

Children and young people

Will McMahon and Tammy McGloughlin introduce this issue of *cjm*.

Some time ago Elizabeth Butler-Sloss remarked that 'the child should be seen as a person, not as an object of concern'. At the Centre for Crime and Justice Studies we echo that sentiment, and are therefore pleased to have invited Sir Al Aynsley-Green, the Children's Commissioner of England, and his colleagues at 11 MILLION to edit the themed section of this issue. Together, we have attempted to ensure that the voices of children and people are at the centre of the themed section and can be heard loud and clear in its pages. 11 MILLION firmly believe that children and young people should be given opportunities to clearly express a view about crime, harm and the society that they live in.

What is perhaps most crucial is that those in government and the voluntary sector as well as education, healthcare and social service providers speak and respond **to** children and young people rather than simply see them as an object of concern to be spoken **about**. After all, it is on children and young people that government policies and interventions have the greatest impact.

Those at the bottom of pile at times of social and economic stress are children and young people from poor or vulnerable backgrounds – which is why we have fore-grounded the experiences of children and young people in the care system, from Yarl's Wood detention centre and those dealing with the commonplace experience of racism towards migrants.

We also carry an interview with 'Tony', one of the growing numbers of young people being caught up in the criminal justice system. The Crime and Disorder Act 1998 contained a clause to abolish *doli incapax*, reducing the age of criminal responsibility, and what subsequently became a highly contentious legislative issue, the ASBO. These two measures opened the way to criminal justice net-widening for children and young people and the increased use of custodial punishments accompanied by high levels of reconviction.

Conscious of this problem, the Youth Justice Board set itself the target of reducing the number of first time entrance to the criminal justice system by five per cent. At the end of last year the Board announced that it had not only reached the target but had reduced first-time entrance by over ten per cent. **Rod Morgan's** article, which is carried in this issue as part of the 'Evidence based policy' series launched by the Centre last year, puts this claim to the test and finds the explanation involves 'missing data' 'deftly ignored'. He suggests 'This can only be described as sleight of hand. It pains me to say this. But I do not know how else to describe it'.

It is not only children and young people who have been subject to net-widening. With more than 1,200 offences created since 1997 and the prospect of thousands of additional prison places being built, the purpose of imprisonment is becoming more focused on locking up rather than the rehabilitation and therapeutic interventions for the convicted. **Jon Collins** argues in the topical issues section that the only beneficiaries of the prison building programme will be the private companies contracted to run them.

Another aspect of net-widening is the growth of surveillance, which has become a growing commercial enterprise, and is leading to the increasing intrusion of CCTV cameras. In their article, **Abie Longstaff** and **John Graham** conclude that 'the needs of the individual need to be protected not just from the interests of the state's security services, which tend to favour ever greater levels of surveillance, but also the interests of the corporate sector'.

Vanessa E Munro, meanwhile, considers the government's plans to criminalise the clients of controlled prostitutes. She asks if it will be an effective anti-trafficking measure or whether it will take the focus away from the wider issues of trafficking of cheap labour where employees are often unprotected and exploited in the workplace.

Finally, we would point readers attention to the piece by **Arianna Silvestri**, an Associate at the Centre for Crime and Justice Studies, who reviews a significant piece of research carried out by herself and others, on young people and gun and knife crime.

This comprehensive review of the evidence clearly shows that the projects that showed evidence of effectiveness were well-organised and multi-agency interventions: they warned young people suspected of gun crime but crucially also offered services intended to address their problems. It also found that the results in terms of gun homicide were typically short term and there are also clear risks that even targeted police attention will cause discontent.

On knives the review could find simply no precedents for successful police operations. If long-term harm reductions are to be achieved, it suggests, it is critically important that agencies work together to tackle the social problems faced by young people and their families, and that government policy provides tangible support, rather than abdicating responsibility in favour of 'old-fashioned policing'. ■

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