of incidents has remained virtually unchanged in recent years, but that the aggression has become more severe. Many of the victims struggle with the physical and emotional consequences of this violence for a long time and some ticket inspectors are no longer able to carry out their job. Examples of other problems include the presence of people on train tracks and vandalism on trains.

Action objectives:

Luisteris was established twelve years ago as a project aimed at helping NS personnel to deal with the consequences of violence. Another objective was to reduce aggression on trains and around railway tracks.

Target groups:

The project focuses on the target groups that cause trouble to NS personnel: the troublemakers. NS employees (or railway police, special investigators, etc.) attempt to identify the school or club with which the troublemakers are affiliated and then forward this information to the project. This also happens when a railway accident has occurred. The project then approaches this school or club and offers them to participate in the Luisteris project. Luisteris is offered not only to the troublemakers, but also to their classmates or club mates. If requested (for prevention), the project team will also visit schools located along railway lines or schools where many of the students use the train.

Context:

Luisteris works with a total of 130 information officers (65 engine drivers en 65 ticket inspectors). These information officers reach 50,000 to 70,000 students on an annual basis. The information officers are NS employees who normally work as engine drivers or ticket inspectors. All information officers receive teaching skills training. They also have an annual one-day refresher course. During this day, the curriculum is adapted based on experiences.

Luisteris works with a uniform programme that gives the information officers the freedom to address local issues and to share their own experiences with the class. The information officers give the lessons in the regions where they actually work. This allows them to zoom in on specific local problems (e.g. a dangerous railway crossing or an incident with a local impact).

Effectiveness:

Over the years Luisteris has become a permanent element in the social safety policy of NS. The information programme is therefore no longer a project, but a structurally embedded programme. Luisteris was evaluated in 2004. The main conclusions from this evaluation were that Luisteris has made young people more aware of the seriousness of their aggressive behaviour on trains and the impact this has on ticket inspectors. There is now more understanding, awareness, insight and empathy.

Starting points / Vision

The young people causing these incidents typically do so out of thoughtlessness. They therefore need to be made aware of the dangers of thoughtless behaviour and group behaviour on trains and around railway tracks. Luisteris wants them to think about the consequences that their actions have for themselves and for the affected NS employees so that they will not repeat their behaviour. The lessons also have a therapeutic effect on the affected NS employees.

Respect is the first matter of importance in the approach. The information officers clarify that the problems being discussed are not about young people in general, but about a small group that causes many problems. Instead of only focussing on the wrongs committed by the perpetrators, they look for solutions together with the young people.

Prevention of future incidents rather than the question of guilt are the basis of the project. The information officers look for a solution jointly with the group rather than imposing it upon them. Discussion is an important component of the lessons.

Methodology / Mechanism

The programme aims to prevent aggressive, disorderly conduct by increasing young people's empathy for others (NS employees) and by making them aware of the dangers of thoughtless behaviour.

Luisteris is about more than providing information on aggression on trains. It's about aggression in general, about peer pressure, about being afraid to say no, and about making choices – not only on the train, but in other places as well.

As a result of the fact that the ticket inspectors share their experiences in a very open manner, students also have the courage to express their feelings and to talk about unpleasant experiences, fears and feelings of guilt. This also promotes awareness.

Operationalisation:

13- to 18 year-olds

The lesson starts by confronting the students with their behaviour. At the beginning of the lesson, the information officers illustrate the role of the good guy and the bad guy. In this manner, they imitate the class's behaviour. The class's reaction to the bad guy (who behaves badly and antisocially) serves as the starting point for a discussion about respect.

This is followed by showing a video that demonstrates the effect of group behaviour on people. During the video, a pause is taken occasionally, after which a discussion follows about group behaviour and peer pressure. One of the information officers tells a story about an incident that he or she actually experienced and about the impact the incident had on him or her, their partner, children, colleagues and friends. The students are also made aware of the consequences that the actions have for the students themselves, including an explanation of what will happen to them if they find themselves up against the law.

9- to 12-year olds

Luisteris also has an information programme for elementary education. It primarily focuses on the dangers of thoughtless behaviour along railway tracks. The engine drivers discuss thoughtless behaviour on railway tracks. They describe the impact that a (near-)accident can have on their lives.

Halt Procedures

Young people who have been arrested for committing offences on trains or railways often end up in a Halt procedure. During an interview held with a Halt counsellor, the young person is confronted with the consequences of his or her actions. They must perform their community service at NS, if possible.

Guidance / training:

The teacher plays an important role within Luisteris. He or she is involved in the organisation of the lesson and must be present during the lesson. The contents of the lessons and the severity of the experiences shared are agreed with the teacher in advance.

The school is responsible for the follow-up and the consequences of the lesson. The programme provides for the teacher to come back to the topic at a later time. The students are also given assignments that they can use for a project afterwards. Furthermore, a confidential contact person must be available if students have a need for this after the lesson.

Evaluation:

Luisteris works with evaluation forms to be completed by teachers (and occasionally by students) after the information session has ended. The forms are used to refocus or adapt the contents of the lessons.

In 2004 the Alexander Foundation conducted an evaluation survey. The survey held among elementary school children and first-formers showed that students

remembered much of the information session. For example, the students remembered how long it takes for a train to come to a standstill. The students also indicated that they learned a lot about the dangers on and around railway tracks. Many students admitted that they had placed items on railway tracks at one point in time, but that after taking part in a Luisteris information session they would not do so again. As a result of the lessons, students are better able to empathise with engine drivers.

The survey held among secondary school children indicated that Luisteris has succeeded in giving young people reasons for refraining from aggressive behaviour on trains and in strengthening their empathy for NS personnel. In addition, many of the young people indicated that they were more likely to say something when witnessing provocative behaviour, at least if friends were involved. The greatest effect of Luisteris appears to have been in the area of empathy. The young people now have a better appreciation of the position of ticket inspectors and a better understanding of the consequences of aggression.

Success factors:

- NS employees themselves came up with the project, as a result of which it enjoys broad support within the organisation.
- The project uses realistic video footage.
- The information officers look for solutions together with the young people.
- The information officers are ‘experience experts’ telling true stories with genuine emotion.
- The information officers deployed are from their own region, which heightens the recognition of a situation. The young people may run into the same ticket inspectors on the train the following day, and all students are familiar with the dangerous railway crossing discussed earlier.

Failure factors:

- The project relies on co-operation from the schools and the clubs.
- Teachers must be willing to co-operate.
- The project relies on suitable information officers (both with regard to contents and teaching skills).
- The public transport company must be prepared to take social responsibility. (NS allocates 500,000 euros of their annual budget to Luisteris and the information officers give their lessons during working hours.)

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