

BOOK REVIEWS

CJM
CRIMINAL JUSTICE MATTERS

Living Dangerously

Roger Graef. Harper Collins.
H/B 262pp (1992)

Tarnished Vision: Crime and Conflict in the Inner City

David Robins. Oxford University Press.
P/B 142pp (1992)

Roger Graef's 'Living Dangerously' follows eight young offenders over a year from their period on an 'intensive probation' course at Sherborne House in London, which attempts to make offenders confront their behaviour as a 'last chance' before prison. The stories, ridden with humour and angst, reveal both the optimism and hope, and the cynicism and resignation of these young offenders and chart their drift in and out of a perpetual cycle of further offending, courts and prison. Two of the youths, Bobby and Sam provide hope, attempting to settle down in vain efforts to find employment, only to face the cycle again as a result of inadequate support systems, poor agency intervention and little prospect of full time employment. Whilst the majority of middle class youth find work through a network of family and informal contacts, as Graef argues, for youths like '...Sam, and for the boys like him, there is no equivalent network, particularly in times of recession. His only

grapevine is one of crime: the only way he knows to get past doors is to climb in the window'

In a similar vein, David Robins' 'Tarnished Vision' charts the hopes of a number of young offenders from an inner city area to realise a vision to reconstruct their community, and thereby to help reduce the incidence of predatory crime. However, against a background of deprivation, marginalisation and community conflict, the vision becomes tarnished. The book painfully highlights the realities of inner city life - intra class crime, community disorganisation and impoverishment and the ineffective and lacklustre attitudes both within the community and within statutory and voluntary agencies. As Robins states, '... the vision was tarnished by harsh realities - violent feuds and fractional strife, a chaotic local authority, ineffective and contentious community organisations, and youth involved in networks of criminality'

Rather than romanticising the young offender, both texts painfully appreciate the impossibility of many of today's youth achieving a fraction of their optimism and dreams, not only as a result of the inadequacy of much governmental and local authority provision and the conflict which exists between such organisations and the community, but also because of the presence of 'within' community con-

flict and disarray. It is hardly surprising that so many young people turn to crime and delinquency when cynicism and resignation borne of deprivation has created a class alienated from most political, economic, legal and social institutions. Neither the misdirected deployment of resources nor the reintroduction of punitive measures of control such as secure accommodation will reconstruct a sense of hope and purpose for these youth. Moreover, however well intentioned the programmes such as Sherborne House, and those described in *Tarnished Vision* may be, if they fail to break the cycle of inner city pathologies the time soon arrives when, as Robins argues 'members of the community themselves take stock of their desperate situation and decide to devise solutions of their own'. Both books point to the need for intervention which goes beyond the formal criminal justice system and the individual as offender. There needs to be a reallocation of resources aimed at tackling the causes of criminality, and as Robins argues, '... this means putting less faith in prisons, which have little effect on crime, and more faith in health, education, training and child care...' Unfortunately the vision which is portrayed by the young people in these books is not shared by the present government.

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