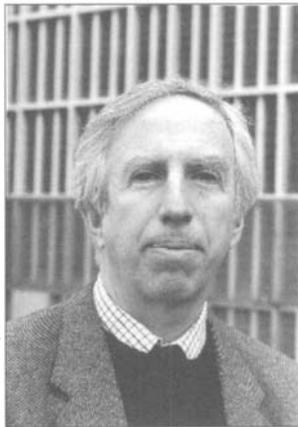


Roger, your books and films dealing with young people in trouble are renowned for conveying the reality of their experiences within the criminal justice system. You are currently finishing a new series of films in this area. What can you tell us about this project?

The current project is the culmination of seven years work. It is the second in the series of three

Roger Graef talks to David Kidd-Hewitt



Ken Loveday

programmes called *In Search of Law and Order*. The first was the search for law and order in the UK and looked at policing, sentencing and punishment of young people in Britain and its effectiveness or otherwise. The new series is about American innovations in juvenile justice. The first programme is set in Texas and deals with what the justice system itself can do. For example, there is a wonderful programme in Fort Worth where they make eighteen interventions between arrest and incarceration. Eighteen, it's absolutely fantastic. They see kids basically as good kids who make mistakes, instead of evil kids who commit deliberate acts of criminality. The second film is in Boston where there is a collaboration of a very extensive kind between all the various justice agencies and other relevant

agencies which has effectively stopped youth murder altogether. There is now a truce upon which they are trying to build a more lasting peace. The third film is set in an industrial suburb of San Francisco, called Richmond, California, with a very deprived school and a very early intervention with babies and toddlers and mums who are at risk themselves because there are inadequate resources for them and they themselves do not know what to do with their difficult kids. So the third film is really about what needs to be done to keep kids out of the justice system. In my view by the time they get into the justice system the chances are that it's pretty far down the line for the persistent offenders.

Isn't this at odds with the other side of American justice that we have been looking at in CJM recently? Where there are in fact young people on death row and there are more and more young people going to prison? The whole ethos seems prison based rather than interventionist.

The availability of guns in the US does mean that juvenile homicide has been a very serious problem and for people who kill incarceration is regarded as a necessary step because they are so dangerous. But the use of prison for drug offenders, non-violent drug offenders at that, is part of an abject failure to understand the complexity of the drug problem. The War on Drugs is a kind of knee-jerk response. So the prisons are actually filled largely with non-violent drug offenders. The ones on death row and the ones who have been tried as adults are being treated really as kind of examples of despair. But having said all that, even in Texas, which has the largest number of all of those things in the country, they have got a place called Gittings where they deal with rapists and killers largely under 18, where they do really turn these kids around and let them go back into the community at 18. They believe in that same notion, that these kids are capable of redemption.

In your 1992 study, Living Dangerously, we are taken through the experiences of young offenders such as Bobby and

Sam who have been given an alternative to prison. That is Sherborne House which you describe as a showcase of the Inner London Probation Service. Would the Bobby and Sam of 1997 have that same opportunity?

Bobby and Sam today would probably go to prison, because under Howard's punitive ethos that prison works, judges and magistrates have resorted to prison in a way that they used not to under a previous regime. It's interesting that Home Office policy does have such an influence on sentencing even though it's never set out necessarily in law. Sherborne House has really struggled for clients at the level for which it was designed which is the most at risk, high tariff. It is supposed to be the equivalent of prison and instead they are getting lower level kids just to keep open. I don't think that's terrible because it's such a good place but in terms of the principles set for it it's a loss and I'll hope that will change now Jack Straw is Home Secretary.

What about your idea of role models as a way forward for young people in trouble?

I am very pleased that Lambeth is taking up this idea of 'adopting' thirty of the most difficult offenders. The Lambeth scheme is similar to that already operating in Fort Worth, in that they are proposing to have mentors or minders for 30 of the most difficult kids in Lambeth, the most persistent offenders. The point is that lack of supervision is one of the key predictors of future offending, we know that.

We know about erratic parenting, but simply a lack of attention encourages these kids to look for the kind of approval and support they would normally get from a parent or uncle or a cousin and when they find they are not getting much support, they look to get it from each other. That's why the role model notion is so important. If they lack evidence that they can get excitement and approval in a positive way they are going to find it in a negative way. Crime pays, we have to remember that, and until it stops paying they're not going to stop crime. To me the miracle is that so many kids

do give up crime because on the whole the chances of getting caught are very slim and the rewards for it are pretty good.

Role models are there in abundance in most middle class settings and certainly in stable working class ones. The kids we know who are most at risk of offending, lack those role models. The ones who are too dangerous and are really ill, mentally ill, are a very small number and they need a different kind of attention. Although we know already from the serial killers, the psychopathic killers who randomly strike at their victims, that several of them tried to get psychiatric treatment and were turned away - and that's a kind of civic madness.

What role should the police have with regard to control of young people? Should they be supported when the occasional 'cuff on the ear' controversy hits the headlines as in the recent Steve Guscott case?

There is a risk with using the police on the beat to resolve the contradictions of fair trial, innocent until proved guilty, and to provide a kind of rough justice in the style of PC Guscott. This produced such a reaction in the country saying that he was right to hit this kid. Well, from what I have been able to find out, this kid was the least culpable of a whole group of kids on that estate and it wasn't a cuff on the ear, he was actually hit right across the nose. The cops are not the right people to be handling that on their own. We are handing them the problem and I think that this notion of putting more bobbies on the beat as a way of reducing crime is just wishful thinking. It won't help either the police to have unrealistic expectations put on them or the rest of the public who are going to be disappointed.

I am interested in a theme that flows throughout all your work and it has certainly come out in our conversation today, that young people who are in trouble are all our children. Is this something you strongly believe?

Absolutely. I have had the privilege of spending quite a lot of time with kids who are utterly rejected by the system - their

school, their families even, and whether it's in prison or in Sherborne House. I find them very good company. Interestingly, I have never been threatened by any of them. I have had one quarrel once with Bobby, that's it. I was disappointed by Luke a couple of times, he was just rude, but that's it. I have never felt in danger, nothing's ever been taken, I've given three of them jobs and two of them stayed with it although one of them was on drugs the whole time. They seem in my experience to behave the way they are treated.

When I was in Texas, I went back to the place where I had been briefly, for an hour, in November. I went back three months later to a secure residential place and a lad came up to me and said, 'Oh Yeah, you're the one who taught me how to iron my trousers', and he was really pleased to see me. It was five minutes, three months previously but it meant something to him. I think we are incredibly mean with our time, our trust and our support, but we are very free with our punishment.

Do you see your films and books as there merely to inform, or do you see yourself more directly as a mechanism for change?

Well both actually. According to PSI, the *Rape* film is the only film that's ever changed public policy which is both good news and bad news. But public policy isn't the only thing. I've used television to change attitudes and if we can begin to see these kids as similar to our own, then we wouldn't treat them so differently. Take the safaris issue as an example. If you are middle class and your kid is in trouble, almost the first thing you will do is take them on a trip, to give them some adventure and change their scene, get them away from bad influences. Yet when we do that with these kids, that's considered a treat for cheats. If your kid was in trouble, and consistently so, would you lock him up in a room the size of a large lavatory, with two other kids who are just as bad, if not worse, for 6 months or a year and then expect him to come out better? Civic madness.

Roger Graef is a film maker, journalist and author.

While juveniles are by no means forgotten in UK prisons, they seem to give rise to a certain amount of bewilderment among prison staff. That, at least, was my impression after the ISTD's day conference on the issue. As Tony Fitzpatrick, the prison service area manager for Merseyside and Manchester, pointed out in his speech, the very presence of juveniles in prison is controversial, but they are likely to continue to be there until sufficient resources are devoted to providing secure care beds. Amazingly, prison is cheaper than places in secure childcare units.

The figures given by Mr

Conference Report

Bryan Williams reports on the ISTD day conference - 'Juveniles in Custody: the forgotten children', held in HMYOI Stoke Heath on April 30th 1997.

Fitzpatrick were a surprise. On 25th April, there were over 2,500 juveniles in prison custody in England and Wales; 1,642 sentenced males, 44 sentenced females, 844 unsentenced males and 19 unsentenced females. Some young offender institutions (including Stoke Heath, where the conference was held) specialise in younger prisoners. Others make no special arrangements for them at all, and delegates from women's prisons spoke of asking older inmates to 'mother' juveniles, while acknowledging that if resources permitted, they would like to do more.

Catherine Crawford, head of the prison service's Programmes Group, said that all sentenced juveniles serving more than four weeks were subject to sentence

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planning - although it was clear from other delegates' contributions that sentence planning is at a very early stage in some institutions. It would seem important that juveniles are given priority in the process, because under the latest version (called 'sentence management'), sentence planning involves the assessment and management of risk, and the identification of needs. These are then kept under review, and discussed with supervising social workers or probation officers to ensure continuity after the young person's release.

Earned privileges

Having almost completed a programme of research for the prison service on the topic, Alison Lieblich and Grant Muir were uniquely well-qualified to talk about the service's 'earned privileges' policy. What's that got to do with juveniles, one might ask. As it turns out, quite a lot. It seems that juveniles' experience of the enhanced regimes and incentives policy is markedly different from that of adults. Interestingly, young offenders were more likely to see the principle of earned privileges as a fair basis for allocating people to different levels of regime. Juveniles misbehave far more often than older prisoners, and staff have to respond flexibly. The system needs to find ways of taking account of the fact that children sometimes have tantrums, rather than penalising them in the same ways as adults. While the policy has not led to noticeable improvements in inmates' behaviour overall, the study found that the behaviour of juveniles in prison has changed for the better. The speakers did not speculate about the reasons for this, so we shall have to wait for the published report of their research.

Stoke Heath's chaplain, Barry Cooper, assisted by Mark Supersad, gave a moving presentation about juvenile prisoners' experiences. Reminding us of the conference theme, he used examples from his own work to demonstrate the need to show children in prison that people do care about

them, respect them as individuals, and remember them. They must not be allowed to feel that they are forgotten. Not many opportunities are currently provided for the expression of spirituality in prison, or for discussion of the guilt and the desire for peace and rehabilitation which many young offenders feel. While the examples he gave necessarily arose from his work in the chaplaincy, he showed that prison officers as well as 'civilian' staff have a genuine interest in helping young prisoners to work on such issues.

Evidence of abuse

Former social services director Christine Walby spoke of the need to remember that juvenile offenders are indeed children. Echoing the previous presentation, she said that it was often conveniently forgotten that many of the children in prison have suffered horrific abuse and deprivation prior to their offending careers. She summarised the available material about abusive institutions and abused children in residential settings, and argued that it was relevant to the prison setting. There is space here for only a few examples. Poverty among children in this country trebled between 1979 and 1995, by which time one in three children was living in poverty. This is a cause of increasing crime rates which is often neglected. Research published by the Prince's Trust in 1995 showed that 90% of children sentenced to long periods in institutions had previously suffered abuse. A paper published by the Howard League in the same year showed that bullying was reaching dangerous proportions in YOIs. Ms Walby went on to say that in her experience, assaults and abuse in institutions are associated with cultures and environments which tolerate violence. Low morale, cuts, and poor staff training create an environment where abuse can thrive and keen, professional staff have their enthusiasm blunted.

On a more positive note, there is plenty of work going on to improve matters. Ms Walby mentioned in particular the Warner



Julie Grogan

Farida Anderson of POPS leads a workshop

Report and the paper 'Children in Public Care', published in the wake of the pin-down scandal by the Department of Health. The level of awareness and concern about the risks to children in institutions has risen considerably, and complaints procedures have been set up in many settings to ensure that children's rights are promoted.

The conference was an important and timely one. The continued incarceration of thousands of children in young offender institutions is a national scandal and a breathtaking waste of resources. While some of the presentations demonstrated the professionalism

with which the prison service is coping with this unwanted problem, much of what was said reinforced that prisons are not the proper place for these young people. One hopes that this issue will be urgently and effectively addressed by the new Home Secretary.

Bryan Williams, University of Keele.

ISTD will be running its next conference on Juveniles in Custody at HMYOI Portland on 18th September 1997. Details from ISTD on 0171 873 2822 or E-mail istd.enq@kcl.ac.uk

YOUNG PEOPLE & CRIME

SELF-REPORTED OFFENDING AMONGST 14-25 YEAR OLDS IN ENGLAND & WALES (1993)

Key Points

- Involvement in offending and drug use amongst young people is widespread - every other male and every third female admitted to committing offences and the same numbers admitted using drugs at some time - but most offending is infrequent and minor and most drug use is confined to using cannabis.
- About 3% of offenders are responsible for a disproportionate amount of crime (about a quarter of all offences).
- Young Asians are less likely to commit offences and/or use drugs than whites and Afro-Caribbeans.
- The peak age of self-reported offending is 21 for males and 16 for females.
- Females aged 14 to 17 are nearly as likely as males to be involved in offending but as they get older, this offending drops off sharply in comparison with males.
- The rate of participation in property crime by males increases with age, whereas for females it declines; the seriousness and frequency of all offending by males and females declines with age.
- The strongest influences on starting to offend are low parental supervision, persistent truancy and associating with others involved in offending, all of which are strongly related to the quality of relationships with parents.
- Female offenders who become socially mature adults are significantly more likely to stop offending than those who do not, whereas this development process makes little difference for male offenders. However, males who continue to live at home into their mid-20s, avoid heavy drinking, drug use and association with other offenders, are more likely to stop offending.

Source: Home Office December 1995. John Graham & Ben Bowling. Home Office Research Findings No. 24.

"The continued incarceration of thousands of children in young offender institutions is a national scandal and a breathtaking waste of resources."