

# Intensive probation

**Janet Jamieson** comments on the evaluation of four Scottish programmes.

The Social Work Research Centre at the University of Stirling has been involved in the evaluation of four intensive probation projects. Intensive probation in Scotland operates as a direct alternative to custody for high tariff<sup>1</sup> young offenders and was offered as a requirement of a probation order for offenders aged between 16 and 25 years. Intensive probation involved participation in a group-work programme which was, on the whole, derived from social learning theory and focused on offending behaviour, the development of social and cognitive skills and community reinte-

research undertaken in Leeds where fifty-two per cent of offenders recommended for a place on intensive probation were sentenced to this disposal while forty-two per cent were sentenced to custody, and five per cent to other disposals. Thus, as was also concluded in the Leeds research, a high reliance on custodial sentences as a direct alternative to intensive probation provides strong evidence that those offenders assessed as suitable for intensive probation were at serious risk of a custodial sentence. This conclusion is further strengthened by the finding that sixty-two per cent of those assessed as unsuitable for intensive probation were sentenced to disposals that were of a lower tariff than custody or intensive probation.

## Completion rates

Offenders sentenced to intensive probation face a minimum of 60 hours intensive probation supervision and an average of sixteen months probation order supervision. This could prove a daunting prospect for many young offenders whose lives are often problematic or chaotic on both personal and practical levels and thus relatively high levels of attrition would not have been unexpected. However, of the 181 probationers who actually attended one of the projects 104 (57%) successfully completed the intensive probation component of their orders and 77 (43%) were breached. This percentage of successfully completed orders was lower than that achieved by the STOP project in Mid Glamorgan where seventy-two per cent of those who attended the intensive probation programme successfully completed. However, the lower completion rates achieved by the projects may reflect the fact Scottish offenders cannot ask for outstanding charges to be taken into consideration at sentencing, an option that is available to offenders in England and Wales. For Scottish offenders, the existence of outstanding charges may serve as a disincentive to successfully com-

plete an intensive probation programme.

## Conviction rates

The projects achieved a considerable degree of success in motivating high tariff offenders to attend and complete programmes designed to challenge and confront their attitudes and behaviour. However, the 'What Works' debate and literature emphasizes the importance of demonstrating effectiveness through the impact intervention has on reoffending rates. Table 1 details the reconviction rates (for cases that these could be determined) in the eighteen months immediately after sentencing, or in the case of those sentenced to custody, in the eighteen months immediately after release from this custodial sentence.

The table illustrates that the rate of reconviction was relatively high for all disposals. Reconviction was lowest for those sentenced to disposals other than custody or intensive probation and highest for those who had breached intensive probation orders. The table also illustrates that probationers who had completed orders recorded a reconviction rate that was three per cent lower than for those who had been sentenced to custody. A Home Office study on reconviction concluded that offenders sentenced to community disposals were associated with considerably more pseudo reconvictions<sup>2</sup> than those offenders sentenced to custody. The report tentatively suggested that pseudo reconvictions accounted for two per cent of reconvictions for custodial sentences and for six per cent of reconvictions for probation orders. When these adjustments were made, offenders who completed intensive probation orders had a reconviction rate of seventy-seven per cent, that is seven per cent lower than the adjusted rate of eighty-four per cent for those sentenced to custody.

The findings presented suggest that intensive probation has proved an effective and successful intervention for young people whereby over half (57%) of the high tariff young offenders managed to complete intensive probation orders and almost a fifth (17%) had not reoffended in the eighteen months after project completion. Indeed, project/module completion evaluation questionnaires and post completion interviews demonstrated that probationers believed intensive probation to have increased their awareness of offending and its consequences and to have demonstrated to them strategies to

gration. The groupwork methods and approaches employed by each project varied.

Raynor argues that 'the probation service has to be careful not to set people up to fail and particularly not to invite failure by inappropriate selection for programmes' (1992:13). Targeting of young offenders who were at risk of a custodial sentence therefore proved an overarching objective for all the projects. A total of 335 offenders were assessed as suitable for intensive probation. Of these 197 (59%) were sentenced to a probation order with a condition to attend an intensive probation project, 120 (36%) were sentenced to custody and 18 (5%) were sentenced to other disposals. These findings compare favourably to

**TABLE 1: Re-conviction Rates**

Disposals	Eighteen months	
	Number	Percent
Intensive probations (n=116)	104	90
Intensive probation completed orders (n=64)	53	83
Intensive probation breached orders (n=52)	51	98
Custody (n=85)	73	86
Other disposals (n=50)	40	80

**TABLE 2: Responses after 12-24 months**

	n=17		n=14
Why stopped offending	No of cases	Why continued to offend	No of cases
Desire to stop	6	Drugs use	4
Negative impact on relationships	4	Acceptance that offending inevitable	2
Intensive probation	3	Alcohol use	2
To avoid custody	3	Need	2
Consequences	3	For money	2
Plans for future	2	Excitement	1
Stopped using drugs	2	Relationship problems	1
Consideration of victims	1	Revenge	1
Maturity	1		
<b>Total</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>15</b>

avoid further offending. For example:

*I understand the consequences of offending and getting caught and it's not worth it. (project completion evaluation)*

*Since I started coming to the groups I have learned a lot about self responsibility, about drugs, violence, drink and mixing them together. (project completion evaluation)*

*I've not reoffended and I've stopped using. The help they give you, they listened. They were listening and advising and showing you the way to go. (post completion interview)*

*Well put it this way I've never offended since they asked us about the victims' point of view. That got to me. At the time I didn't think about victims, I always thought so what. (post completion interview).*

However, intensive probation was not the only factor that encouraged positive changes in offending behaviour, table 2 summarises the answers given by probationers interviewed 12-24 months after project completion to explain their non offending or continued offending.

Overall, it appears that intensive probation had proved influential but it was not the only influential factor nor, indeed, the most often referred to. The factors identified to explain continued offending indicate that a variety of needs and problems exacerbated and encouraged further offending. These findings therefore suggest that intensive probation would prove a valuable and effective component of a wider strategy that addresses the myriad of problems and difficulties experienced by high tariff young offenders. David Downes (1997) has recently advocated that

such a strategy should involve encouraging individuals to become 'stakeholders' in society and should incorporate the promotion of employment opportunities and greater social and economic equality. Such a strategy would address issues such as boredom, need and, hopefully, resignation to a criminal lifestyle. It should therefore reduce the influence of these pressures to offend.

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#### Notes:

1. High tariff in this respect refers to offenders who are at high risk of a custodial sentence because of the severity or persistence of their offending.
2. Pseudo reconvictions are convictions for offences that were committed prior to the target sentence, which in this study was the conviction for which offenders were assessed for intensive probation.

Once again Britain is turning to the US for answers to the crime question. Following the apparent success of commissioner Bill Bratton in cutting New York City's crime rate, zero-tolerance policing is being touted by a number of politicians, pundits and police officers as a solution to (among other things) the petty crime and 'incivilities' caused by troublesome, teenagers loitering in public places (Dennis 1997). No more fatalism about what the police can achieve. No more 'turning a blind eye' to the noise, nuisance and other anti-social behaviour that blights people's

# Busy on the street

**Ian Loader** questions the appropriateness of the 'zero tolerance' approach to policing young people.

quality of life. Zero-tolerance promises that the police will intervene firmly and confidently to crack down on the perpetrators of teenage disorder, however trivial, their activities. Lectures will be delivered, parents informed, arrests made, the law enforced. Criminal behaviour will thus be nipped in the bud, and the spiral of decline in communities besieged by troublesome youth halted.

All this has an obvious practical and emotional appeal. To the police it says: 'yes, you can make a difference'. To anxious



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residents it sounds resolutely ‘tough’ and appears to offer instant amelioration. But will it work? And how does it square with how young people actually experience crime and policing?

### Quelling disorder

The organizing premise of zero-tolerance policing is that teenage disorder can be quelled successfully by police activity alone, without the assistance of other agencies. (It is noteworthy that while Bill Bratton (1997: 40) calls his strategy ‘community policing’, he is at pains to ensure that ‘the police’ rather than ‘the community’ get the credit for what has happened in New York.) This belief is seriously flawed. It reduces a number of complex issues (not least about the legitimate uses of public space) to a simple problem of ‘law and order’ and fails to acknowledge the hard-won lesson that many both senior and rank ‘n’ file officers have learned since the early 1980s: that there exists no purely policing solution to questions of crime and disorder (see Loader 1996: ch. 4).

Lacking this insight, zero-tolerance policing might even exacerbate the problems it sets out to tackle. By focusing yet more police attention on young people congregating in public places (a social group who already feel heavily policed), it risks reducing still further the already rather low levels of trust that many teenagers have in the police. In some locations, as the Chief Constable of Thames Valley Police Charles Pollard (1997: 54) notes, such a strategy might provoke the very disorder it sets out to prevent. At the very least, zero-tolerance is likely to reinforce the resigned fatalism that young people often evince towards the police. As one 21-year-old male put it to me during my recent research (Loader 1996: 1):

“The police can do what they want as long as they don’t worry me. And they do what they want anyway. So all your opinion polls and charts and that’ll not make any difference to them.”

### Young people as victims

This brings us to the matter of young people’s safety. A number of recent studies (conducted by both the Home Office and others) have suggested that young teenagers are disproportionately victimized by crime and often face more serious problems as victims than they cause as perpetrators (Anderson et al. 1994; Aye Maung 1995). Zero-tolerance policing not only has nothing much to say about this, but it risks creating a climate of hostility in which young people are even less likely to report their experiences as victims to the police. Young people’s safety will thus remain where it stands at present: near the foot of the policing and crime prevention agenda.

Zero-tolerance policing then is likely in significant respects to worsen young people’s relations with the police. Its underlying impulse is to banish and exclude, to treat young people as a problem to be solved rather than as citizens-in-the-making with demands to voice. Far from offering a lasting solution to the problems it purports to deal with, it seems set to reinforce a situation in which young people are over-controlled as suspects and under-protected as victims.

So what’s to be done? Is it possible to tackle the problems caused by ‘troublesome youth’ while also addressing the experiences and concerns of young people themselves? I believe it is, provided that policing policy (as well as any more general, multi-agency solutions) are based upon the principle of inclusive dialogue (Loader 1996: ch. 7). Here two current initiatives demand more serious consideration than they are receiving in the rather punitive climate that prevails at present. First, we need to put in place forms of youth consultation (of the kind recently developed by Greater Manchester Police Authority) that offer young people a genuine voice in how they and their communities are policed. Second, we need to develop practices of mediation that



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enable young people and local residents (together with relevant local agencies) to vent their frustrations, wrestle with each others’ point of view and (just possibly) develop negotiated agreements about how to resolve the various problems associated with young people’s occupancy of - and behaviour in - public places.

This it seems to me offers a promising alternative to the follies currently being propounded under the banner of zero-tolerance policing; one capable of delivering solutions that are both effective and democratically legitimate.

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## Homeless in London

Statistics based on CentrePoint Project Admissions  
April - September 1996

### Gender - All Admissions

	gender	
	Count	%
Male	346	55%
Female	284	45%
Total	630	100%

### Age - All Admissions

	AGE	
	Count	%
15-16	57	9%
17-18	251	40%
19-20	163	26%
21-22	80	13%
23-24	40	6%
25-26	35	6%
27	1	0%
Total	627	100%

*The law does not recognise those under 16 as homeless. CentrePoint houses young people at risk in Central London - 0171 629 2229*