

Youth Justice Conference

22nd June 2006

Edinburgh



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4th Annual Youth Justice Conference – Getting It Right For Every Child

Supported by the Scottish Executive, Prince's Trust & Barnardo's, Scotland

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This was a very full conference with speakers from many disciplines contributing their experiences and plans regarding issues and problems experienced by young people in relation to youth justice. It was split into four sections – “Joined-up Working”, “Early Intervention and Diversion”, “Reducing Youth Offending” and a seminar session featuring “Using Restorative Justice”, “Drug and Alcohol Use” and “Supporting Parents and Families”. (Delegates chose one of these seminars). The conference was sponsored by the Scottish Executive, Barnardo's and The Prince's Trust, who's Operations Director, Michael Hankinson, chaired the event with a Keynote Address presented by Cathy Jamieson, MSP, Minister for Justice.

“Joined-up Working”

In the first section, “Joined-up Working”, Councillor Tommy Williams, Convenor, Renfrewshire Council Community and Family Care Policy Board presented his Authority's experiences of “delivering an end-to-end service and ensuring cohesive joined-up working”. They had delivered a youth crime policy, a tiered approach to youth crime with a range of interventions targeted specifically for each individual child and their needs. A multi-agency youth crime team was established aiming at a seamless service, the focus being on prevention, diversion and intervention – early intervention being the key. With regards to prevention, schools were imperative in supporting young people where personal and social development classes promoted active citizenship. Pro-social behaviour was acknowledged and achievement celebrated and the focus was very much on partnership working.

When ‘diversion’ was necessary, the model of “RAMPS” – Reparation, Mediation and Parent Support – was used. Again acknowledging positive behaviour, they addressed problematic behaviour, offered an immediate level of support to individuals who required it using a joint proactive approach with agencies and the voluntary sector. By supporting young people they found they minimised and/or prevented reoffending.

When intervention (including intensive intervention) was required, all Council services contributed to the costs with additional funding from the Scottish Executive. Identified needs were quickly met with a range of services and inputs in a clear action plan. All young people referred to the Reporter were considered for the Restorative Justice Programme and this approach was very effective as less than 15% of those referred to RAMPS were referred again to the Reporter for further offending. Councillor Williams demonstrated the success of the scheme by stating that, in 2001 there were 49 persistent offenders, 24 in 2004, 18 in 2005 and 16 by 2006. It was felt that it was sometimes a positive thing for young people to be involved with social services, but there was a clear need for all agencies to work together to achieve the best outcomes.

Cathy Jamieson, the Minister for Justice, then delivered the Keynote Address, “Building on the National Standards”. She stressed that the majority of young people are a credit to their families and communities. It is only the behaviour of a very small percentage that presents persistent problems. Care needs to be for families and communities and not just the young person. Preventative work is very necessary and it is clear that individual agencies are recognising who the main persistent offenders are. The new Anti-Social legislation has helped and behaviour is now tackled more quickly. The overall level of offending is falling, however there is still patchy deliverance across Scotland. Whilst recognising the importance of targets, National Standards should focus on outcomes. Agencies cannot pick and choose about working with these standards. Where agencies are working together, results have been shown to be positive. The Minister stressed that everyone has to redouble their efforts and realise the need to measure progress. Ms Jamieson stated that she has the responsibility to get areas of poorer delivery to learn from other areas. To assist with this, Advisory Teams with a national remit will be set up. In addition, the Youth Justice Improvement Group will supply ideas and support to build on and also meet future challenges. As the Justice Minister, Ms Jamieson stated that she was not prepared to write off any young person, but was also not prepared to allow antisocial behaviour and will not tolerate those who refuse to take effective action to help these troubled or troublesome children. There is a need to make extra efforts for joint working and to think laterally and creatively. We must challenge cultures in our organisations and give communities the confidence that we are on their side. We must give young people life skills and have appropriate levels of intervention and diversion.

The final speaker in this section was Detective Chief Superintendent John Carnochan, Head of Violence Reduction Unit, Strathclyde Police who explained about “Effective Policing: A Shared Agenda”. Looking at the fear of crime, the speaker stated that the most at risk group of violent offending in Scotland were males aged 16 – 20 years. However, the most vulnerable group in relation to violence in Scotland was also males aged 16 – 20 years. A young people’s survey (featuring 16,000 responses) showed that these youngsters wanted more “things to do” (26.5%), less bullying (25.4%) and safer streets (24.1%). Unfortunately for some communities, crimes are not coming down. Behaviour is about choice and the way to affect this is by education. Policing methods for dealing with crimes are not any better than many years ago; indeed in some areas they are worse. Therefore there is a real need for people to work together to find better methods. Information should be shared. There is also a need to look at how change is viewed and assessed in much the same way as the Health Service adapts to this whereby policy and treatment change is effected to meet improvements in health care. Problems in individuals can and do develop at a young age and can then create further problems. It was felt that more money should be spent at the early years stage rather than at the opposite end. This, in time, would prevent problems at the top end of the scale, therefore eventually minimising the amount required to be spent. Using research figures, Mr Carnochan demonstrated that in adult murderers, 61% were unemployed at the time of the crime, 50% had problems with alcohol, 25% with drugs and 25% had mental health problems. However, of this same group, 61% had problems in school, 39% were from broken homes, 24% had a father who was violent to their mother, 26% had been in care, 25% had problems with alcohol and 17% had abused drugs. So therefore this ‘adult’ group had been met before as youngsters and services did not use their knowledge to make the situation(s) any better. Much earlier intervention is required and there needs to be much more engagement in communities and exchange of information. If there is knowledge of someone at risk, either as a victim or otherwise, we are personally negligible if we do not act. This is intervention, not interference and must be made at a quicker speed than at present.

“Early Intervention and Diversion”

The second session of the day looked at “Early Intervention and Diversion”, featuring firstly Hugh Mackintosh, Director of Barnardo’s Scotland. Mr Mackintosh looked at “Diverting Young People from Offending Behaviour” and stated that extra funding has helped to produce more resources than before. Anti-social behaviour orders, tagging, etc lead us down a path of treatment rather than prevention. Young people need strong bonds with family and teachers, healthy standards, opportunities and praise for positive behaviour. There is the need to value children and young people. Some troubled youngsters, assisted by their service, have stated that in the Project they were involved in, this was the first time they felt loved or cared for. There is also the impact of poverty that is not yet being fully addressed.

There is a wide range of measures that can be put in place which may prevent or divert antisocial behaviour. These include teaching in literacy and numeracy skills, personal management and behaviour. Transition periods between nursery, primary and secondary schools are very important with joint assessments being crucial here, together with parental support. The level of support to parents seems to drop off throughout primary school and a golden opportunity is missed for real partnership between families and services, especially where the parents have themselves had poor parenting. There should be intensive targeting for vulnerable families, the level of need and capabilities of some parents being crucial. There is no quick fix and it is not necessarily the cheap option, but very necessary to prevent problems later on.

Christina Burnett, Head of Support for Children, Young People & Families, Edinburgh City Council spoke next about “Working with Young People at Risk: Meeting the Needs of Every Child”.

It is known that young people who offend tend to be the disadvantaged, the poor and the abused in the main and are disaffected, not at school and may be looked after. To be effective, there is the need to understand who are likely to become persistent offenders and/or involved in serious crime. There has not been enough attention paid so far to the identification of the needs of specific groups, girls, children with learning difficulties and those involved in specific types of crimes. Partnership working with all necessary agencies is vital, sharing and targeting resources. Legislative frameworks should recognise the right of every young person to equal opportunities in education, leisure, recreation, training and employment. The rights of the community too have to be protected from the impact of antisocial behaviour and the role of the Hearing System and the courts must take all this into account. The wider community need to be involved, ensuring individuals and groups know that they have responsibilities. Direct work requires to be undertaken with these groups and we have to examine how people in communities are engaged with and empowered, encouraging them to take on other roles, e.g. panel members, volunteers, foster carers. The whole community is required in planning and implementing youth crime prevention strategies.

To achieve this, the following needs must be met: the need for a case management approach, the need to ensure children are in school and using universal services and the need for engagement with families. Decision-making must therefore be effective and timely. Further needs include the use of Early Intervention Projects, police warnings/restorative warnings, information sharing and joint decision making with flexible resources. This must be the way forward. Evaluation of practice and the use of different interventions needs to be carried out and evidence does show that a difference is being made with regard to prevention, diversion and intensive support. Staff training is vital but should take place in a multi-disciplinary way. Young people are most effectively helped to change behaviour by a combination of clarity, firmness and support that addresses their needs. Ms Burnett stressed that enforcement without support is rarely effective and support that does not address behaviour can often lead to an increase in problem behaviour.

To follow on in this theme, the next speaker, Dharmendra Kanani, Director, The Big Lottery Fund – Scotland, then spoke about “Supporting Young People to Engage in Positive Behaviour, stating that it is necessary to deal with packages that help communities as a whole, but quite often work with young people, features highly on teenagers and preventative work is forgotten. The Big Lottery Fund has held a number of initiatives aimed at engaging young people and Mr Kanani and his staff spoke of their overall observations. Sport had been a successful approach, with the vast majority of young people participating in their ‘Active Steps’ being male, activities including the highly popular Late Night Leagues. Some youngsters had later moved on to achieve coaching qualifications. This scheme demonstrated that key individuals or strong leaders are the make or break factor, particularly in terms of credibility with young people and that outdoor education provision is particularly successful in promoting social inclusion and improved social behaviours. A multi-agency project in Angus led to a 54% reduction in exclusions and a 51% reduction in truancies. A key factor in the success here was that the workers came from Leisure Services rather than the Police, Social Work or Education. Social Services are the key partners in sustaining many programmes, but there must be a strong emphasis placed on the involvement of young people at every stage as the majority have shown they will continue to attend if they are able to define their own outcomes. This has been demonstrated by their excellent participation where they take their responsibilities seriously and demand high standards. Other projects focussed on the 9-12s and reducing social exclusion (for whatever reason). Here it was found that, by feeding the children, behaviour improved. Breakfast clubs fostered health, learning and social skills. Other programmes throughout the country successfully targeted truancy, low achievers and the transitions of disabled children into mainstream schooling. Many of these projects are still ongoing but results have been very positive. By accentuating the positive and the possible, behaviour can be changed and young people can be supported to build and enjoy better relationships.

The last section in this session featured a case study, “Diverting and Preventing Offending Behaviour”, led by Amanda Stevens and Sukky Jassi from the Policy Research Institute at Leeds Metropolitan University. This was a holistic approach to young people and antisocial behaviour and was a multi-agency project that looked enforcement vs. preventative measures. This study evaluated the outcomes of a one-year pilot project targeting two antisocial behaviour “hotspot” neighbourhoods and a preventative project with 9-14 year olds whereby young people were diverted through positive activities. These youngsters were supported by youth and educational workers as well as young people support workers. The support offered was family and education orientated and in the form of accessing leisure and recreational activities with the hope of reducing antisocial behaviour. The team worked with local agencies to get referrals, often before enforcement action was taken. There was a flexible and individual approach for every case, building relationships with the whole family unit where appropriate. Intervention was multi-dimensional. The group’s key findings found that the project played a very important role in supporting young people and families in both targeted neighbourhoods. Activities went beyond planned project objectives (e.g. integrating young people back into education, family therapy, etc), multi-agency working was strengthened and there was a demand in both neighbourhoods for the project to continue. 31 young people (and some of their families) achieved positive outcomes and involvement with the police has reduced for more than half of the young people within six months. Here again, preventative work with young people at an earlier age was highlighted as was the need for more tailored holistic projects as opposed to a ‘one size fits all’ approach. Targeting antisocial behaviour ‘hotspot’ areas is not enough to eradicate the problem.

“Reducing Youth Offending”

The afternoon session of the conference started by looking at the issue of youth offending and Donna Bell, Head of the Youth Justice Team, Scottish Executive spoke of “Improving the Quality of the Youth Justice Process and Taking the Scottish Youth Crime Action Plan Forward”. To enable this there had been an unprecedented increase in funding in the last three years with the focus being on persistent offending. Results were now being seen with offending and re-offending rates coming down, but we should not be complacent. It was clear that there was a need to engage with the/

10.2% of the population who were classed as persistent offenders, but a lot of good work has been done with activities such as the Youth Crime Action Plan, National Standards implementation and the Antisocial Behaviour Act put in place, the latter being a fundamental part of the Youth Justice agenda. Any responses to offending had to be appropriate and timely, keeping the child at the centre, but we had to be mindful of the impact of the offender in the community. "Getting It Right For Every Child" was a universal vision for children, with everyone responsible for taking effective action and working together, guided by a lead professional for each child. It was important to build on what we have. Practice changes need to start now with integrated assessment and planning, maintaining and improving partnership working and links with other service providers. It is important to identify and cultivate hard to reach groups with less emphasis on inputs and process and more on action. There is clear need to make resources work effectively with a focus on performance and quality. This should lead to a delivery of positive outcomes. The public simply want to know that something has been done, preventing reoccurrence and young people need to be given workforce skills as this underpins everything.

Ms Bell concluded by stressing the focus was on quality improvement with support at local level, aided by five professional advisors helping support staff and trying to assess what is needed to implement the agenda. Processes require to be improved and both needs and deeds should be addressed. It is very important that the child be at the centre, whether offender or not, but we must also recognise the victim and the community.

Tom Philliben, Director of Reporter Operations, SCRA next reported on the "Impact of the Youth Justice Pilot Scheme: Fast Track and Children's Hearings". SCRA's focus was to protect vulnerable children and young people, to reduce offending and tackle offending behaviour, whilst engaging with victims and communities. SCRA was now much more involved with the latter. Mr Philliben stressed the need for caution when talking about offenders. Children can amass a variety of offences, sometimes due to falling in with a bad crowd, having a bad patch or even being ringleader. Because someone falls into this category does not mean they cannot become a positive member of the community in the future.

The Fast Track Children's Hearings Pilot (1.2.03-30.9.05) aimed for the Hearing System to respond more quickly, reduce re-offending and put an early stop on offending behaviour and took place in 6 Scottish areas. It was found that the vast majority of persistent young offenders were male (83%) and that many came to the Reporter at an early age with care and control grounds (62%), a quarter before the age of 5, most between the ages of 9 and 12. The impact of the Pilot showed a general improvement in the whole system with 19% reduction on offending six months after entry. However it was felt that the verdict of the Pilot was 'not proven'. It did show that, with better resourcing and focused work, a big improvement can be made and the system can be more effective. Fast Track is definitely positive with regard to timescales, but not proven with regard to impact on offending. Success requires integration of all agencies working together with communities. This is not simply for the short-term, the job requires longterm effort. Improvement can be seen but there is much more to do.

Kay Geddes, Youth Justice Strategy Co-ordinator, Aberdeen Youth Justice Strategy Group then delivered a presentation entitled "Meeting Targets and Delivering a Real Reduction in Youth Crime". Fundamental to the project in Aberdeen, a Police Tracking System to track all young offenders was initiated which followed pre and post intervention to evaluate service effectiveness. This improved coordination of caution, restorative warnings, referrals to Hearings and referrals across agencies. Tracking of young people also continued for two years after they had left the service. Again, as with other speakers, the predominant group were males (75.9%) although females were a rising trend. The youngest was 8 years old and 37% were offending within Residential Units. Crimes were mainly breach of the peace, vandalism, assault, theft and vehicle related. A Young Offender Review Group was set up to establish the process for monthly multi-agency meetings where it was decided who would be most appropriate provider to take on the referrals discussed. The Service provided diversion work (street projects, midnight football, youth cafes, etc) and worked with youngsters involved in all levels of offending targeting their needs with specific services, some highly specialised.

The outcomes were significant in that SACRO reported that 70% of repeat offenders did not re-offend within 12 months of accessing the service, 86% of first time offenders did not re-offend. Reports to the Reporter were also speeded up and outcome monitoring for young people post service is being established with initial information showing positive outcomes and impact on residential and secure placement. The group's audit demonstrated that while successes had been achieved, there was still further work to be done in relation to improving the allocation and referrals across SCRA and Social Work Children and Families. There was a lack of positive outcomes with vehicle offences and a lack of parenting support for families with complex needs. There still needs to be greater coordination with Education and other agencies and the transitions across youth and adult justice also require improvement. Many new services have been funded and will hopefully target young people up to the age of 21. The challenges ahead lay with more joint planning and effective coordination.

The final speaker in this section was Christine Allon, Director of Careers Scotland, who looked at “Creating Skills and Opportunities for Employment”.

There is a need to create skills and opportunities for all young people for employment. Thought must be given to what type of skills the young person may have or that could be developed and what would be required for them in the workforce arena. It is important to look at employability, getting connected and linking opportunity and need whilst providing support and aftercare. An employability framework is required featuring a partnership approach with the individual at the centre.

Following this session break, delegates were divided into groups to attend one of three seminars – Using Restorative Justice, Drug and Alcohol Use and Supporting Parents and Families. The author attended the latter, which was Aberlour’s National Parenting Development Project. The three main messages here were early intervention, accessible services and integrated working and planning. There was the need to develop user-friendly services for parents as this produces better outcomes for children and it was discovered that the quality of the programme leaders skills and how the programme was offered was as, or more, important than the content of the programme. Timing of interventions was crucial and the project highlighted the need for more training amongst all staff, ideally at an interagency level. Positive outcomes were recorded for most of the parents and children who participated in the programmes, but more sustained work and other supports were required in order to achieve a lasting impact on their parenting skills. The biggest outcome was parental self-esteem – this improved immensely and communication improved between parents and children, attendance at school also improved and there was a substantive increase in children’s emotional states.

The key messages and implications for practice were:

1. Developing parenting services is complex and time-consuming.
2. Adequate training and resources are not currently in place.
3. Processes are as important as content.
4. There are advantages in viewing inter-agency planning, training and direct practice, but inter-related elements of an integrated service.

The full report on the above Development Project is due for publication shortly.

All in all, this was an excellent conference with many good speakers and much relevant information. The only fault was that it attempted to pack too much content into the day and this left no time for questions and discussion. However, despite this, it was an extremely useful opportunity for all agencies to meet and share knowledge and ideas which will hopefully lead to more successful multi-agency approaches to tackling youth justice issues and addressing the needs of the young people, families and communities involved.

Notes taken by Angela McGroarty on behalf of the Scottish Association of Children’s Panels (SACP)