

SUPPORT VERSUS CONTROL

The Children Act

The Children Act 1989, implemented on October 1st 1991, offers much scope for supporting families rather than, as previously, controlling them. The philosophy underpinning the act is based on respect for young people and on working in partnership with parents to maintain children at home rather than placing them in institutions or with substitute families.

There is a large body of evidence to show that residential care has a negative impact on a young person's life chances; they are at risk of developing a criminal profile whilst in care and of entering the juvenile justice system. Their educational achievement and subsequently employment opportunities are curtailed, and



*Portrait of Boy Aged 10¹⁰/₁₂
From The Young Delinquent, Cyril Burt.
London 1925*

there is the danger of physical and emotional abuse in residential care establishments.

Under the Children Act, services support children and families. These services include respite care, information on services, family aides, advice and counselling, provision of family centres (operating a holistic or systemic approach to family problems). What we are now witnessing evolving are new services for young people and their families which respond to family dysfunction and to the delinquent behaviour of young people by working with the family to support

them and to promote the young person's welfare within their family.

Currently what were Intermediate Treatment (I.T.) sections of social service departments, (and sadly still are in many 'creatively challenged' local authorities - where 'Youth Justice' hasn't made it on to the agenda yet) are developing services that are responsive to the immediate needs of young people and families. The most parsimonious response is respite care. This 'shared' care offers a residential time out placement for a maximum of 3/4 days for a young person. This allows parents and the young person a period of time apart from each other, enabling workers to effect positive change in the relationship between the young person and their family.

I.T./Youth Justice practice has always been innovative and has been at the forefront of good services. The new duty, outlined in the Children Act, to reduce the need to bring care or supervision proceedings and to encourage young people not to commit criminal offences, prompts Youth Justice sections to develop these proactive approaches to supporting young people and their families.

Inter-agency cooperation between e.g. probation, housing, education and social work with schools, is increasing. However many social service departments are drastically cutting back services and many are in a zero growth situation. Youth Justice sections can, once again, take the lead with initiatives aimed at maintaining young people within their families and in their communities.

Francis Charlton is a criminologist specialising in working with young people.

JUVENILE CRIME: SOME CURRENT ISSUES (1993)

A report from NACRO's Young Offenders Committee, chaired by Rt. Rev. Mark Santer, Bishop of Birmingham.

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