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Centre for Institutional Studies

Research Report

WORKING WITH REPEAT USERS OF THE YOUTH CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM

Rosina Knight

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April 2006

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Rosie Knight
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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Methods

The Urban Regeneration Evaluation Research Team at the Centre for Institutional Studies (CIS), University of East London, was commissioned by the London Borough of Newham (LBN) to undertake an evaluation of Youth Justice Projects and Interventions.

The research was conducted over a period of eighteen months, from October 2002 to February 2004. The findings below draw on the following research:

- Interviews with sixty-five youth criminal justice workers¹, in addition to numerous informal chats.
- Seventy-eight in-depth semi-structured interviews with young people, typically lasting from forty-five minutes to an hour and a half. Six of these young people were on bail and fifty were serving a referral order, community sentence, Detention and Training Order (DTO) or Intensive Supervision and Surveillance Programme (ISSP). Young people from all of the (now former) strands have been interviewed. Twenty-two of these seventy-eight interviews were second interviews, intended to follow up on the young peoples' progress through the Youth Offending Team (YOT).
- Nine interviews with individuals from key partner agencies.
- Attendance at interventions at the YOT (including the street robbery project), Mentoring Plus, Newmartin Community Youth Trust (NCY) and the Attendance Centre.
- Shadowing a YOT police officer who was delivering final warnings and reprimands.
- Shadowing an NCY worker acting as an appropriate adult in Plaistow police station.
- Observation of a court session.
- Attendance at YOT, NCY and Youth Action Programme (YAP) team meetings, children's fund delivery team meetings and some Green Street and Canning Town community forums.
- Prison Visits alongside YOT staff and peer researchers.
- Several visits to Oxford to visit the 'Street Dreams' Project.
- An interview with a Youth Justice Board (YJB) effective practice manager.

¹This includes YOT managers, YOT caseworkers and project managers and workers from NCY, YAP, Mentoring Plus and the Attendance Centre.

- Attendance at conferences.

This study is neither comprehensive nor wholly systematic. It has taken shape through an organic process and is primarily an exploratory study. There has been on-going feeding back at management, whole team and individual staff levels.

The first section of this report, entitled 'Understandings of Youth Crime' sets the scene for the remaining sections. It is important to first of all map out the ways in which youth justice workers and young people understand the problem of youth crime. This gives an indication of the understandings which both workers and young people take to the experience of participating in the youth justice process.

The second section, entitled 'Working with young people' will illustrate both effective and ineffective ways of engaging young people in the criminal justice process with a view to achieving active change in or for them.

The third section; 'Multi-agency working' looks at the issues involved in the YOT's role as an inherently multi-agency service, mapping out the attitudes and practices of strategic partners, young people and workers in turn.

All of the sections of this report will use scenarios which draw on real examples in order to illustrate the possible responses of young people and workers to the very real tensions involved in the process of criminal justice interventions with young people, in each case exploring the reasons why such scenarios might come about.

The key finding of the interviews with young people is that for the most part young people are active, engaged individuals, capable of articulating well developed theories about the world. Thus an assumption of the following findings is that young people's active engagement should always be sought if interventions are to be successful.

1.2 Context

Before proceeding further it is important to set out the larger policy context within which YOT workers are operating. First of all, the Youth Criminal Justice System (YCJS) is driven by a particular understanding of youth crime, often called the 'risk factors' approach. As workers and young people alike were well aware, the principal and statutory aim of the YOT in particular and the YCJS in general is to prevent first time offending and re-offending by children and young people. To quote the recent guidance to YOTs that was recently published by the YJB:

'This can only be achieved by ensuring that the assessed needs of children are met, and that young people manifesting risk factors associated with offending behaviour can access appropriate health, social, educational, family support and leisure provision as a means of diverting them from criminal and anti-social behaviour.'

This 'risk factors' approach to the understanding of youth crime thus informed not only the setting up of the YOT in the form in which we see it today, but also in the ongoing work of youth criminal justice workers. ASSET, which constitutes the primary assessment tool of the YOT is driven by this risk factors approach. At a

strategic level, the performance indicators that structure the annual updates of the Youth Justice Plan are also informed by this approach to youth crime.

The second fundamental element of the YCJS that shapes the work that YOTs are able to do is the legislation that dictates the routes that young person might take through the criminal justice system, both at a pre-court and court stage.

Finally, although the YOT was envisaged as a system that would be made up of staff from a range of key agencies, this alone is not sufficient for the delivery of an appropriate multi-agency response to any given young person who is on a YOT intervention programme. Rather, the YOT should be seen as an agency that co-ordinates and accesses mainstream services together with and at times on behalf of young people, rather than one which delivers these services. In order for the YOT system to function well, it needs to be backed up by quality core provision, in key areas such as social services, education and health.

2. UNDERSTANDINGS OF YOUTH CRIME

2.1 Young people: reasons for offending

The following reasons were given by young people for becoming involved in and maintaining their involvement in crime.

Money....

By far the most widely expressed explanation for youth crime was its perceived economic benefit. This view was expressed in interviews illustrated in the following quote;

'If I was rich do you think I'd be doing crime?'

Fun....

The desire for 'fun' was also cited by some young people as a motivation for committing crime. Some young people, in particular those who had offended persistently talked about the thrill of police chases as a reason for offending.

Being the big man....

Offending was also widely perceived to be a way of making and keeping relationships with peers. This deeply social nature of crime was also recognised by young men in particular who argued that the desire to be the 'big man' and to gain 'respect' was fundamental to understanding offending. One young person talked of the respect accorded to those who 'innovate' in crime, whilst another talked of those involved in criminal behaviour as participating in a kind of 'race' of money-making and innovation. Some young women and men in the sample argued that offending also increased attractiveness to the opposite sex.

Loneliness...

Loneliness was cited as a possible reason for the acute need of young people for friendship, hence their vulnerability to different forms of peer pressure in all its various forms.

Bereavement....

A number of young people talked about their experience of bereavement and this in most cases tended to coincide with the onset of offending. Liddle and Solanki (2002) found that in their sample of young people who were persistently offending, 22 per cent had suffered bereavement. More recent research (Youth Justice Trust 2003) has suggested that the percentage may be even higher and argues that emotional trauma such as bereavement can directly link to criminal behaviour because emotions associated with (in particular) unacknowledged grief, such as anger, can be channelled into offending.

Racism....

Racism was cited by some young people, in particular Black young men as a reason for starting and continuing to offend. The sources of this racism were threefold. Firstly, young people talked about general perceptions of young Black people;

'Some people think all black people 15-19 are rogues that smoke weed and that are out of education. It is a self-fulfilling prophecy.'

Secondly, racism in school was seen as a site for the preparation of young people for street life;

'There is racism in schools. Like if something goes missing you know they are thinking it's you. You then have to try to maintain the image.'

Being a victim....

For one young person, racism and victimisation went together in causing him to get involved in crime, as illustrated by the following quote:

'I was always 'banging out racism' there at school.....it got me clued up for street life.'

Several young people talked about the way in which having been victimised in the past could lead or has personally led them into offending. One young person even argued that his own experience of being stabbed was a good thing, because although it made him a 'bit para' he is now more streetwise. (See Pain *et al.*, Police Research Series Paper 152 at www.homeoffice.gov.uk for a discussion of the way in which vulnerable young people often assume both roles of offender and victim).

Inadequate services....

Young people who had extensive experience of the criminal justice process argued that the youth justice system itself was responsible for the escalation of offending. In the first instance, the police were seen as contributing to further offending:

'...you think if you're gonna keep pulling me, let's give them a reason.'

(See also Sherman (2003) for a discussion of how police treatment of young people on arrest can impact upon their future behaviour). In addition to this, young people reported that the poor response of the police to their claims of victimisation drew them into offending, through a sense of injustice (see Pain *et al.*, Police Research Series Paper 152 at www.homeoffice.gov.uk for a discussion of this). The process of moving through the YOT in punitive ways was also cited by young people as a contributory factor in continuing to offend:

'The more you punish, they don't learn. It makes them angrier.'

'They do not listen. We end up doing crime because we get more angry.'

'They should do it (help) when we need it.' This is how you make criminals. You have to stop them when they are young and fresh. When they are old no-one can tell you what to do no more. They can't hypnotise us to stop. The best thing is for them to see why we do it and help us.'

Young people seemed to view the question about why youth crime exists as naïve. They often saw its existence as a self-evident, irresolvable problem of a society in which 'you need money to do everything.' This perception of crime as inevitable is, whether true or not, the central sticking point between youth justice workers and young people in interventions designed to change young people's thinking and behaviour regarding offending.

2.2 Workers' explanations of offending

Workers also expressed a variety of explanations for youth crime.

Poverty...

Some workers, including managers, were scathing about young people's need for money, suggesting that it was greed that motivated young people to offend. Other workers were often in agreement with young people in arguing that it was material need that contributed to youth crime.

Fun...

Workers, particularly those dealing with first or second time offenders talked about boredom and the subsequent need for excitement as a motivating factor in offending.

Racism....

The experience of racism was not widely recognised as a contributory factor in offending.

Being the big man....

Workers talked a lot about 'getting in with the wrong crowd' and the need for young people to get away from certain young people with whom they might be socialising.

Inadequate services...

Only one worker expressed the idea that an inadequate response from the criminal justice system could in itself contribute to offending. In addition, the failure to provide other mainstream services such as education were seen as factors in the development of offending behaviour.

Family...

Workers almost always saw families as partially responsible for the involvement of young people in offending behaviour. Young people were loathe to express this.

Whilst young people's explanations centred very much upon the individually experienced benefits of crime and the circumstances that lead to the *need* to offend, workers' explanations of offending centred much less upon such benefits and more upon the individually experienced *problems* of young people. It is key that workers see that explaining a young person's criminal behaviour and understanding it may be two separate things. Whilst young people understand their offending in terms of primordial motivations and intentions of self-preservation, survival and self-esteem, workers often explain offending at the level of the rational, e.g. a young person is offending because of difficult family circumstances, with a view to enforcing norms. As explained below, it is really important that a shared understanding of a young person's offending is developed. This means that if for example family history is indeed a reason why a young person begins to offend but a young person fails to perceive this and instead claims that they offend for material benefit or emotional buzz, the young person's explanation should form a central part of the shared understanding that develops between a worker and a young person. It is clear from the workers' responses that the risk factors approach, expressed through ASSET, is often guiding their understandings of youth crime. If used appropriately, ASSET may be a good tool for designing and monitoring

intervention plans and for predicting reconviction (see K. Baker *et al* 2002). However, it is not clear that this alone necessarily provides a good frame for the development of a common understanding of a young person's offending. For example, a worker may identify the young person's family as a major factor in the offending. However, if a young person does not see that their family situation is at least in part responsible for their involvement in offending, it is not helpful for a worker to focus doggedly on this to the exception of all else. That is, the identification of risk factors does in all cases help in decisions about how to intervene in a young person's life. To reiterate, young people themselves must be central both in the understanding of crime that a worker and a young person use to inform their supervisory relationship and in the interventions that form part of their ongoing supervision plan.

3. WORKING WITH YOUNG PEOPLE

3.1 Introduction

This section will aim to map out two scenarios that characterise young people's experience of the relationship with their core worker at the Youth Offending Team. Young people tended to see the relationship with their core worker as the centre of their experience of the Youth Criminal Justice System. Other experiences, such as diversionary activities, or reparation, tended to be at the periphery of their discussion of the YOT and young people did not find it easy to recall these experiences. The relationship between a young person and their worker and the ways in which this plays out through the process of supervision is key to understanding the opportunities for transformation in and for a young person and the obstacles to such a transformation.

Although 78 interviews were conducted with young people, it was not clear that it would be accurate or helpful to categorise them in a particular way which marked them out for a particular package of interventions. Rather, what seemed to ring true in all cases was young people's need for a key worker whose personal approach, professional knowledge and values and management supervision could be trusted to deliver the appropriate response at the appropriate time, within the bounds of a young person's court order.

The following two scenarios draw together research findings of those young people who have experienced youth justice interventions as to some extent negative and those who have experienced them as to some extent positive. Thus, they illustrate two ideal-type ways of working with young people.

3.2 Scenario one: A transformative relationship

In this scenario, the relationship between the YOT worker and the young person could be described as a two-way dynamic process, characterised by trust and understanding. The role of delivering services to young people in establishing and maintaining trust will be explored in the next section, entitled 'multi-agency working'. Some young people felt that they had developed a relationship with their worker that for them had been transformative, where they carried the lessons learnt through their worker with them into their everyday lives:

'Sometimes we talk about school. She's open, friendly. She can say something and it makes me wanna go home and work.'

'X is like a counsellor. Say you have a thought you are gonna jack someone, he manages to talk you out of it.'

Due to changes in the structure of the YOT, workers are now working more generically than previously, such that a young person is allocated a worker who will take them through the court process as well as supervising the order that they subsequently receive. As such, the worker will complete a pre-sentence report (PSR) where relevant for a young person. Some young people, in particular those who

seem particularly vulnerable, say that they resent being asked personal questions by someone who may be a stranger to them. This was expressed by a young person in the following way:

'They always fucking wanna assess me...' '.....People go too personal. They ain't got that authority.'

One way of dealing with this is for the YOT worker to say to the young person that this is a process that they have to go through but is not the be-all and the end-all of what will happen in the subsequent order. It is almost as if they distance themselves from the process in some way.

Young people consistently expressed the need to be understood. As explained above, a young person's understanding of their behaviour and a YOT worker's explanation may not be the same. In order for a young person to engage effectively in the process of a youth justice intervention, they need to feel that they are actively involved. This involves engaging with the way a young person narrates their own experience, which is part of the ongoing development of a *shared* understanding about their behaviour, from which the worker can effectively engage and deliver services that a young person feels are appropriate, relevant and timely for them. One young person expressed this in the following way:

'They go straight for the home life. They should try and sort out the other stuff first. They start assuming and they should start with the little things. The social is more important. You need to build a relationship. In YOT the first thing is home life.'

The active engagement of a young person is established primarily by asking questions that require them to think and that give them space to explore themselves and their attitudes. Examples of such questions are:

*How do you feel about yourself?
What do you do for yourself?*

Such questions place the young person at the centre of the conversation. This needs to happen as early in the order as possible, as one worker voiced:

'You need to engage the kids early in an order. You've got to install belief.'

Prompts around exploring the young person's experience of the process of being arrested and moving through the system might be an effective way of engaging with young people. More generally young people reported feeling positive about interventions that required them to explore themselves in ways they might not have done so previously. One young person reported enjoying a group session she participated in whilst in prison where they were asked to say one thing about themselves beginning with each letter of the alphabet.

For those young people who have been through the system a number of times, it is key that their worker engages with any possible cynicism that they might have about the system. This means asking questions about their previous experiences of the criminal justice system and using this experience as a hook for talking about their offending.

3.3 The nature of transformation

A number of re-interviews were conducted with young people, which attempted to see whether any change had taken place as a result of the interventions of the criminal justice system and if so, how young people understood this change. The majority said that the YCJS had not changed them. However, where young people had experienced the criminal justice system in any positive ways, they tended to talk in terms of what they have gained from the YOT, rather than in terms of the changes it has brought about in their behaviour. If young people were asked directly what could change things for them, they responded by saying that nobody can change you except yourself and that rather than thinking in terms of changing people, workers should think in terms of what choices they can make available to young people:

'The YOT is trying to stop you reoffending. It don't work though. They can't stop you doin what you wanna do. They should be keeping us occupied-never bored, so you ain't got the motive to do crime.'

'You can't change people. You can lead them to somewhere and show them they have a choice.'

Where young people could identify a change in their behaviour or general life, they would usually accredit themselves with that and were reluctant to say it was their YOT worker who had achieved this change. In a number of these cases it was clear that the YOT worker had played a central role, by for example making a key referral to Landmark Training. However, young people's explanations of their behaviour express the active way in which young people must own their change.

3.4 Factors that enable transformative relationships

3.4.1 Worker perceptions of young people

Certain attitudes towards young people foster the development of relationships. Most importantly, there is a need for workers to separate the young person from their offence and not to moralise or judge them, as expressed by a worker in the following way:

'I am trained to assess young people as young people. Not in terms of morality. People are surviving here.'

This was a widespread attitude amongst workers in the YOT. It is important to see that young people perceive the YOT as an institution as part of 'the system' broadly speaking and thus the more a young person has experienced conflict with that system e.g. through school the more a worker has to in a sense prove that they are not just the same as 'all the rest'. What needs to happen in order that a worker is able to engage a young person and keep them engaged, is that the worker somehow comes to be seen as different from 'the rest', e.g. teachers, police and any other authority figures with whom the young person has experienced conflict. This does not mean that the worker should be perceived as an easy pushover.

Rather, that their authority has to be earned and respect is two-way. This is expressed below:

'X is a good worker. X treats you fairly and gives you chances if you show respect.'

'Its about the way a person wants to be, who has the authority is someone who is on a level.'

Moralising and judging is experienced by young people as something which fixes them as a criminal, rather than easing their pathways out of this behaviour. Neither of these conditions means that a worker should have no boundaries or should not criticise a young person for their behaviour. On the contrary, if workers do not moralise or judge, young people are more likely to respect the boundaries that are put in place. One young person talked of the difference between being challenged, where trust could be maintained with his worker, and being judged, where trust was lost. Working with young people in the criminal justice system is high energy work and in order to continue engaging in this work in a positive way, workers themselves need to feel there are returns. Those workers who seemed most engaged and motivated were also often those who were mentally stimulated by the young people:

'There is so much you can learn from young people. When they talk they are telling you about themselves.'

3.5 Worker perceptions of change

There are certain perceptions of change amongst workers that support the establishment of a transformative relationship. First of all, there is a need for workers to see the motivation to transform amongst young people as fluid and that this motivation can be influenced by the worker themselves, rather than a fixed state of being i.e. a young person does or does not want to change and that is that. The following quote illustrates three key elements of encouraging a young person to develop and maintain the motivation to transform their lives:

'...it's not about changing young people. It's about making them understand that life won't be easy if you ain't got a trade. Also that money ain't gonna buy you happiness. Trying to show young people this, that with good comes bad'

The three elements that are seen as key here are:

- giving a young person options
- challenging belief systems about the importance of material goods
- showing young people the consequences of their behaviour for the future

In the context of a society in which materialism is a dominant thread, the second of these elements is far from easy. However, young people are often highly philosophical and the discussions themselves are ways of establishing and maintaining a relationship of mutual interest. For example, it is important that workers have an understanding of the way racism within the YCJS in order that they are able to sensibly discuss this with young people where necessary. Whilst there is

a possibility that workers will see short-term gains with young people, overall there is a need for them to have a long-term vision of transformation, in particular where a young person has offended persistently over a number of years. As one person who was working with young people who had repeat offended put it:

'It is much harder than I thought. You feel you can make a difference generated by your enthusiasm. For a lot of kids trying to change them is trying to change a leopard's spots. You need 2,3, years pecking away at them. With a lot of kids we are just babysitting them. They are still out there thieving. But I still feel I can make a difference. I am still holding out maybe there are a few things I can say that plant seeds.'

Finally, it is key that workers see the dynamic nature of a young person's life, even in areas such as family, which some workers seem to see as untouchable, or unchangeable. For example, one young person talked of how his worker had looked after his mum when he was in prison and how this had stabilised him when he was inside.

3.6 Organisational conditions

Supervision for workers with their managers is key to maintaining the energy to be able to 'put up with the crap' and continue to engage with young people in a positive way. When asked what they would like from supervision with a manager, one worker put it like this:

'I want everything that a young person wants - respect, honesty, integrity, memory.'

Although workers have reported increased supervision with their managers since the re-structuring took place, the quality of such supervision still seems to be patchy. It may help with solving practical problems that workers might face with the job, but whether it is sufficient to support them emotionally is unclear. One worker expressed the following:

'I have never seen supervision here as anything mental. It is practical, not emotional or mental. If it was for this, supervisors would have training.'

It is key that supervisors have adequate training in supervision, in order that workers feel sufficiently supported.

In summary, the following example expresses the key stages of the development of a transformative relationship:

George had been through the Youth Criminal Justice System repeatedly. He had experienced family problems, educational problems and serious drug abuse. Through all the time he was in the YCJS X hadn't told workers that he was using heroin. He said that he didn't realise how serious his problem was and that he was too ashamed to admit it. Before, when he was released from prison he thought he could solve his problems on his own but now realises that the effect of his area, his family and friends is simply too much. He sees that he needs to be helped by workers. Now he wants to be a painter and decorator but recognises that he has to educate himself first. He said that you need a worker to keep with you.

George described his resistance to help previously and his inability to see the ways in which his area, family and friends affected his behaviour. Through the development of trust with his worker, who he describes in the following way:

'He busts a little joke now and then. Y gets straight into things instead of talking a lot of waffle.'

George began to develop a shared understanding with him of his own problems and thus perceived the need to be helped. This realisation in itself was transformative for him and he expressed the emotion that he would feel after meeting his worker and going back to his cell. The shared understanding was for him the beginning of seeing the possibility for change. Further, relationships with workers can be an on-going space within which young people can choose to express themselves in all manner of ways. For example, one worker talked in amazement about a young person who commented on the sunset in a supervision.

3.7 Scenario two: Playing the game

In this scenario, the young person remains passive throughout the criminal justice intervention and isolates the YOT and their experience there from their lives. They are just 'playing the game.' In this scenario, young people do not see that the YOT can bring about change in or for them and just see it as an hour or two 'off-road':

'YOT is a waste of time. YOT don't help cause they just keep you off road for 1, 2 hours.'

Young people who do not engage with criminal justice interventions describe their experience of supervision as 'check-ups'. They describe how they are asked 'how' and 'why' questions for the most part. This is expressed by a young person in the following way;

'They ask me hows things, behaviour, how you keeping? Said would work to get careers advice. Everyone has his own brain, plays the game. It gives me headaches though, enough bullshit.'

The classic question that young people who do not seem to engage with the criminal justice process report being asked is 'why did you do it?'. For some young people, in the absence of trust between them and their worker, such a question, for the reasons cited above (that youth crime is seen as inevitable and the reasons for it self-evident) indicates a lack of understanding on the part of the worker and immediately generates a distance that is then difficult to overcome. Other questions to which young people report that they respond passively are;

'how is it going at home?'
'how is it going at school?'

Young people who have moved through the system a number of times were much more likely to express their sense of disengagement with the process. One strategy was just to switch off, either by 'not listening' to the worker or by 'letting them speak.'

3.8 Why do young people 'play the game'?

- Low expectations on the part of young people due to previous disappointment.
- An identification of the worker with previous authority figures-e.g. teacher, police officer.
- Boredom in supervision.
- Failure of the worker to show a young person how in terms of their own life course, crime is not an adaptive way of living.
- Moralising. Belief on the part of the worker that a young person does not know right from wrong.
- Worker perceptions of change:

Many workers said that a young person won't change if they don't want to. Although this in itself is true, there is a danger of seeing such a motivation to change as a fixed state which is either there or not and which is entirely determined by the young person themselves. This can create a sense of powerlessness on the part of the worker and thus they lose confidence in their ability to bring about change, which in turn leads to a retreat from engaging creatively with a young person. The other side of this is where the motivation to change seems to be there at one point and then vanishes. Often it seemed that when young people were just about to be released from prison, or had recently been released, they would express a desire to change their ways. However, this could disappear once the young person gets back into their old grooves, to the disappointment of their worker. If this disappointment in young people continues, this can undermine the desire of the worker to actively engage. Supervisors should be aware of the considerable potential for disappointment that exists in youth justice work, in particular with those young people who are persistently offending.

- Organisational conditions of the workers:

There are various ways in which the undermining of morale in the YOT had an impact upon the ways that workers were able to engage with young people. Agency staff, some of whom were delivering core services to young people, complained that their job insecurity was an ever-present threat to their sense of belonging in the youth justice system. This also affects job tenure and contributes to staff turnover. In addition, the informal recruitment practices of the YOT, some felt, had led to a degree of de-professionalisation of youth justice work (see Burnett and Appleton, 2004 for a discussion of this in the context of Oxfordshire YOT). Others felt that the appointment of managers was not undertaken in the most open way possible and thus potentially compromised equal opportunities policies. As discussed above in scenario one, the importance of adequate and informed supervision of workers cannot be over-stated.

4. MULTI-AGENCY WORKING

4.1 Introduction

This section will aim to set out how the YOT as an institution is structurally situated within other services. It will then explain the different ways in which workers respond within this framework to young people moving through orders and the different ways in which young people engage or disengage with the multi-agency response of the Youth Criminal Justice System. Workers' responses and young people's experiences clearly influence each other.

4.2 The institutional position of the YOT

YOTs were set up in a bid to address the Audit Commission's criticisms of the youth justice system back in 1996. The principal argument for a 'joined-up' approach was that young people's offending is related to a range of problems or 'risk factors' which are

'...traditionally dealt with by separate agencies...and that it would therefore avoid duplication of effort, inconsistencies and differences in emphasis if services pool their skills and combine forces.' (Burnett and Appleton 2004: page 34).

On the ground, there are various interpretations of what this actually means in practice.

The YOT management seems to have been successful in encouraging other local authority managers to view young people who are offending as young people with complex needs that require a multi-agency response. However, it is not clear that there is a shared vision of how the YOT partnership at a strategic level can be effective in facilitating good practice by workers with young people on the ground. Most of the partners interviewed identified the role of the YOT to be the prevention of youth crime and the delivery of a package of support to young people in the context of a team made up of staff from a variety of agencies. There was also a general consensus that the YOT should be doing more in terms of early prevention, although partners were hopeful that Youth Inclusion Support Panels (YISPs) might help deliver such early intervention. Although correct descriptions of the YOT's remit, these descriptions lacked a deeper understanding of what mainstream agencies' involvement in the partnership should mean in practice.

However, one of the partners expressed a vision of the YOT which seemed to be an appropriate structure within which to facilitate the best practice models of multi-agency working on the ground for workers and young people. This vision can be summarised in the following way:

- The YOT should be trying to ensure that 'hard to reach' young people access mainstream services and 'champion' their rights to education etc.
- The YOT accesses 'inaccessible children and their parents' so that certain services can be delivered to them.

- The YOT should act to ensure that all the strategic partners increase their ownership of the issues of youth crime.

One of the main concerns of a number of the strategic partners was around the size of the YOT team and their uncertainty around the outcomes of the YOT. For example, one partner said the following:

'They have a large team but it is not clear whether they actually deliver, whether there is a reduction in re-offending.'

However, it is vital that in order for the YOT to be effective, these outcomes are seen not only as the responsibility of the YOT as a team of workers but equally as the responsibility of all of the mainstream services which constitute the YOT as a partnership. The YOT should be judged on its ability to co-ordinate the responses of other services (not on its ability to deliver these services), but this in turn is contingent upon the quality of services that those agencies provide as well as the quality of relationships between them and the YOT. The Audit Commission report (2004) on Youth Justice highlighted this in the following way:

'Addressing the full range of risks and needs depends strongly on the YOTs' ability to gain access to essential services from other agencies.' (page 77)

The Audit Commission report (2004) also talks of how parent agencies use the secondment of staff to relinquish responsibility for youth offending to the YOT. At an operational level, workers and young people alike experienced the frustrations of this avoidance of responsibility by mainstream agencies such as education and social services, such that the YOT seemed to be operating in some instances as an island.

From the interviews conducted with young people and workers, it seems that in many cases the YOT is a safety net for those who have otherwise fallen through the gaps in other services. Workers, in particular those working in programmes such as the ISSP, reported that it was often the case that the greater the need and the older the young person, the less willing or able mainstream agencies are to engage with them. This leaves the YOT carrying the can as it were for young people with complex needs. In some cases the YCJS can therefore become the sole welfare intervention for a young person.

4.3 Obstacles to the collective ownership of the problems of youth crime

Moving back to the strategic level, there are a number of obstacles to partners seeing the prevention of offending and re-offending as their responsibility as much as it is also the YOT's as a team of workers. These obstacles are set out below:

- There is a perception amongst some partners that central government itself is not sufficiently joined-up, such that their own targets as agencies may well compete with the targets of the YOT. This may equally be the case for funding, so that managers of mainstream services may see the funding for their own core business as under pressure by their obligation to pay into the core budget of the YOT. Examples of this view are expressed by the following quotations, taken from interviews with managers of partner agencies:

'Targets set for individual agencies may compete with the needs of young people in the YOT. For example, education is put under scrutiny about the performance of children in tests, attendance etc. Young people involved in crime don't necessarily look good in terms of these targets.'

Burnett and Appleton (2004) have noted these competing pressures in the research on Oxfordshire YOT:

'...they (the police) regarded their contribution of both staff and funding as 'a leap of faith' and were apprehensive in case, when called to account by their auditors, there might not be enough to show for the investment.' (page 47)

- There may be constraints on the ability of heads of department to act on the youth crime agenda due to power structures within their departments. For example, the devolution of power from the LEA to individual headteachers through changes in the allocation of funds has diminished the power that the LEA itself has to push through an inclusion agenda for young people who are excluded from school and are involved in offending.
- The feeling amongst partners that the YCPG meetings are not as effective as they could be and that the YJB driven Youth Justice Plan is not a helpful tool in working out a shared strategic vision for the YOT as a partnership. This was expressed in the following ways:

'The board meetings are bogged down in the day to day and are not sufficiently strategic.'

'It tends just to turn into the people who have the information telling the other people... I think sometimes it's difficult to know what we achieve in that group. It's usually not that effective'

- The short-term nature of much of the YOT's funding. This was expressed in the following ways:

'The YOT is good at securing specialist funding which is short-term. The biggest challenge is that if the YOT is going to do any good work it has to have sustainability - 2 or 3 years is not enough.'

At present the partnership board is not sufficiently effective as an operational mechanism for 'ensuring an integrated approach to delivering effective services.'

In addition, there do not seem to be clear mechanisms whereby the YOT manager can hold other local authority heads of departments to account on their responsibilities for delivering services. There may well be reporting systems in place, but these do not seem to be used effectively.

4.4 Young people and their experiences of multi-agency working:

So how do young people experience the YOT's delivery of a multi-agency service?

4.4.1 An engaged experience

Every young person who was interviewed was asked how they thought the youth criminal justice system should deal with young people, both for themselves specifically and for others generally. It was generally more difficult for young people at the earlier stages of the YCJS to articulate what they thought would be a good service than for those who had been through the system repeatedly. As one young person who had been through the system a number of times said, wisdom comes with experience, so:

'You have to stop them when they are young and fresh. When they are confused.'

The following quote expresses the general consensus of young people on what the YCJS should be doing:

'...they need to help us get into college, get accommodation, get a job, do more active things like sport. They need to talk to us on a level. If you don't understand where we are coming from try to. Use your power. Be straight. Be honest.'

From this, it is clear that young people want YOT workers to be advocates who lobby on their behalf.

4.5 A virtuous circle

Also articulated by the young person above is the dynamic between acting as an advocate for a young person in opening up other services and forming and maintaining a good inter-personal relationship with them. The ability of a worker to deliver an appropriate multi-agency response is related to their ability to engage in a relationship with a young person and therefore conduct an ongoing assessment. In turn, if a young person feels that a worker is acting on their behalf, they further trust the worker. This broadens the possibility that the young person might try and engage in something that they would not previously have considered. For example, one worker managed to establish a strong and positive relationship with a young person by advocating for them when they were in prison. Through this relationship, he got the young person, who was struggling with drug issues and who had previously been completely disengaged with the responses of the criminal justice system to consider attending a rehabilitation project out of the borough of Newham, which for him was a radical move. Thus engagement with a worker and with other agencies can become a virtuous cycle, taking in the young person's strengths and motivation along the way. There are however, pitfalls in this model of working that will be explored below in the worker section.

4.5.1 A disengaged experience

Young people who are involved in offending are often thought of as 'hard to reach.' However, disengagement should be seen as an outcome of young people's involvement or lack of involvement with services and therefore is an active position that some young people take in response to their experience.

4.6 Causes of disengagement

In the YCJS in Newham there are several reasons why young people might be disengaged from the attempts of workers to deliver a multi-agency response to their needs.

- Young people's perception of the YOT as part of the police due to its location in the police station.
- Lack of rapport between a worker and young person.
- Young people feeling that workers pry into their business too soon, as expressed by:

'They go straight for the home life. They should try and sort out the other stuff first. They start assuming and they should start with the little things. The social is more important. You need to build a relationship. In YOT the first thing is home life.'

- Sole focus on offending by their worker.
- Sense of being punished, or a sense of injustice. For example, one young person felt victimised because of the way he was treated by NCY. He had failed to turn up at NCY for an appointment but claimed that he had rung them to say that he couldn't make it because it was Id-ul-Fitr. The worker responded the next time he came by giving him a missed appointment.
- Sense of injustice at the initial stages of the order e.g. young people feeling that the 'contract' made at the beginning of a referral order is not a contract at all, due to their not being involved in negotiating what goes on the contract.
- Young person is acquainted with other young people in the YOT, who may have had negative experiences. This is particularly the case with young people on ISSP.
- Previous disappointment on other orders, in particular the inability of their previous worker to sort out housing, education etc.
- A mismatch between their perception of what had been promised and the reality of what happened on previous or current orders. This was a particular problem for those young people who had offended repeatedly.
- Perceived irrelevance of interventions. None of the young people who could recall going to NCY for group work saw the relevance of the interventions.

One young person even claimed that attendance at NCY encouraged offending:

'NCY makes you re-offend. They ask a question and everyone gives his own answer. If a worker asks how would you feel if you were robbed and the boy

says I don't care you get me, nex man thinks 'wait I like this person, he's from the streets.' And then they link up. Places like that are a chance for people to link'

- Where young people have had a negative previous experience of an agency to which they are sent.
- Where young people have a sense of being labelled as criminal at the agency attended. For example, despite the ethos of NCY as seeing the whole young person, the names of their programmes and the ways they are delivered give the impression that the sole focus is upon particular offending behaviours rather than on increasing a young person's understanding of themselves and their social behaviour. Similarly, young people resented being sent for a drugs awareness programme, in particular those who were on bail. Although research shows that substance misuse is a factor in offending and re-offending, young people feel that if their offence is not substance misuse related, it is unjust that they should be sent to such interventions.
- A lack of relationship with the person delivering an intervention. For example, one young person said of NCY group work:

'I'm not listening when somebody tells me. If my mum can't tell me, why am I gonna listen to somebody I see twice a week?'

This can lead to young people disengaging from the process by for example stereotyping workers as 'you lot' who live in nice places. Some of the NCY workers on the ISSP however, managed to distance themselves from this perception of 'toffy-nosed' criminal justice workers and were liked and respected by the young people. In this context informal offending behaviour interventions can be delivered. One observation took place of a young person having breakfast with a group of ISSP NCY workers who in this informal setting were able to challenge the young person effectively because he was engaging with them in a stimulating discussion about his own experiences.

- Where a young person doesn't understand why they have to go to an agency or where it is. This happened with a number of young people who were told to attend YAP.
- Where a young person is not properly informed by his/her worker. An example of this was where an NCY worker explained to a young person who had thought he had nearly finished his sessions at NCY that he was going to start on a further eight week course on offending behaviour and community responsibility. The young person got very angry about it.
- Losing hope in the system. This is a process which was witnessed by the researcher doing re-interviews with young people. The usual story was that a young person was promised help with for example housing and education. At this point they held out hope that the system could help them. The process was long and eventually they lost faith that the YOT could deliver.
- A mismatch in expectations of what young people believe the YOT should deliver and what the YOT in actual fact delivers. The result is apathy or aggression.

- Young people scale down their expectations of the YOT and if they are afraid of the consequences, simply turn up and play the game. If they are not afraid of the consequences they simply do not turn up and therefore breach the order. This was voiced by young people, for example:

'I'm not listening anyway I just don't want to get sent to jail.'

4.6.1 The vicious circle

The consequence of the inability of workers to deliver on their needs is that young people scale down their expectations of the youth criminal justice system, which then feeds into their general sense of disaffection with 'the system'. This disaffection makes it more difficult if they come into the system again. The worker at these later stages has a lot more work to do before being able to engage a young person in the first instance.

4.7 Workers and their ways of multi-agency working

Workers responded to the challenge of delivering an appropriate multi-agency response in different ways, according to a range of factors, including individual character, knowledge of the different agencies and professional background. As explained above, the YOT was envisaged as a team made up of representatives of different statutory agencies. Indeed, in the Newham YOT there are representatives from most, if not all of the core agencies. However, due in part to the rapid expansion of the YOT and the seemingly lack of formal criteria for the recruitment of staff, managers took on staff who firstly did not necessarily have training in the professions originally deemed appropriate for membership of the YOT and in some cases had little or any direct experience of working with young people. This was not necessarily wholly negative however. Some of these staff brought their own experience of working with young people that allowed them to engage in a different kind of way. In some cases, young people responded very well to some of these staff members and perceived them as being 'on a level' and not so 'professional'. This enabled the establishment of a good relationship. But the drawbacks were that in terms of delivering a multi-agency response, these workers and therefore their young people were sometimes at a disadvantage. That is not to say that those representatives of relevant agencies were necessarily able to deliver a better service. Both those with and without professional expertise responded in what will be called 'engaged' and 'disengaged' ways with delivering a multi-agency response to young people.

4.7.1 An engaged response

An engaged response to any young person begins with an appropriate assessment. This was voiced by one worker in the following way:

'You have to assess where they are at the start of their order, what their skills are and think realistically about where they can end up. It is not about me having all the power. It is a two-way process. This is not really the culture in the YOT.'

Assessment is also seen as ongoing, as expressed by the following:

'When you put together a supervision plan it should be based on the young people. You don't have to be tied to the PSR. You can change the supervision plan in response to ongoing assessment.'

An engaged response involves taking a view of needs as related not only to a young person's problems but also their personal strengths. Some workers make it their job to understand what different agencies do and what rights and responsibilities young people have with respect to those agencies. Such workers utilise the existing skills in the YOT in addition to researching elsewhere for relevant information or appropriate agencies. Once the appropriate agency is identified, they then set about making a referral. In order to ensure the success of this referral, workers may sometimes need to accompany young people. Engaged workers also understand that in sending a young person somewhere they are trading on a young person's trust for them and they therefore need to trust such agencies themselves and believe in the service. The worker also maintains an openness with the young person and keeps them up to date with what is happening in the process, being open about the obstacles that they may face. Finally, an engaged worker will understand that their role with a young person may change through time and their responsibility may expand and contract at different stages of the young person's order. For example, one worker talked at length about how she had become the key worker for this one young person who had committed a sexual offence and who was in need of considerable attention. For a time, her work consisted almost entirely of advocating on his behalf to get appropriate resources for him. However, having secured these resources, she felt it necessary to pull back from her work with him, in order that others including social services would fulfil their responsibilities.

4.8 Enabling factors

- An enthusiastic attitude towards learning new skills on the part of the worker.
- A willingness to engage with the complexities of a young person's case and to advocate for them in a calm and informed way, in particular with regards to mainstream services such as education and social services.
- Management supporting workers with their own knowledge of services in a timely way and also through ongoing professional training.

4.8.1 A virtuous circle

Young people respond well to a worker who sorts stuff out for them. They build a relationship and this becomes the incentive for the worker to keep working to unlock problems and services for young people and in the process open doors to particular agencies, build relationships and expand their own knowledge and skills.

4.9 Obstacles within the YOT

- A good worker will not send a young person to an agency they don't trust or where they think the intervention is irrelevant. This can bring pressures of its own and there have been cases where an individual worker's reticence in using a particular service that delivers mandatory elements of orders lead to trouble with their manager.
- A worker who engages with all of a young person's needs may end up feeling over-stretched and burned out.
- Those workers who did go beyond a reductive picture of their role and negotiated with core services were often also concerned about through-care as what the work that they had started with a young person often went beyond the bounds of the length of the order. This becomes a problem where the YOT service becomes the key link between services and where this may be the first time that services have been linked up for a young person.

4.10 Obstacles outside of the YOT

The Audit Commission report (2004) pointed out that access to mainstream services is still a problem for many YOTs despite the presence of chief officers on steering groups. This is a major frustration for YOT workers and young people alike. One worker put it in the following way:

'For ones who don't want to change you can't make any difference. People who are the most disadvantaged get the least out of it because the support structures are not in place to support the work the YOT is doing.'

This section will set out the issues highlighted by the research in certain key areas:

4.10.1 Social services

Workers pointed out the following problems:

- Poor communication between social services and YOT where a child has an allocated social worker. For example. a social worker had a young person on his caseload about whom a child care review happened without his knowledge.
- Barriers to YOT staff being able to get referrals accepted by social services staff e.g a worker on the ISSP programme, who was a social worker by training reported that in the two years she has worked at the YOT she has never yet managed to get a referral accepted. This is an issue picked up by Audit Commission report (2004) which found that only one-third of YOTs have good access to social services. In response to this problem it suggests that social services should second a social worker.
- Social workers passing over responsibility for cases to YOT staff. E.g. a YOT worker identified that a young person's problematic behaviour was related to

the absence of his mother. He was a Somalian refugee, whose mother was currently trying to come over from Somalia. It was identified in a social services review meeting that the YOT worker attended that some liaison should take place between the Home Office and Social Services. However, when the next meeting came round, which the YOT worker again attended, nothing appeared to have been done, and indeed the social worker suggested that he thought it was the YOT's responsibility, arguing that the YOT must have some links with the Home Office as a criminal justice agency.

- Inadequacy of leaving care support for young people. One worker argued the following:

'An awful lot is left though. When they are leaving care, they need support all the way through. Sometimes all they get is a flat, some money in their pocket and off they go. It would be nice for them to get through-care. We're basic, we are dealing with offending. What we do should be done by social services. They pass responsibility over to us.'

4.10.2 Education and training

- Although the education workers within the YOT have an in-depth knowledge of all the barriers to getting young people into education, training or employment, their power is limited by structural constraints. For example for young people who have been excluded permanently from school, there is little that can be done to effectively lean on individual head teacher. This was noted by the Audit Commission (2004):

'In practice it is difficult for YOTs and other local agencies to influence schools, as LEAs have little or no control over them.' (page 83)

- Young people and YOT workers consistently moaned about the quality of alternative provision. There are supposed to be education otherwise forums but they haven't met for a long time, although this was apparently due to change in 2004.
- Young people are being given false information on being transferred to alternative provision. For example, one young person's school sold the SIP 10 project to him as a way of him getting more help in school. Now he is there, he has found out that they don't do GCSEs, which he was not told before being sent there. He feels it is a waste of time and that he was deliberately misled.
- Young people encountering problems with access to individual schools, with schools losing forms and taking excessive time in processing applications.
- SIP 10 and 11 is inappropriate for some young people and sending them to college sites doesn't work, because they are not subject to the same legislation as schools and are not set up for under-16s.
- There is a shortage of courses and relevant work placements or apprenticeships for young people. This was noted with great frustration by

ISSP staff in particular (see the Audit Commission report on Youth Justice for supporting evidence of this shortage nationwide). There are staff within local voluntary organisations such as NCY who have valuable networks in the local community and who could be encouraged to develop placements using these links.

- Workers also report having been asked by social services or EWOs if the YOT can provide basic skills or education provision for young people who are out of education.

4.10.3 Mental Health

Hagell (2002) estimates that the prevalence of mental health problems amongst young people in the criminal justice system is around three times the national average. However, workers often felt that the services available for young people were inadequate.

- A lack of persistence on the part of mental health services with young people who are unwilling to engage. For example, one worker was supervising a young person who had told her that he was self-harming. The mental health worker within the YOT had conducted an initial assessment and had made a referral to the Child and Family Consultation Service (CFCS). Apparently, CFCS didn't want to know because they said that he didn't engage in the past.
- There were a number of cases where workers felt that they were forced to recommend custody for a young person in their PSR due to their feeling that this was the only way they were going to get any mental health care.

4.10.4 Bereavement

As mentioned above, emotional trauma such as bereavement can directly link to criminal behaviour because emotions associated with (in particular) unacknowledged grief, such as anger, can be channelled into offending. However, once more there were concerns on the part of workers around the lack of services designed to deal with these issues.

- Workers pointed out a severe lack of bereavement services in the borough of Newham.

However, an engaged worker will continue to advocate on behalf of young people, if well-supported by management.

5. CONCLUSION

The findings discussed in this report have been generated by in-depth interviews and ethnography with a range of agencies involved in the delivery of Youth Criminal Justice services over a period of eighteen months. Throughout this time, the research questions which these methods have enabled the research team to address have been purposely framed in order to take seriously the accounts of those young people who experience these services first hand. A number of strong messages have emerged from the findings discussed.

First of all, both workers and young people offered their own explanations of offending. Whilst young peoples' explanations were often framed in terms of what they got from crime, that is to say the emotional, social and financial rewards, workers' explanations were more often framed in terms of risk factors, thus mirroring the thrust of the YJB's approach to crime and criminality. However, it was clear that in order to successfully challenge a young person's offending it was necessary for that young person and their worker to develop a shared understanding of this offending behaviour and that a dogged focus on the risk factors approach may serve to alienate a young person from criminal justice interventions.

Second of all, the relationship between a young person and their YOT worker was the key *medium of change* for a young person. Offending behaviour groups, drugs sessions and one-off interventions were at the periphery of young people's engagement with the Youth Criminal Justice system.

Where young people did see that their dealings with the YOT in particular had transformed their lives, they were keen to own that change for themselves. That is there was a strong ethos, amongst young people, in the idea that the will to change has to come from within themselves.

Where transformative relationships with workers did exist for young people, they were characterised by understanding, by humour and by a lack of judgment by workers, alongside their willingness to challenge young people and be challenged by those self-same young people. These transformative relationships were enabled by personal creativity and commitment on the part of workers and strong managerial support for those workers who have a talent for engaging with young people.

A large number of those young people who were interviewed were 'playing the game.' Young people who were repeatedly coming through the YOT often became increasingly bored, disillusioned and disengaged and further, became better at playing this game, or alternatively, gave up playing the game at all and breached their orders.

A large part of this disappointment and the subsequent response of 'playing the game', was related to the inability of YOT workers to deliver core services to young people, such as education, training, or housing. This was amplified as a young person's needs grew alongside their engagement with the CJS - for example where

a young person went into prison, their housing needs might become acute on release.

The vision of the YOTs was to deliver multi-agency responses to young people, in a recognition of the multi-dimensional nature of young people's needs. However, in order for this to work in practice, it became clear that YOT workers themselves could not be used as replacements for the delivery of core service provision but rather were most successful at advocating for young people with services such as schools. It was also clear that statutory services such as education and social services were shifting their responsibilities onto the YOT, to the detriment of young people. This was reflected in the interviews with strategic partners. Further, the strategic partnership board did not appear to be an effective way of ensuring that all services took joint responsibility for youth crime.

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