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**‘On the Run - was broadcast on Monday 24<sup>th</sup> October on ITV1**

As a former police detective and now a TV presenter, I know and understand many of the issues facing police officers today. I also understand the power of the media and how important it is to bring some stories to the public’s attention.



All my programmes focus very much on crime and policing; which include ‘To Catch a Paedophile’, ‘Cyberbullying’ and ‘The Lost Detective’. Without exception the reason for making the programmes is to raise awareness of certain issues and, where possible, effect change. Thankfully I can say change has occurred in every programme.

This often means tackling difficult subjects and challenging both senior officials and political figures.

My latest programme ‘On the Run’ was no different. In this one hour programme I worked alongside and supported the police, whilst at the same time raising the issues of lack of resources, and failures in the criminal justice system. My focus was on criminals on the run from the police.

The issue of criminals being given bail or released on licence does prove a significant drain to police forces especially when the individual either fails to surrender to bail, or breaches the conditions of their licence. The resulting affect is the need for police to locate and arrest the individual.

Last year the total number of people who jumped bail was 83,500. Of which 31,000 were subsequently prosecuted for jumping.

So, firstly I decided I would look at the issue of how many people jumped bail last year, as well as how the demands on policing often meant that forces are only able to go after the most dangerous of these offenders.

We started by trawling the internet for details of wanted people and spoke with numerous forces, and as a result we focused on three cases.

Our task was to find these three wanted people; we started by creating a number of different social networking profiles, as well as a false talent agency.

The first of our three cases was Daniel Slater, who has numerous convictions and was sentenced to three years in a young offender's institution with four years on licence for robbery. After his release from prison he broke the terms of his licence and was recalled to prison. However, he decided otherwise and went on the run

As soon as we started to engage with Slater we made contact with Essex Police to explain that our plan was to draw Slater out so he could be

arrested. We received a very positive response and one that clearly showed they were happy to work with us to catch him.

Indeed DCI Hooper, of Essex police set out very clearly why they wanted him caught. *"Slater led a criminal lifestyle. He has connections to a number of people within their borough that commit acts of criminality; – particularly, severe acts such as burglary, which blight the lives of the community and have a massive impact."*

Slater fell for our talent agency scout and was happy to come to London for a photographic shoot. With the shoot all set up and with police officers in position we waited - but after an hour we pulled the operation as Slater failed to appear. We later discovered he had been ill in hospital.

So we decided a change of approach and went to Southend conducting some enquiries on the ground. As a result we identified an address we believed he would visit when he was in the area. We were so confident that we arranged to run an operation with Southend police to have him arrested once he was in the open.

This is what we did; we watched him walk along the Southend sea front, however just before the strike was called he was spooked by an undercover officer and ran. Slater was very aware the police were looking for him, and was always looking over his shoulder. He was fast - running down an alleyway before jumping a seven foot fence. He was lost for a good 10 minutes, during which time a dog and other units joined the search for him. However I was aware of a local address and was pretty sure this was where

he had gone to ground.

Once the address was surrounded a warning was given to the occupant and seconds before the front door was about to be put in, it was opened. Slater was sitting on the settee and his time on the run had come to an end.

Our next target was Ahmed Awled - three years ago he viciously attacked a man on a train, leaving his victim with a broken jaw and partially blind in one eye. He was given bail but never turned up at court and was sentenced to five and a half years in a young offenders institution for violent disorder and GBH with intent.

Awled's disappearance has been very well publicised, he even appeared on the most wanted wall of Crimewatch and despite considerable effort by British Transport Police he remained at large.

In our research we found out he was using a false name, and had a Facebook account. We also established that he was working at a US Military base, Camp Lenonier, in Djibouti.

We monitored him and when he returned to the UK, we immediately got in contact. We very quickly gained his friendship using a ploy to build up his confidence. However he said he was about to leave for work in Holland, so we had to act quickly. We decided to invite him to meet our fake female profile for a drink, but he failed to turn up. He did get in contact later that evening and apologised, saying he was very keen to meet and would definitely attend this time.

We would have lengthy conversations with Awled, often very late at night and established that he was a fan of Arsenal, so we decided we would take him to a game - what fan could refuse such an offer. He took the bait, and we arranged to meet him at Waterloo railway station one Sunday afternoon.



Having already been in close communication with British Transport Police (BTP) the trap was laid and we waited for him to arrive.

When he did not show up on time we were concerned that again he had stood us up, but after very careful contact with him we managed to get him to the location, albeit one hour forty-five minutes late. When he finally arrived he walked towards the meeting point, but was arrested before reaching it. Another great result with an offender on the run caught.

Our third case was that of Yehia Hacham who ran over an 11 year old school boy, Liam Hannon. After the accident Hacham immediately tried to cover it up, both in getting his car fixed and by lying to the police. He was convicted in his absence and went on the run. Through some extensive enquiries we tracked him down to Egypt and as a result we have passed all our information on to the authorities.

Out of all the cases this was by far the most emotive and sad, I just hope our work will enable Hacham to be caught and returned to serve his sentence.

As well as featuring three specific cases we also looked at a number of other cases where bail was given and then the person went on to commit a further serious crime.

It is in this area that we also consider if more can be done when giving bail, a number of suggestions have been to ensure a surety is required for more cases and a greater use of tagging. Either way, the amount of people who jump bail is quite shocking, and requires a radical re-think.

I did not make this programme to highlight poor practice at an operational policing level, but rather to raise the issue of those offenders that are on the run having been given bail, or recalled to prison.



With the current demands on policing and the massive cuts over the next few years it is very clear that certain policing tasks will suffer, especially those that are very demanding on resources and time intensive.

I spent a lot of time with police officers and it is very clear that if they were given the resources and had bureaucracy reduced, then they would be able to make a significant impact on the number of offenders on the run.

The other important reason for making this programme was to use a different approach with a joint aim. We used lawful tactics, albeit those that are much easier for us to use; for example, we made a lot of use of social networking and fake profiles to engage with our offenders.

We also had the massive benefit of being able to focus on just three cases, devoting resources and time.

Another very important aspect of catching these wanted individuals was the working relationship with the police. Certainly in today's climate the relationship between the police and media is under constant scrutiny.

However, the key to success was setting out from the start our objective and how we believed that by working together we could catch these criminals. We also made it clear that we would share our information and co-ordinate a situation and meeting that ensured the offender was arrested.

Some may say that it is the role of the police to find wanted people; I would disagree, and say that it is everyone's responsibility. If we as the media are in a position to help and work together to remove dangerous offenders from the streets, then this clearly has to be worthwhile. It is on this basis I would like to especially thank Essex and BTP for having the vision, trust, and confidence, to work with us in the media to secure the arrest of Slater and Awled. Additionally I would also like to thank Sussex and Essex Police who made time for me to shadow some of their officers as they went looking for wanted people.

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