

# It's a 'Wrap'

## Jeremy Lindsey describes 'wraparound services' for young offenders and the work of an ISSP provider in the UK.

**A**t the recent Youth Justice Board Conference the Intensive Supervision and Surveillance Programmes (ISSP) were being hailed as a success. Operating as an alternative to custody, the initiative is now available across England and Wales.

A key element of the programme is a high level of individual support for the young person throughout their sentence. Youth Advocate Programmes (YAP) is contracted to provide the ISSP service to nine of the London boroughs. These include Haringey, Hackney, Islington and Lambeth, boroughs with high levels of crime and those crimes often of a serious nature. Essential to the ISSP is the provision of up to twenty-five hours a week structured activity for the young person. These are the most persistent offenders in their areas, young people who have been traditionally described as destined for a lifetime of custody. They feel helpless, trapped in a cycle of crime, detention, crime and detention with the occasional relief of a range of recreational drugs and the excitement of crime. Often their families feel hopeless and full of despair, long since ground down by the trail of police, social services and youth offending team workers through their lives. Professionals themselves feel helpless and the never-ending cycle plays out, often to a sad and lonely end. How do we change these young people's biographies?

### ***Advocates ensure that children and families receive care regardless of their needs or past history.***

In the mid 1970s in the US, the problems were similar to those seen in the UK today – high levels of institutional care or custody for young people, showing little or no impact on crime. Innovative approaches towards young people in trouble were clearly needed. As a response, a method of intervention called wraparound began to develop. Early wraparound programmes centred on the concept of needs-based, individualised and unconditional services. This model was used in designing the Kaleidoscope program in Chicago and the formation of the Alaska Youth Initiative, which was successful in returning to Alaska almost all young people with complex needs who were placed in out-of-state institutions. Similar programmes in more than 30 other states followed the Alaska efforts, and the wraparound model has eventually also influenced practice in other fields – policing, social work and mental health.

YAP in the US was established in 1975 with a clear aim to work with young people and to maintain them in their communities. In particular a programme set up in Fort Worth caught the eye of Roger Graef who filmed it for his series *Law and Order in the US*. YAP currently operates more than 90 individual programs in Florida, New York, New Jersey, Ohio, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Texas and Washington, D.C. Outcome data from 2002 shows that with 500 young people going through the Texas programme, 92.8% completed with 85% in some form of education at point of discharge and 70% having not re-offended in a period of 180 days post completion.

The Youth Justice Board recognised the potential for the model and incorporated the thinking into their ISSP initiative. YAP took the step to set up in the UK and has been running three programmes in London over the past two years and now also has programmes in Ireland.

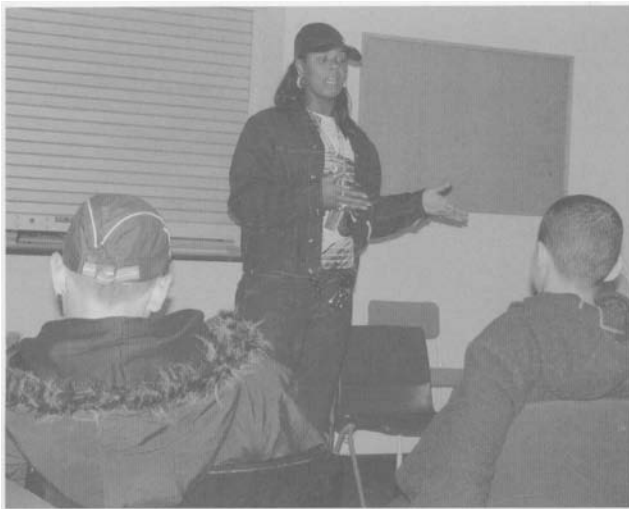
So what is a YAP programme? Core to our service philosophy is the notion of unconditional care, we have a 'no eject and no reject' policy. Each young person on a YAP programme is matched to what we call an advocate. The advocate is a paid member of staff employed on a sessional basis. This advocate is identified as someone who will best provide additional support and supervision in all aspects of that young person's life. All our advocates come from local communities; they are recruited for their local knowledge, cultural integrity and ability to act as appropriate role models. In London our staff profile reflects the diversity of the communities we serve. Advocates ensure that children and families receive care regardless of their needs or past history. Advocates are trained and are equipped to understand and respect the cultural diversities that exist within their individual community. Two thirds of the advocate's work is spent addressing root behaviours and issues that lead to the young person's contact with the law, and providing support and guidance for the young person and his/her family. The other third is spent enjoying quality/recreational time with the young person while demonstrating and explaining appropriate life and social skills. Advocates may work with more than one client at a time. YAP's goal is to empower the young person and his/her family with supports that will remain in place after the advocate's

involvement has ended.

This has to be achieved within the context of a court order that places specific requirements upon the young person. Some elements of our involvement will be non-negotiable. Appointments with the supervising officer and possibly curfew times have to be met, they will have to engage accessing, education, training or employment and offending behaviour programmes. However the young person and their family do have a say and are integral to the creation of their own programme. The issues and behaviours to be addressed by the advocate will be set out in the young person's individualised service plan. This plan sets out the goals for the young person and their family and the strategy of how they are to be achieved. The goals are specific and provide measurable outcomes for each life domain where unmet needs are identified. Short-term, interim and long-term needs are addressed. Responsibilities and time frames are identified. Crisis and emergency procedures as well as provisions for ongoing review and assessment are included. The advocate assists in the drafting of this plan in conjunction with the young person, family, the supervising officer and any person supportive of the young person and family (neighbours, community figures, spiritual leaders).

All plans are in writing and include signatures of the child and family team participants. The service plans cover:

- Family (including housing, transport, health)
- School (enrolment, tutoring etc)
- Psychological/behavioural
- Legal
- Employment
- Recreation.



*YAP worker leading a discussion on relationships with a group of young people on ISSP in London.*

When drawing up the plan a strength-based approach is used in addition to determining the needs of the client and family. Time is spent listing what they are good at. This can be the first instance in a long time that anyone has said anything positive to or about the young person. In putting the plan together every effort is then made to help develop these skills and talents. Advocates are trained in how to build on strength-based techniques and pull in family members and friends as a support system for the young person. Effectively a wraparound model of intervention is followed. The key elements are:

- Strength based assessment
- Individualised service plans
- Community linkages - professional and informal resources
- Flexible funds for ancillary goods and services
- Young person and family team which supports a family over a period of time
- Unconditional care regardless of prior history or complexity of needs.

Wraparound is a mix of highly individualised in-home and community-based services developed around each family's unique circumstances. Rather than fitting family needs into designated service slots, wraparound services connect families with resources that accommodate specific needs. The underlying ethos behind this approach is to shift the power from outside agencies to families and their communities. The goal is to empower the young person and his/her family with supports that will remain in place after the programme involvement has ended. The programme philosophy emphasises working with parents, guardians and caregivers to strengthen their ability to provide ongoing support for their children (for example: counselling, parental group, assisting parent to find a job, resources or respite care). Although the young person is the primary focus, contact is regularly maintained with those around him/her, as this will indirectly help the young person involved.

The following brief case examples highlight some of the young people who have been through YAP programmes. Their names have been changed.

**Brenda** was a 15-year-old black African. Her mother had never told her about her father's background and she had no role models. Her mother had kicked her out, but her two

younger sisters remained at home. She had huge rejection issues. She had lived in care homes and developed a peer group of young adults and adults. She was considered at risk of prostitution plus she had committed an offence of theft from a children's home and was often missing from her place of residence. She was matched with an advocate who had been in care herself. The plan of work concentrated on sexual health and relationships. Brenda was encouraged back into education; weekend contact with her mother and sisters was established with a good breakdown plan if it all went wrong. Her absconding reduced to being very sporadic; she had excellent compliance with the order resulting in no further contact with the criminal justice system. She now has plans for college and a career in hairdressing. Her order has been rescinded. The advocate has seen Brenda grow in maturity and confidence, become respectable and respectful, from being out of control and involved in high risk behaviours.

At the age of 17, **Colin** was placed on an ISSP for robbery and handling. His older brother was in prison. Neither son had respect for their mother who was in very poor health, obsessive and worn down by worry. The house was in poor repair and very dirty. The advocate concentrated on getting standards established in the home concentrating on behaviour and cleanliness. Colin was encouraged to clean up the home with the advocate's assistance as part of his order. Support was given to his mother to give her confidence to say no to the sons and lay down some rules. She lost weight, her health got better, and she was visibly more confident. She is quoted as saying "I have learnt skills to deal with my sons". Colin did have rocky times on his ISSP and breached his curfew. He went into custody. However the advocate kept working with both sons on release. Colin is now in college and has grown up a lot.

**Jonathan** had a very bad attitude to authority, had been in custody prior to going on ISSP. Through his programme he was linked into Positive Action for Young People, and has completed the essential youth work course. He is now going into schools and talking about his experience. At a recent presentation to youth justice professionals he met with the magistrate who had originally sentenced him.

**Becky** was addicted to crack cocaine, pregnant, very anti-authority, and from a family with history which reinforced this behaviour. The advocate had to gain her trust and the family's. To help get her off cocaine the advocate would meet her early in the morning and stay with her till mid-afternoon keeping her drug free. Becky was surprised that the advocate kept coming back despite the swearing. She realised eventually that here was someone who was committed to her but also tough on her behaviour. The advocate supported Becky through her labour and with court proceedings with social services. The advocate got her into a mother and baby unit in Kent and continued to visit her there. They have stayed in touch since the order was completed.

ISSP is being hailed as a success; there is evidence that an impact is being made on custody figures. However the long-term success will be judged on offending and re-offending rates. A national evaluation of ISSP is being carried out by Oxford University – the results are due in 2004. We await publication with eager anticipation. ■

*Jeremy Lindsey is Chief of Operations, YAP UK.*