



## **Crimestoppers Conference Case Study**

**By Phil O'Shea**

Crimestoppers works quietly behind the scenes to combat violent crime and make all our lives safer, and it does so very effectively. The charity accepts anonymous tip offs from the public about criminal behaviour and every day, 17 people are arrested and charged every day as a result of information given to Crimestoppers and every five days, somebody is charged with murder or attempted murder following calls to Crimestoppers.

Since the charity was established in 1988, it has received almost 900,000 calls with useful information, leading to almost 78,5000 arrests and charges. Over £97m of property has been recovered and almost £135m worth of drugs.

So its annual conference, attended by delegates from the 40 regions nationwide along with police representatives, is an incredibly important forum in which ideas are discussed and information shared.

Creating the right relaxing, yet stimulating, atmosphere encourages more constructive dialogue and this is just what organisers found in the Isle of Man, where last year's conference was held.

Having attended the annual Crimestoppers conference in Cardiff in 2005, Isle of Man Crimestoppers committee chairman Phil O'Shea thought the Island could put on a more polished performance. But there were a few challenges to overcome first, not least the budget that was just £5,000. The main problem was how to accommodate 140 delegates who preferred to sleep where the conference was taking place, on an Island that does not have a hotel with that capacity.

Crimestoppers is staffed entirely by volunteers - who are more used to information gathering than conference organising - but they benefited from the help and support from the Isle of Man Visitor and Convention Bureau. The bureau was established under the auspices of the Department of Tourism and Leisure that, since 2004, has been actively working to increase the number of conferences and meetings held on the Island.

The inspiration for this is not hard to unravel; it injects a significant amount of cash into the Island's economy. In 1999, there were three conferences held on the Island using 220 bed spaces that brought in a net economic benefit of £310,000. Since 2004 there have been 34 conferences with 9,155 delegates taking up 25,276 bed nights and injecting £3.6m into the Manx economy.

The bureau lends its expertise to those organising a conference on the Island on many aspects the organiser possibly hadn't even thought of. From finding suitable venues, the bureau will conduct inspection visits, provide promotional support and even welcome packs. An inspired, and successful, way of raising the profile of the Island as a conference venue has been the creation of the Conference Ambassador programme comprised of members of academic, professional business and other social organisations.

As its name suggests, becoming a member of the programme means you are effectively an ambassador for the Island and charged with encouraging your organisation to consider the Island as a suitable venue for conferences and meetings.

In Crimestoppers' experience it is a more than suitable venue. Delegates arrived on Wednesday and the Manx welcome began immediately at a welcome kiosk at Ronaldsway with a welcome pack and then shuttle buses direct to their hotels in Douglas.

They accommodated delegates at the Hilton and Sefton, with a few rooms at the Rutland – meaning the conference at the Hilton was just a stroll, or shuttle bus ride away. Venues and rooms were decorated with banners and posters of welcome and about Crimestoppers and they were sponsored by Tower Insurance.

On the first evening, there was a reception at the Villa Marina, sponsored by Douglas Corporation and Close Bank. The mayor of Douglas welcomed everyone and delegates enjoyed a Manx-themed buffet while a local harpist performed. The opening evening 'set people up for the rest of the conference,' said Phil. 'People raved about it.'

Local talent was again employed and a Manx dance troupe performed on the stage of The Hilton at the closing dinner. The conference itself was opened by former police chief constable Mike Culverhouse. 'He was so impressed that he stayed for the whole day,' said Phil.

There was a day of presentations from Crimestoppers' staff and breakout sessions for idea generation. The focus of the discussion was about youth and how to engage them more and help them understand the work of Crimestoppers. As young people are exposed more than perhaps any other section of society to anti social behaviour and resultant criminal damage, engaging their attention is vital in the battle against crime. Not only to provide information to Crimestoppers, but also to divert them away from crime.

The Island's natural beauty always provides an inspiring backdrop for any discussion and delegates' partners got the chance to take trips around the Island including a tour of the Laxey Wheel and had a memorable time at Brightlife, a spa in the North of the island.

Each delegate left the Island with a souvenir book of Island scenes and a box of kippers, 'these are the things that people remember,' said Phil. The conference even had potential spin off benefits for tourism and several suggested they would return to the Island for holidays in the future.

Such was the success of the conference that organisers of this year's annual Crimestoppers conference in Bristol said they had 'learned a lot about how to run a conference from the Isle of Man team. 'Not only was the conference a success, the work of Crimestoppers Isle of Man has been particularly effective in recent months. It is impossible to prove but nonetheless tempting to form an association between initiatives discussed at the conference and the figures recently revealed by Crimestoppers Isle of Man: calls to them have increased by an astonishing 75 per cent in recent months.