

Pathway Projects: Sunderland and Gateshead

Kelly Davison outlines an innovative intervention programme taking place in Northeast England.

Innovative intervention

The implementation of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 has seen a new principal aim for the Youth Justice System - 'to prevent offending by children and young people' placing an increased emphasis on early intervention, preventing offending and tackling known risk factors associated with Youth Crime. Following the Sunderland Youth Offending Team pilot, the Sunderland and Gateshead Local Authorities have been jointly announced as a Youth Justice Board Pathway area with a remit of taking forward the lessons learnt from the pilot and providing new and innovative approaches for working with young offenders. The following describes the 'Pathway Projects' to be delivered by the two Youth Offending Services and places these in the context of the Youth Justice reforms.

Partnership working

Fundamental to the Youth Justice reforms of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 was the recognition that agencies previously involved in addressing youth crime had often worked in an uncoordinated way and that the police cannot effectively fight crime if working alone. Section 38 of the Act 1998 places a duty on local authorities with social services and education responsibilities to ensure that appropriate Youth Justice Services operate in co-operation with police, probation, and health. This has led to the development of multi-agency teams within Youth Offending Services with the aim of providing

an holistic approach to addressing offending behaviour by young people. The Sunderland pilot indicates that this has been a particularly successful aspect of the new reforms and as many young people who offend also fall into the Children Act definition of 'children in need', this has provided Youth Offending Teams with a greater capacity to meet their general welfare needs. The themes of multi-agency working and 'joined-up' thinking have been taken forward by the Sunderland and Gateshead Youth Offending Teams as a Pathway area with the development of projects encompassing local partnerships with the Police Service, Fire Brigade, Health Authority and a range of voluntary sector partners including Barnardos, Nacro and Springboard Sunderland Trust.

Local area need

The development of the projects was also based on the premise that any strategy for reducing crime must address local needs by identifying local trends. Several of the Pathway projects were developed as a direct response to needs identified through local crime pattern and incidence analysis undertaken in preparation for the local Youth Justice Plans. The Community Fire Safety Project and Persistent Young Offender Projects are two examples. The Sunderland Community Fire Safety Project is multi-stranded comprising: an Arson Task Force (to drive down the high number of local incidents of malicious fire setting), a Young Fire fighters branch providing work experience for young offenders and a counselling service for young fire setters. The high number of persistent offenders across the two local authority areas has also been addressed with the development of a specific programme through a partnership with LMT. This includes an intensive cognitive behavioural element to address what may be deeply entrenched anti-social attitudes and behaviour resulting in repeat offending. It is hoped that the programme will also provide

local courts with the confidence that there is an appropriate and effective alternative to a custodial sentence for high tariff, persistent young offenders.

Tackling risk

Addressing youth crime requires an understanding not only of local patterns of crime but also of the causes of youth crime and disorder. A considerable body of research has identified a range of risk factors which increase the likelihood of offending behaviour including: harsh or erratic parenting, educational risk factors, personal and behavioural problems, socio-economic disadvantage and peer pressure. Some of the Pathway projects - Springboard Solutions, Mentoring and the Parenting Initiatives, were aimed at tackling specific risk factors.

The Springboard Solutions Programme is an initiative aimed specifically at tackling the educational risk factors associated with youth crime, low attainment and difficulties experienced as a result of exclusion, truancy and problematic behaviour in school. A partnership with Springboard Sunderland Trust, the project works intensively with disaffected young people aged 14 to 18 who are either out of educational provision or not involved in employment training, or further education. The Sunderland Volunteer Mentoring Project aims to provide a positive adult role model as a protective factor against wider risk factors such as a lack of other significant adult role models, peer pressure and limited opportunities for leisure, education and employment resulting in low self esteem. The volunteer mentors provide young people with a source of support and someone outside of the Criminal Justice System with whom they can discuss their problems. Lastly the Parenting Initiatives, involving a partnership with the voluntary sector organisation Barnardo's, draw on the considerable experience of parenting education programmes undertaken as part of the pilot Youth Offending Team experience to address issues of parenting styles



linked to difficult adolescent behaviour (these are described in greater detail in Helen Watson's article in this issue).

Child/parent relationships

The themes of improving parent/child relationships and family functioning as a protective factor against offending behaviour have also been taken forward in the Sunderland Restorative Justice Project where family group conferencing is routinely utilised. The project, a partnership with NACRO, enhances early intervention work of Final Warnings and community supervision work through Reparation Orders and Action Plan Orders to include restorative components and victim offender mediation. The Gateshead project has included the appointment of a Restorative Justice Co-ordinator and a constructive leisure component, which has led to the promotion of an anti-drugs poster campaign promoted on the Tyne & Wear Metro system. A primary feature of the restorative approach is to provide victims of crime with an opportunity to come to terms with what has happened to them and to hold the offender to account thus providing some restitution.

The key aim for the offender, through either direct or indirect reparation, is to help them to understand the consequences of their actions, accept responsibility and make amends, thereby providing them with some reintegration into the community in which they live.

On the margins

The Sunderland Youth Impact and the Gateshead Early Intervention Projects are particularly targeted at those at risk of offending, on the margins of offending behaviour or regularly involved in youth disorder and nuisance issues. A particularly innovative aspect of the Sunderland project is the use of police intelligence to target hot spots of youth nuisance and disorder, to deploy detached Youth Workers to meet and chat with young people, and to make suggestions about moving those young people on into alternative constructive activities. The Gateshead early intervention project has focused particularly on targeting those potentially commencing offending careers through also targeting incidents of youth disorder and through assessment and intervention at the first police reprimand stage.

Referrals to all the projects are

based on comprehensive assessment using the Youth Justice Board ASSET profile, ensuring appropriate matching of intervention and programme intensity with offending behaviour and likelihood of reoffending.

Intrinsic within the youth justice reforms was the requirement that intervention should be located within evidence-based practice with rigorous

monitoring and evaluation to establish programme effectiveness. A key aspect of the proposals for pathway status thus included funding for intensive local evaluation and a development officer post to identify, develop and disseminate good practice. Following a tendering and contracting process Newcastle University were appointed to conduct the local evaluation and they are working closely with national evaluators appointed by the Youth Justice Board to enable national comparison and establish 'what works' in reducing offending behaviour. Cost/benefit analysis will also be undertaken in respect of each of the interventions.

So far the development of the Pathway projects has provided some innovative models for working with young offenders and some early success stories have been generated. Ultimately, the success of the projects will depend upon the extent to which they demonstrate a reduction in youth crime and disorder and have a meaningful and longer term impact upon the lives of young people, their families and the community.

Kelly Davison is the Research and Policy Officer at the Sunderland Youth Offending Service.