

Youth Crime Action Plan 2008

HM Government

A response from the National Council for Voluntary Youth Services (NCVYS)

October 2008

Introduction

1. The National Council for Voluntary Youth Services (NCVYS) is the independent voice of the voluntary youth sector in England. A diverse network of over 170 national voluntary youth organisations and regional and local youth networks, NCVYS has been working since 1936 to raise the profile of youth work, share good practice and influence policy that has an impact on young people and the organisations that support them.
2. The NCVYS network reflects the diverse range of voluntary organisations working with young people at community, local, regional and national level. Most of our members offer opportunities to engage in challenging activities or develop creative talents. They also support young people to become active in their communities and offer opportunities for their voice to be heard. Some offer interventions to prevent or tackle specific issues such as homelessness or offending behaviour. Others offer counselling, advice, guidance and information. All contribute to young people's personal and social development; some also engage with spiritual development.
3. For more information on any element of this paper, please contact NCVYS's Policy Officer, Hannah Dobbin on 020 7278 1041.

Key comments

4. NCVYS welcomes the opportunity to comment on the *Youth Crime Action Plan*¹ (YCAP) and facilitate a co-ordinated response from the voluntary and community youth sector (VCYS). This section gives NCVYS's response to the YCAP which focuses on possible implications for the VCYS².
5. Although the YCAP does not specifically focus on the VCYS, its proposals can be applied to third sector settings, including organisations that work with children and young people. NCVYS would like to see more emphasis and recognition of the role of the VCYS in future Government strategies and communications.
6. Recognition within the YCAP that youth crime is a local problem and needs to be effectively dealt with at a local level is welcome. The emphasis on joined-up working and focusing on the needs of individual young children is also promising but the challenge for the sector, as ever, will be working to help ensure that the national rhetoric translates into consistent practice at a local level and that local commissioning structures and funding arrangements help to support this.
7. NCVYS recognises that there is an onus on the VCYS to get involved with Government policymaking and influence how plans are implemented at a local level. Through its representation on local strategic bodies, for example Children's Trusts and LSCBs, the VCYS can influence decision-making and ensure that the third sector is fully involved in policymaking around children and young people. Representation is often facilitated by local infrastructure organisations such as Councils for Voluntary Youth Services and provides a valuable opportunity to ensure that youth crime remains high profile at local levels.
8. Opportunities should also be used to ensure recognition of third sector support in helping to meet local PSA targets by targeted work with young people at risk of social exclusion. As the role and legislative powers of Children's Trusts are being considered it is crucial that the third sector is fully engaged with the process to ensure that its voice is heard and that the sector is fully reflected in the new arrangements.
9. The continuation, development and engagement of the VCYS in delivering services to children and young people and influencing policymaking is reliant on funding. The YCAP highlights investment in the capacity of the third sector to reduce youth crime through previous Government strategies, such as the ten year youth strategy which launched the YSDF. The sector's experience of progressing through the YSDF has been varied, with many established organisations losing out, so it is crucial that the VCYS is aware of current and new Government funding initiatives. VCYS infrastructure organisations can provide a role in sharing information between Government and the sector, at both national and local levels.
10. The YCAP frequently highlights the importance of better links and the sharing of information between services, young people and families. The VCYS can facilitate this process as it is often in contact with the most hard-to-reach children, young people and families. However, it can only do this if it is recognised by Government as a partner and funded to contribute to information sharing. VCYS infrastructure and network organisations should be used to provide an information conduit between local authorities and local voluntary and community organisations. Government and the VCYS need to be proactive in developing and maintaining effective communication channels to ensure that vital

¹ The *Youth Crime Action Plan* is available to download via:

<http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/publications/youthcrimeactionplan/>

² Based on the Speaking Out briefing paper on the *Youth Crime Action Plan*. Speaking Out is a joint project between NCVYS and the National Council of Voluntary Child Care Organisations. The briefing paper is available to download via: <http://www.ncvys.org.uk/index.php?page=551>

information is communicated effectively across statutory and non-statutory agencies in order to strengthen local partnership arrangements and delivery of improved outcomes for young people.

11. The Youth Taskforce will be working with local partners to develop pilots and provide examples of good practice in areas including safeguarding and supporting young victims. The implementation of the plan will be an excellent opportunity for Government to engage with the VCYS around these areas and learn from the good practice that already exists. The VCYS can also lead developments in engaging young people involved in crime with youth workers and ex-gang members and support when leaving custody and transition to adulthood.
12. The YCAP promotes the importance of offering children and young people places to go and things to do at times when they need it most. The VCYS, and in particular volunteer-led organisations, are key providers of activities for children and young people. These organisations, workers and volunteers need to be fully supported to ensure that their services are accessible in the evenings and weekends.
13. The YCAP highlights the third sector's role in relation to early intervention; however it is unclear from the document what role the third sector is expected to play in other areas, such as supporting young people in custody. NCVYS and the VCYS would welcome further guidance around this.
14. The VCYS is in an often unique position to get the voice of children and young people themselves heard. Children and young people's views are not included in the YCAP, however through advocacy and offering support, the VCYS needs to facilitate engagement with children and young people. The sector's existing work around participation and engagement of young people came out strongly in the recent roundtable discussion held as part of the *Speaking Out* project. Whilst there has been some welcome recognition of the third sector's value in engaging children and young people in local communities this needs to be strengthened further in local implementation plans to ensure sufficient capacity to continue engagement and participation initiatives.
15. A key part of policymaking is translating national strategy documents into practical reality, especially at a local level. The YCAP is very aspirational and to ensure that it achieves its vision of success, the VCYS needs hold the Government to account for delivery, especially at the local level.
16. NCVYS supports the expert views of its member organisations and allied organisations in the area of youth crime. NCVYS fully supports Clinks in its response to the YCAP and endorses the views that follow from member organisations.

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**Youth Crime Action Plan -
Response from The Duke of Edinburgh's Award (The DofE)**

October 2008

1. About The DofE
2. Youth Crime and The DofE
3. Overall Response to the Action Plan
4. Response to Specific Consultation Questions
5. Appendix: Case Studies

1. About the DofE

At The Duke of Edinburgh's Award (DofE) our mission is to inspire, guide and support young people in their self-development and to recognise their achievements. The result is the world's leading achievement award for young people.

275,000 young people, including over 30,000 who are experiencing significant disadvantage, do DofE programmes each year. Doing a DofE programme involves young people learning a new skill, improving at a physical activity, volunteering in their community and undertaking an adventurous journey.

DofE programmes are created by young people themselves, according to their own personal interest and targets. There are over 10,000 settings running DofE programmes, including every local authority, many youth clubs, schools, Pupil Referral Units, institutions working with young offenders and a wide range of voluntary youth organisations.

2. Youth Crime and The DofE

Doing DofE programmes offers an effective intervention to support the Youth Justice System in meeting the national target of reducing the number of persistent offenders. By doing their DofE, young people are engaged in a framework of positive opportunities, which enables them to understand that their actions have consequences. For young offenders, this gives them the opportunity to understand the reality of their actions and a wider understanding of the impact of their crime on the community. In turn, this gives them the skills to engage with restorative justice, which is emphasised in the Youth Crime Action Plan.

Self esteem, resilience and personal development are crucial protective factors for young people at risk of engaging and re-engaging in criminal activity. By doing their DofE, young people are encouraged to develop these characteristics.

YOUTH CRIME ACTION PLAN - REPOSE FROM THE DofE
OCT 08

Supporting young people involved in the youth and criminal justice systems is one of our key priorities. We are currently undertaking a long-term programme of work, the ASPIRE Project, which focuses on the implementation and impact of the Duke of Edinburgh's Award among young people in the secure estate, including both development work and research.

Our development work has been a great success. Table 1 below shows the growth of the DofE in the secure estate, including a 45% increase in participation over the last year.

Table 1: Growth in delivery, participation and DofE Awards achieved in the secure estate

	July 2007	July 2008
Programme delivery	21 establishments	46 secure units 67 youth offending/justice teams
Participation	537 young offenders 187 in a custodial environment 350 through youth offending teams	780 young offenders 292 in a custodial environment 488 through youth offending teams
Awards achieved	31 Bronze DofE Awards 1 Silver DofE Award	46 Bronze DofE Awards 1 Silver DofE Award

The research for the ASPIRE Project is being conducted by The University of Cardiff and NEWI, which will evidence the impact of the Duke of Edinburgh's Award on young offenders. It is based on a wide variety of secure establishments across the country that are participating in the study. We will reveal the research findings at a high profile launch early in 2009 and will share the results with all interested stakeholders.

3. Overall Response to the Action Plan

As a Charity, we believe that we can help the Government to achieve the aims of the Youth Crime Action Plan in a sustainable way. In particular, our programmes will support the stated aims of:

<i>Exploring how to enhance best practice in the delivery of Youth Offending Team programmes;</i>	Our current research programme looks at our work in this area, and we have a number of examples of best practice, including the Award Project, detailed in case study 1 below.
<i>Developing a more comprehensive package of care for children leaving custody;</i>	Doing DofE programmes enhances a package of care when leaving custody by providing a transferrable, non-stigmatising and youth led route back into the activities available in the wider community.
<i>Improving education and training in juvenile custody, placing new duties on local authorities to commission education and training in juvenile custody."³</i>	All local authorities already deliver DofE programmes as part of their duty to provide positive activities to young people. As a widely recognised non-formal education programme, the DofE can not only support the young offender but also provide local authorities with a joined up approach between provision for young offenders and the wider community of young people.

³ Youth Crime Action Plan, Executive Summary point 22, page 8.

Key points

- **Restorative justice:** The DofE welcomes the increased emphasis on Restorative Justice. We believe that DofE programmes can be used to support this work and help young people develop the skills needed to engage with it.
- **Extending traditional youth work hours:** Ensuring that young people can access opportunities at the weekends is essential. However, we are disappointed that the Action Plan does not include a ban on curfews that restrict opportunities to engage.
- **Endorsing positive peer groups:** We would like to see more emphasis on positive peer groups and an acknowledgement that groups of young people can be effective in preventing crime, not just in causing it.

As a Charity we work closely with those in our sector and have also contributed significantly to the responses from NCVYS and CLINKS, through the Youth Policy Exchange (YPE) group. The comments in this paper endorse those responses and include further information from our experience.

Restorative justice

The Action Plan states, *“We want communities to get more involved in how youth crime is tackled in their area and take collective responsibility for the behaviour of young people.”*⁴ We were pleased that restorative justice formed such a fundamental part of the Action Plan. We know that DofE programmes can support such work, and that both the young offender and the community can benefit. In terms of enabling engagement, allowing young people to participate in activities that encourage them to take on responsibility, negotiate and work as part of a team means they can mature and gain empathy and an understanding of how to behave appropriately in society.

This is not just a benefit for young offenders but also for young people in the wider community. We know that young men aged between 16-24 years are most at risk of being a victim of violent crime. According to Home Office statistics, in 2005/06 12.6% of young men in this age group experienced a violent crime compared to 5.5% of men aged between 25 and 34. Although they are likely to be involved in community panels as victims under the Youth Restorative Disposal, all community panels should include young people.

The Action plan also states *“The public should be able to see how young offenders are repaying the community for the consequences of their actions... We will ensure that new citizens’ panels, set up to identify projects for offenders to undertake, will consider schemes for young offenders.”*⁵ We feel that that the Government should make it explicit that young people must be included on community panels. These young people, and any who wanted to be involved, would be fulfilling a valuable volunteering opportunity in their area. The DofE can support this aim. For example, there are over 275,000 young people each year looking for such an opportunity for their DofE, also equipped with the skills listed above. We would welcome further support in both growing DofE programmes for young offenders and community volunteering opportunities.

We believe that the proposed pilots of the Youth Restorative Disposal, Youth Conditional Caution and Youth Rehabilitation Order would be strengthened if the young offenders involved were given the opportunity to do a DofE programme. Doing the DofE gives them the skills set to be able to undertake these requirements. There is clearly the ability to encourage young people on this order by giving them the chance to do their Duke of Edinburgh’s Award. Several Youth Offending Teams already use the DofE and building it into a sentence plan at this stage could have real benefits for your people whilst giving them the opportunity to do something that does not stigmatise them in the future.

Extending traditional youth work hours

We welcome the increase in youth work provision to times which suit young people, which will incorporate reparative work by young offenders. We know that youth services don’t always run DofE programmes past eight o’clock on a Thursday night and will work with local authorities to ensure that the extended provision includes our programmes.

⁴ *Youth Crime Action Plan*, Executive Summary point 11, page 5.

⁵ *Ibid.*

We also welcome the extension of Operation Staysafe, particularly the emphasis on making support and services immediately available to young people removed from an area. However, this must not become a curfew. Wherever curfews are enforced young people are no longer able to engage in youth work activities, either because they are outside or have to travel home. DofE programmes involve outdoor activities, as well as activities that are accessible to young people in their leisure time and that can be done without adult supervision. Young people have the right to participate in these opportunities under Articles 29 and 31 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Endorsing positive peer groups

Unsurprisingly with the current media atmosphere, the Action Plan focussed strongly on dealing with gangs and negative peer groups. However, this was not adequately contrasted with the expectation that young people should be able to form positive peer groups. Such associations help adolescents to gain the skills to be proactive members of society. Young people must be allowed to meet and work together or they cannot develop their social skills. We would like to see an explicit acknowledgment in every paper that young people meeting together is usually good for them and for the community.

There was a brief acknowledgment that “[t]he vast majority of young people make a positive contribution to society. Their success should be recognised and praised. They should be given a say in what goes on in their area, how local issues are addressed and how services intended for them are delivered.”⁶ We would emphasise that this is exactly what the DofE achieves for the young people who do it. We would be happy to share our expertise to improve the outcomes for and perception of young people across the UK.

4. Responses to Specific Consultation Questions

Chapter 2

Building on what we have set out here, what are the most effective ways for local agencies to increase further their focus on prevention and early intervention?

Although early intervention is an essential aspect of supporting those at risk of offending, there are dangers. Firstly, early interventions alone cannot fully counteract the sheer force of poverty, negative environments and parenting. Secondly, inappropriate early interventions can label and stigmatise and place people on higher tariffs than would otherwise be the case. An often cited example is youth justice in the UK which has shifted from welfare to a discourse that focuses on potential offenders and early intervention. Thus, vulnerable young people become targeted early on as ‘pre-offending’ due to their behaviour as reported by local agencies.

We are aware of how easily programmes can become a stigma despite their positive intentions. In the UK, DofE programmes have a universal reach, challenging the perceptions wider society has about young offenders. In South Africa, the majority of DofE participants started within the penal system and do not benefit from the lack of stigma. We therefore recommend that local agencies are advised to make use of programmes that are available to a wider range of young people in their area.

Young people are the most likely to be affected by crime yet often feel victimised by the police. Therefore, the Action Plan’s emphasis on encouraging links with the police is sensible. However, we believe that a good relationship between young people and their local police force is vital for preventative work. Such a relationship allows young people to seek help before problems escalate, rather than being isolated or fearing prejudice.

Sharing a positive activity changes this relationship and it is for this reason that many police forces run DofE programmes. At Bronze level of the DofE, working with the police is one of young people’s top ten Volunteering choices, so understanding the work of public services is increased among participants. The Metropolitan Police Cadets, who were cited in the plan, use DofE programmes in this way.

⁶ *Youth Crime Action Plan*, Executive Summary point 5, page 4.

How can government ensure that parents are engaged when their children are in court and are completing sentences? Should measures of compulsion be used and what should these measures be?

The reality of the court and custodial process is complex and highly structured. The voluntary sector places a great deal of emphasis on effective mentors for young people leaving custody. We suggest that this approach could be furthered by creating a specific role of a court-appointed friend to the family, working closely with local YOT/probation services and voluntary sector.

The idea of compulsion should, wherever possible, be avoided. At the DofE we are committed to the principle that voluntary engagement with development programmes promotes the highest rates of success. We do accept that circumstances might require powers to engage with those parents who need to be encouraged to take more responsibility for their children. However, such an intervention must trigger further support for the young person in question.

Chapter 4

What is the best mechanism for enhancing good practice in the delivery of evidence based interventions by YOTs?

Creating research minded practitioners and managers in YOTs will enhance good evidence based practice. This requires strategic capacity building and good knowledge transfer links between research bodies and regional clusters of YOTS. An example of current best practice is Research in Practice (RIP), a department of The Dartington Hall Trust run in collaboration with the Association of Directors of Children's Services, The University of Sheffield and over 100 participating agencies.

Initial methods to promote an emphasis on good practice are:

1. Ensure that interventions have a robust evidence base,
2. Develop networks and learning circles across YOTS which identify different best practice challenges and share learning across the group
3. Identify evaluation strategies to generate inclusive participation of young people in identifying what is good practice from an outcomes based perspective. This should include looking at the monitoring and developing toolkit currently being developed by the Ministry of Justice.
4. Identify agents in YOTS who can liaise within and outside. Such agents must be of a senior enough level to be influential.
5. Interventions that are effective must be properly resourced.

We know that running DofE programmes can enhance best practice in YOTs. Please see case study 1 in the Appendix for one example of our work in this area

Chapter 5

Should there be a requirement for local authorities to have a senior official responsible for overseeing resettlement and what should this role cover?

We welcome the new duty on local authorities to lead on the education and training of young offenders in custody and endorse an extension of this to resettlement.

It is vital that the reality of life in custody is recognised. Many young people leaving custody will not be returning to the same local authority that provided their education in the institution. Resettlement must promote rather than jeopardise the positive development of young people. DofE programmes can help this as they are available in every local authority, adding consistency and a route back into engagement with the wider community.

An emerging theme of our current research is that young people fail their DofE programme because they transfer to somewhere it is not run. Many do not get the chance to join a community based DofE Centre after they leave. However, as all local authorities are run DofE programmes, they are an appropriate and low cost tool for the education and training of young offenders especially when seen as an alternative education programme.

Therefore, any role supporting resettlement should include liaison with the relevant custodial setting. It should also include ongoing liaison with those responsible for delivering the local offer of positive activities. This will not only make sure that the needs of those who are on resettlement programmes are met in the long term but should also ensure that the young people are consulted on what they want to do.

One of the aspirations of the Action plan is to “[d]evelop... a more comprehensive package of care for children leaving custody”⁷ Using DofE programmes will help those working in this area to achieve this. Please see case study 2 in the Appendix for one example of our current practice.

What should the key elements of a package of support for children leaving custody include; how can this best be delivered and how long should the support last for?

Alongside accommodation, formal education, employment or training and sufficient funds, young people leaving custody must be given the chance to engage positively with society and their own personal development. This support should be based on needs and eventually merge into the local youth offer available to all young people. Therefore, time limits will be based on the individual’s needs.

We know that doing the DofE has the potential to give young people leaving custody an almost instant route into the community and a positive peer group over time, because it is a progressive and long term programme. We are looking at how to develop and promote this model and will happily share our findings.

Please see case study 2 in the Appendix for one example of our current practice.

What measures could be taken to improve the employability of young people with criminal records?

Having a DofE Award increases employability in a number of ways. For example, the recognition we offer is highly valued by employers. In 2006 independent research with major UK companies who together employ 12% of all staff found they believed the DofE was the single most important activity young people could do at school after qualifications. It found that employers were looking for the personal qualities including leadership, teamwork, self-motivation, consideration and confidence. Our programmes are proven to develop these qualities: research among Gold Award holders found 79% developed leadership, 83% tolerance, and 85% confidence, among many other skills.

Last year we spent £3.1m extending the reach of our programme, raising awareness of and developing our programme in harder to reach communities, and in offering direct support to excluded young people to help them take part. This can have a significant impact on skills and employability. According to our research among Gold Award holders:

- 93% of young people felt that having the DofE on their application form helped them secure employment or preferred college places
- 64% believed that having achieved a DofE Award helped them gain their most recent/current job.

In Aylesbury YOI, we have seen evidence of this in action. A young offender, who learnt and delivered sports coaching for his Volunteering section of his DofE whilst being held in custody, was given the opportunity to start volunteering at the local leisure centre. He made such a positive impact that this activity continued after his release. He is now employed at the centre.

Being able to find young offenders positive volunteering opportunities as part of their DofE programme will give them life changing new experiences. If a young person is nearing the end of their sentence and they are able to be released to take part in volunteering opportunities this could lead to employment; but it also supports gentle resettlement back into society where people are supporting and giving young offenders the opportunity to live their life as positive law abiding citizens.

⁷ Youth Crime Action Plan, Executive Summary point 22, page 8.

Chapter 6

Do you agree that Children's Trusts should be given a formal role to prevent offending by children and young people?

If Children's Trusts are given a formal role, one of their key responsibilities must be the inclusion of positive activities and recognition into Children and Young People's Plans. This element is often missed from preventative work yet it is vital. In a DofE programme for example, young people must learn to work as a team and travel unaccompanied across an unfamiliar environment. Such work, as well as being fun and enjoyable, can build resilience and risk management skills, as well as independence. In addition, volunteering gives young people an awareness of the needs of other people and the community. All of these give young people the abilities to resist offending opportunities. Using DofE programmes to do this gives young people the chance to identify activities that they are interested in and a long term route back into their local communities.

5. Appendix: Case Studies

Case Study 1: The Award Project

The Award Project is an early intervention scheme geared to young people on final warnings and referral orders, though will work with those on supervision orders. It has been running successfully for about 8 years in partnership with the DofE, Wessex Youth Offending Team and Hampshire Children's Services. It works with young people who have offended via referrals from the YOT and in 2005/06 had a re-offending rate of 5% compared to the national average of 54.5%.

The age range is 13 ½ to 18 ½ and the project works in the boroughs of Havant, Fareham, Gosport, Eastleigh and the New Forest. At the moment the team consists of 4 project workers and one administrator who currently work with 100 young people for six months.

A referral is followed by a home visit with the young person and parent or carer to outline the different activities on offer and find out what the young person is interested in doing. As participation is voluntary, some young people decide the project is not for them. About 10% do not take up an activity at this stage.

Activities are then organised and funded to suit each individual. Current activities include:

Volunteering

Individually: helping in a charity shop.

In groups: helping Hampshire wildlife trust in the countryside, helping at a horse rescue centre.

Physical

Individually: gym membership, swimming, golf, horse riding.

In groups: mixed sports programme [swimming, power kiting, mountain biking, scuba diving, rounders, horse riding, ice skating, skiing etc].

And any activities young people are already taking part in.

Skills

Individually: learning a musical instrument, driving lessons.

In groups: fishing, life skills, motorcycle training, conservation.

Expedition

6 young people have done an Expedition this year (2008/09).

"We see lots of young people and support them through learning new stuff or meeting new people and trying new things. It never ceases to touch us watching young people change and develop into self assured, confident and mature young people. I am not saying we work for every one but we certainly help."
Vicky Jackson, Project Manager

Case study 2: Supporting Reintegration

Gary,⁸ who achieved his Bronze Duke of Edinburgh's Award whilst in custody at Wetherby YOI, made it known on his release to his YOT worker that he wished to continue and to progress onto the next level of DofE. He asked his YOT workers to find somewhere where he could carry on.

A meeting with a local DofE leader was facilitated through the DofE Regional Office, where issues around involvement and his criminal record were discussed. The DofE Leader agreed to act as Gary's mentor throughout his DofE programme and help him tailor his DofE programme to fit with his aspirations for the future. Gary has decided to start a programme at Gold level and received a bursary to cover his registration fee.

The DofE Charity is currently looking to strengthen and formalize this approach to resettlement so that more individuals who begin their DofE programme in custody have the opportunity to progress and achieve further DofE Awards.

⁸ Names have been changed.

Response to consultation on Youth Crime Action Plan 2008

Introduction

YouthNet aims to create a socially inclusive environment where all young adults are engaged, informed and inspired to achieve their ambitions and dreams. We provide information, advice and guidance through the internet to young people to help them through the challenges they face during the transition to adulthood, and encourage young people to get involved through volunteering.

Background to YouthNet

As the UK's first exclusively online charity founded by Martyn Lewis CBE in 1995, YouthNet's impartial and entrepreneurial approach is to harness the power of new technology, to enable 16-24 year olds to learn, support each other, and participate in society on their own terms. We work collaboratively both with our users and partner organisations as we strongly believe that together we can do more to reach out to all young people and provide high quality content and opportunities, when and how they need them.

We currently do this through two public-facing websites:

www.TheSite.org is designed to be the first place all young adults turn to when they need support and guidance through life. We provide expert information and advice when and where our users needs it most: the dynamic and participative online community, breadth of topics, editorial integrity, expert advice partners and peer support make us the essential trusted guide and allow us *to tell it like it is*. Young people are able to come up with self-help strategies to tackle the everyday challenges they face, including drink and drugs, sex and relationships, money and financial management, health and well-being, travel and free time.

A secure online community forum on **TheSite.org** enables young people to share experiences with their peers through discussion boards and live chats, which are moderated by trained staff and volunteers. Our expert question and answer service

askTheSite also enables young people to confidentially ask questions and receive expert advice back, tailored to their needs. Our archive of previously answered questions, visited by over 80,000 users a month, reassures young people facing similar challenges that they are not alone in the problems they face. Over **500,000** users visit **TheSite.org** every month, creating **2.2** million page impressions in their search for advice and support.

www.do-it.org.uk is volunteering made easy. We connect people, communities and organisations to inspire positive change, providing a central place on the internet for finding out about volunteering. As the electronic backbone of volunteering, do-it.org.uk holds over 1 million opportunities to volunteer, searchable by postcode, and provided by over **400** partners – Volunteer Centres in England and hundreds of national charities. Partners upload opportunities onto the National Volunteering Database, which utilises V-Base volunteering management software, uniquely developed by YouthNet for this purpose. V-Base is now recognised as the industry standard.

Response to Consultation

- YouthNet welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Youth Crime Action Plan, jointly with the National Council for Voluntary Youth Services (NCVYS) and the Youth Policy Exchange, representing the views of the youth voluntary sector. Rather than responding to the specific consultation questions, the response highlights the key recommendations based on YouthNet's expertise in communicating with young people.
- YouthNet attended *Breaking the Cycle of Offending for Young People* Advisory Panel in September 2008, where the statutory and voluntary sector came together to discuss proposals arising from the Youth Crime Action Plan.

Challenging Negative Perceptions

In conjunction with the British Youth Council (BYC), YouthNet runs the Respect? Campaign, aimed at improving the representation of young people in the media, government and UK society as a whole, by encouraging young people to speak up, and society to listen. The climate of debate around young people and the issues of importance to them is shrouded in negative light. Adults and the media often associate young people with problems such as anti-social behaviour, rather than positive youth development. In relative terms, very little exposure is given to encouraging stories about young people who contribute to society, work hard and have fun.

Although YouthNet acknowledges the need to tackle crime and anti-social behaviour, we feel that the proposal within the action plan on non-negotiable intervention and the suggestion to increase naming and shaming of teenage perpetrators of crime has the potential to exacerbate wider negative perceptions. Whilst a recent government report⁹ indicates that crime levels have in fact dropped over the past year, levels of fear remain high, as shown in a recent YouthNet survey.

In September 2008, a YouthNet survey of over, 1000 16-24 year olds explored young people's hopes, fears and aspirations. The research identified that 62% of young people were afraid of being a victim of crime, supporting the evidence that the level of fear of crime is in fact higher than the rate of youth offending.¹⁰

Information, Advice and Guidance

The pace of the transition to adulthood is becoming increasingly complex for young people, who experience different levels of support, while attaining varying levels of maturity. Young people often need advice and support to develop their confidence and improve their opportunities. Better information, advice and guidance, using technology that young people are familiar with will help to promote self-respect and therefore responsible behaviour.¹¹ YouthNet encourages increased investment for communicating information around the implications of crime and how to deal with peer pressure in order to encourage informed decision-making by young people.

⁹ Home Office, *British Crime Survey 2007/08*, July 2008

¹⁰ Youth Justice Board, www.yjb.gov.uk

¹¹ Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, *Transitions: Young Adults with Complex Needs*, 2005

Peer to Peer Support

Whilst we provide information on TheSite.org on the facts around crime and how to stay safe, we will be increasing this content to include audio and video content on the issues around crime to ensure that we reach and inform all young people, whatever their situation or background.

Peer influences however do not always have to be negative. It has been shown that one of the most effective ways of advising young people is to use positive peer influences, where young people inform and help their own peers. Extensive independent research¹² commissioned by YouthNet has shown that, for young people, the "perfect advisor" would be a friend to give them moral support, who also had expert knowledge of the issue in question.

"It's better to find people that are 'in the same boat' as me and get opinions about certain situations"

"Brainjuicer", 2007.

"I was hoping to get support from friends not just information. I just wanted someone I was able to talk to and tell things to"

Naked Flame, 2004.

YouthNet embraces this concept throughout its work and actively encourages involvement from young people through writing their own stories, rants and diaries on TheSite.org. We have also set up a unique peer mentoring programme where young people are trained to deliver relationship advice to their peers online, gaining accreditation in the process, and enabling many young people to feel emotionally more secure about the issues they face.

The knowledge and experience that other young people have been in a similar situation is incredibly reassuring. This acts as an incentive for those, at risk from engaging with crime to develop and share self-help strategies to deal with the situations they find themselves in. There are many creative ways to share the positive experiences of their peers, including through online community initiatives (e.g. case studies exploring the contrasting experience of young people who have experience of crime; moderated discussion boards and live chats to enable young people to share similar experiences with their peers; and creating podcasts (audio and digital files) suitable for downloading to MP3 players).

¹² Towards understanding sources of help and advice for young people – Naked Flame, 2004; TheSite.org Brand Awareness Survey – Brainjuicer, 2007.

Recommendations

- **YouthNet believes that the negative perceptions of young people need to be challenged, with more exposure of positive contributions to society from young people.**
- **We recommend increased investment in information, advice and guidance, via technology familiar to young people affected by the issues of crime.**
- **We recommend government invests in creative ways to promote peer to peer learning for young people to adopt self-help strategies.**

Further information

YouthNet is happy to be contacted, either for research or to send through consultation documents.

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Natalie Brazil
Children and Young People Team
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17 October 2008

Dear Natalie

Youth Crime Action Plan

Please accept this letter as a form of response to the above consultation. Rather than responding to each question individually, we would like to comment on the Plan overall and to reiterate our endorsement of those responses submitted by NCVYS, Clinks, YMCA England and the Steering Group of the Young Offenders Academy.

The Foyer Federation works through a UK and international based network of 130 Foyers, also referred to as integrated learning accommodation centres, based in both rural and urban communities, of which, over 100 are accredited. By developing and encouraging new approaches aimed at supporting disadvantaged young people make their transition to adulthood, an estimate of 10,000 young people are reconnected to education, employment and training through various initiatives in the areas of health and wellbeing, early intervention, quality assurance, welfare reform, bursary scheme, training and employment projects.

We are currently involved in the development of the Young Offenders Academy (YOA) by East Potential, a key Foyer provider in East London and Essex. The YOA is being piloted as a model for East London with the underlying concept of providing an alternative form of custody. The YOA will combine a secure element along with a comprehensive range of services for young offenders before, during and after custodial or community sentences and will thus help the capacity issue of local authorities, health, education and other services providers and partners to deliver the measures outlined in the plan. The holistic Foyer approach has underpinned much of the thinking about how services would be delivered in such a facility and the linkages it would need to make.

We are pleased to see that government has started to think in broader terms about the criminal justice system and recognise that prevention of offending and re-offending lies not just with the criminal justice system, but a 'cross-government package' is required together with a 'triple-track' approach. However, recognising there is a need to communicate a clear message, there are concerns however about the language adopted by the Plan as it reads quite punitively, particularly in relation to parental support. We believe it is crucial to start with the principle that young people in the criminal justice system have just as much right to the Every Child Matters outcomes as any other young person and any services for them should be measured against those criteria.

Whilst we are in favour of an increase in intervention strategies as early intervention is clearly a key driver for any preventative measure, there is concern with the little reference to the valuable contribution of the third sector in contributing to the prevention of offending and rehabilitation. The success of any intervention strategy is heavily determined by the strength of the model, local coordination and competent staff. The Foyer Federation with Connexions helped lead the development of the pilot project, Safe Moves in 2006. The project clearly demonstrated an 'invest to save' model with findings reflecting improvements in housing, mental and physical wellbeing, progression in education, training and employment. Safe Moves also received support from the Accommodation Plus programme which identified accommodation as a main gap in provision for young women and girls at risk or involved in offending. We would therefore encourage future intervention models to comprise at minimum three key elements of: i) peer mentoring; ii) family mediation and iii) informal life skills. We also believe a life coaching approach can empower young people to take responsibility for their own development than more traditional "support" models. We are concerned at, what appears to be, increasing criminalisation of young people and an unhealthy imbalance between the use of custodial sentences and community alternatives. We believe custody is entirely appropriate for young people who have committed the most serious offences but that it should be avoided where possible. This links to our next point.

We believe that the success of the criminal justice system depends heavily on the resources made available during custody. Those young people who do find themselves in custody should be able to access high quality services that enable them to accept responsibility for what they have done, and develop skills and capabilities they need, to take their place as active engaged young citizens. We welcome the proposals to place new duties on local authorities with regard to the training and education of young offenders in custody and the recommendation of a Youth Rehabilitation Order. But again, we reiterate our disappointment that the Plan does not fully recognise the crucial role which can be played by the third sector with regard to the training and education of young offenders.

The proposal of having a nominated senior officer along with a resettlement package is extremely encouraging, but we would stress the importance of ensuring that the package is tailored to need rather than being a one size fits all approach. The Foyer model is a vital tool in any resettlement package, and therefore, we strongly recommend local authorities, in particular the nominated senior officer, develop stronger relationships with Foyers. Their experience also suggests that resettlement must encompass more than housing as the inter-relationship between housing, education and training, employment and health is critical when it comes to a young person's success in making the transition from custody.

In short, both the Foyer model and the YOA have a substantial role to play in both the prevention of offending and re-offending. We therefore encourage government to consider both models as effective tools, which if utilised, will have a profound effect on outcomes for young offenders and those at risk of offending.

Yours sincerely

Steve Hillman
Policy and Research Manager

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17 October 2008

Dear Natalie Brazil

Youth Crime Action Plan 2008

Community Matters is the National Federation for Community Organisations. As an independent voice for community associations and similar community organisations since 1945, Community Matters has played a key role in promoting and supporting action by ordinary people in response to social, educational and recreational needs in their neighbourhoods and communities.

Our vision is for active and sustainable communities in which everyone is valued and can play their full part. We currently have over 1100 members across the UK and pursue this vision by supporting and developing the capacity of community organisations to serve their communities, and represent their interests at a national level.

The majority of our members are neighbourhood level, volunteer-led, multi-purpose community organisations that own or manage a community centre. Our members offer a supportive and inclusive space, activities, and services for local people, often in some of the most deprived neighbourhoods nationally. Their aim is that all local people, including young people, have the opportunity to be active in their communities and have their voices heard. In meeting the social, recreational, and educational needs of local people, our members contribute, in different ways, to Aiming High for Young People: a ten year strategy for positive activities¹³ (DCSF 2007), The Children's Plan¹⁴ (DCSF, 2007), and improving the five Every Child Matters outcomes for children and young people. More widely, they also

¹³ DCSF (2007) Aiming for young people: a ten year strategy for positive activities is available to download via: <http://www.everychildmatters.gov.uk/youthmatters/aiminghigh/>

¹⁴ DCSF (2007) The Children's Plan is available to download via:
<http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/publications/childrensplan/>

contribute to meeting public service agreements (PSAs) through their youth-specific activities as well as activities that promote intergenerational integration and community cohesion.

Community Matters welcomes the opportunity to comment on the *Youth Crime Action Plan*¹⁵ (YCAP) by supporting the responses from the Youth Policy Exchange (YPE) and Clinks. In particular, we endorse the response from the National Council for Voluntary Youth Services (NCVYS), which outlines the possible implications for the Youth Crime Action Plan on voluntary and community youth services.

As the National Federation of Community Organisations, Community Matters is also concerned about the possible implications of the Youth Crime Action Plan on voluntary and community sector (VCS) organisations and services. In addition to NCVYS' response, we would like to make a few points on behalf of the VCS and our members and urge that the YCAP and the cross-government departments supporting it to consider this response along with the others enclosed.

We welcome that YCAP refers to the involvement of communities in tackling youth crime in their areas by being involved in identifying priorities, building public confidence and improving satisfaction. This reflects that the YCAP acknowledges that communities are affected by, but also important in contributing to tackling and preventing youth crime.

We also welcome the focus on providing greater support for young people and parents, support for innovative ways to reduce youth offending, expanding youth centre provision and creating better integrated services for children and families in the YCAP. This recognises that preventing and tackling youth crime requires a range of initiatives that support young people YCAP does as well as their family's needs.

Although we appreciate that tackling and preventing youth crime requires specific and targeted initiatives outlined in the YCAP, Community Matters would argue that this should be coupled with a greater emphasis on, and resources that, provide communities with a more positive and supportive role in preventing and tackling youth crime while at the same time promoting community cohesion.

Community Matters vision is for active and sustainable communities in which everyone is included, valued, and supported to play their full part. Young people are an important and equal part of this vision. However, we would argue that the YCAP does not go far enough in supporting positive opportunities that reconnect young people to the communities in which they are embedded. The YCAP does identify that it is important to recognise, support and praise the positive contributions young people make to society and we fully support and encourage this. However, we urge the YCAP to provide more resources in promoting intergenerational and community cohesion so that young people have the opportunity to be active in multi-purpose community spaces so that they can build a wider sense of place and

¹⁵ The *Youth Crime Action Plan* is available to download via:
<http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/publications/youthcrimeactionplan>

tackle the negative perceptions of young people within their local community and society more generally.

We greatly welcome that the YCAP will work widely with the third sector as this recognises that the VCS is well placed to contribute to preventing and tackling youth crime. In order to maximise the contributions that the VCS can make, we would urge that the needs and interests of all voluntary and community organisations be taken into serious consideration, both those organisations and services focusing specifically on young people as well as multi-purpose organisations that offer places to go and things to do for all local people.

Along with NCVYS' response, we would urge that the following is ensured:

- That voluntary and community organisations have their views represented on local strategic bodies, like Children's Trusts and LSCBs, and in decision-making at a local level;
- That practice is consistent at a local level and that local commissioning structures and funding arrangements reflect national rhetoric;
- That there is continued recognition of the contribution of VCS organisations in working with some of the most difficult to reach children, young people and families and providing places to go and things to do for all local people, by learning from this good practice, and ensuring the continued support, development and engagement of community organisations to share information, deliver services and influence policymaking;

Along with NCVYS, Community Matters urges Government to continue dialogue with the voluntary and community sector in this continuously developing policy area.

Yours Sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'David Tyler', written in a cursive style.

David Tyler
Chief Executive

YMCA England response:

Youth Crime Action Plan

17 October 2008

Introduction

YMCA England welcomes the publication of the Youth Crime Action Plan and the opportunity to respond to the consultation questions. The Action Plan represents a critical opportunity to introduce systemic change to the direction of government policy in relation to young people, particularly those who are involved within and affected by the criminal justice system.

This response is in two sections:

- A general comment on the Youth Crime Action Plan;
- Specific response to the consultation questions (where applicable).

YMCA England's Contribution

The YMCA is network 135 local charities in over 250 communities, represented at national level by YMCA England. The YMCA works both inside and outside the criminal justice system. YMCA England (through its Offender Services Unit) and local YMCAs work with young people in prison through youth activities, case work and resettlement programmes. Local YMCAs work with young people in the community, delivering positive activities for young people and helping to divert them away from crime. Through the resettlement programmes and the provision of supported accommodation, local YMCAs help ex-offenders to make the transition to adulthood and into the community, helping to reduce reoffending.

YMCA England's work in prisons dates 15 years to 1994. YMCA England directly manages resettlement projects in a number of prisons and young offenders' institutions. We help young offenders find suitable housing on release, and assist them with training, job searches and personal development opportunities. The YMCA believes effective rehabilitation of young offenders is dependent on recognising their needs and the forces which impact them.

The YMCA aims to reach and support young people who are caught up in (or at risk of) crime, and we seek to work alongside them at whatever stage they are on their journey to independent adulthood - even if their journey unfortunately involves the criminal justice system.

Preventing a young person 'at risk' from getting caught up in crime at all is the ideal, but we are as thoughtful in our work in custody and after release too, because we believe in the hope for every young person to build a better (and a crime-free) future.

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Date: 17.10.2008

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It is through the delivery of our work with young offenders that YMCA England gains its credible voice. It enables us to gain the knowledge and expertise needed to help support, represent and develop local YMCAs working in the field of criminal justice, especially in custodial establishments. It also gives us a platform to develop innovative, effective work to make a real and lasting difference to young people, who otherwise find themselves excluded or marginalised.

YMCA England is a partner to the Youth Justice in Action Campaign, run in partnership with Y Care International and five other national YMCAs in Ireland, Togo, South Africa, Honduras and Sierra Leone. The campaign provides a global aspect to our national focus in addressing the media perception of young people involved in the criminal justice system and to helping young people to build better relationships with their local police. On June 25 a delegation of young people met with the Home Secretary, Jacqui Smith to commend these campaign objectives. As a strategic partner of the Office of the Third Sector, together with the Foyer Federation, we provide a voice *in favour of young people* - representing their needs throughout government and in policy areas that affect their lives.

Ten years on: The youth crime action plan

The Youth Crime Action Plan represents an opportunity to take stock after ten years following the establishment of the youth justice system by the Crime and Disorder Act 1998. The last ten years saw significant policy and legislation develop, that shaped a youth justice system sitting within a broader criminal justice system – with little thought and strategy to manage the transition between the two.

This legislation was characterised by a rhetoric seeking to be 'tough on crime', and introducing new powers and compulsions. As a result, more young people are affected by the criminal justice system, leading to a pervasive negative perception of young people, and doing unfortunately very little to give them the "respect" so many of them deserve.

We believe this approach undermined the positive progress and investment occurring in the 'youth justice' system. In many ways, it resulted in setting up a system which only granted young people the welfare support they needed, once they entered the criminal justice system. This is too late an intervention – and misses a valuable window to provide appropriate support services and keep young people out of crime.

This type of policy also sent a message to young people that they are a problem, and contributed to a wider, negative societal perception of young people – in many ways limiting their participation in society. Tangibly, this negative perception can be seen even in how the general public now speaks of young people and crime: the popular term ‘youth crime’ over-represents the involvement of young people in criminal activity and exacerbates fear of crime and of young people. It paints young people as perpetrators of crime much more than as victims of crime – even though the latter is so much more truthful.

The policy implication is also difficult to reverse; it defines an identity for those young people who *do* grow out of crime as one plagued permanently with past mistakes. Add a press that seems to latch on to negative stories about young people, and the implications of an individual who cannot escape their past gets foisted on an entire generation.

Chapter 2: Intervening early

1) Building on what we have set out here [in the Youth Crime Action Plan] what are the most effective ways for local agencies to increase further their focus on prevention and early intervention?

- 2.1.1 YMCA England welcomes the core focus of the Action Plan on better and earlier prevention. The Action Plan is somewhat ambiguous in its determination of local agencies; whether these are statutory, third sector or private bodies. YMCA England believes the responsibility for universal provision should be retained by the government, the responsibility for commissioning, planning and governance to be facilitated by government with shared participation, and the responsibility for certain discrete areas of provision open to a broad market of potential suppliers. Whilst many Youth Offending Teams (YOTs) and local YMCAs have good relationships, we find that too often our experience is limited to a role that is concerned only with implementation and delivery of services prescribed by others.
- 2.1.2 The distribution of responsibilities through regional (ROMS, Probation Trusts) and local (YOTs, housing authorities) tiers of governance is fragmented and in need of consolidation. Local authorities should influence where children are placed and the quality of regimes in which they are placed should be achieved through the devolution of custody budgets to the local authority.
- 2.1.3 YMCA England believes there is merit in the recommendation to make local authorities responsible for the placement and funding of custodial placements, in addition to the specified court-ordered secure remand. The Local Area Agreements offer a mechanism through which a joined-up approach to the development of young people, in community and in custody, and through the participation of all local agencies (of all sectors) in the Local Strategic Partnership, may be possible - but is yet unclear. Local Area Agreements were negotiated separately and no local authority chose to prioritise reducing the number of children sentenced to custody or increase young offenders' access to suitable accommodation. A joint focus needs not only structures that will facilitate this but

also a willingness to prioritise suitable support for these young people.

- 2.1.4 The Youth Crime Action Plan should go further than is proposed, and grant responsibility, accompanied by control and resources, to local authorities. In so doing, it should give the youth justice system greater local emphasis with local authorities taking greater responsibility for the young people in its care (in the widest sense: living in the local community, not just those who are institutionalised 'in care'). We want to see a community where young people belong, which when they get into trouble with the law rallies around and considers how it (the community) failed the child, rather than ostracising them – we want to avoid, as in the case of Jamie Bulger, in 1993, whipping up a perfect media storm that castigated the young perpetrators as 'evil'.
- 2.1.5 It could be envisaged that a social market emerges whereby one local authority may purchase custodial places from a neighbouring local authority, as happens within the care system. If, in so doing, the local link, and responsibility of the purchasing local authority for the young offender is maintained then a market model which enables the development of excellence should be possible, enabling some institutions to compete with others for lower reconviction rates. Such a model should be tested to ensure it provides suitable incentives for the maintenance of local links that bridge the gap between custody and the community. This can be done through the provision of education, employment, training and positive activities for those on remand and in custody, and also through the process of resettlement whilst on licence or Youth Rehabilitation Orders. The continuation of current government policy to build Titan Prisons that would 'accommodate' greater numbers of people in prison in one place would undermine this approach, by going against a system that favours local responsibility and promotes co-production of youth justice within the local community.

2) How can government ensure that parents are engaged when their children are in court and are completing sentences? Should measures of compulsion be used and what should these measures be?

- 2.2.1 Through its provision of supported accommodation, YMCA England sees the benefits of family mediation services firsthand, often enabling young people to return to their families after a period of 'respite'.
- 2.2.2 Research consistently shows that family breakdown is a factor that contributes to the likelihood young people will get into trouble with the law. Relationship problems are generally at the root of family disharmony, compounded or caused by poverty, overcrowding and domestic violence. Lack of parenting skills can be found across all walks of life, but bringing up children as a lone parent and being a teenage parent are additional risk factors.
- 2.2.3 YMCAs' homelessness family mediation focuses on relationships and communication, and seeks both long and short term solutions. This can include improved relationships and communication, fewer arguments, increased self esteem, and a greater willingness to accept responsibility for actions and behaviours. More importantly in this particular context, mediation can help support young people to remain at home or return home, either on a long term basis or until a planned move is possible.
- 2.2.4 Mediation can also play a significant role in helping reconcile young people to their families/friends in ways which provide them with emotional and practical support. This increases the likelihood of tenancy sustainment and stability in a young person's life. Good early mediation intervention contributes to much more than just homelessness prevention. It could help a young person stay in education, training or employment, reduce offending and antisocial behaviour. The effects are not just on the young person; mediation can help with parenting skills of the parents so that similar crises can be avoided with younger siblings.
- 2.2.5 Mediation services made available through a variety of agencies already in contact with young people have a greater chance of accessing young people and families before they reach crisis point. However, demonstrating the direct prevention of youth offending in these cases can be more difficult and outcomes need to be measured in different ways to capture the effect.
- 2.2.6 For more information please visit:
www.communities.gov.uk/youthhomelessness/prevention/mediation/

Chapter 4: Sentencing and custody

1) What is the best mechanism for enhancing good practice in the delivery of evidence based interventions by YOTS?

- 4.1.1 YMCA England, in partnership with Centrepont, other third sector organisations working to address youth homelessness, and the department of Communities and Local Government, developed a knowledge base for local authorities and their partners as a mechanism to enhance good practice in the delivery of evidence based interventions. This approach is recommended to government for the practice of YOTs.
- 4.1.2 As a precursor, YMCA England, together with the Youth Justice Board, are engaged in an Alliance initiated by Baroness Scotland and now supported by Ministry of Justice Minister, David Hanson MP. As part of this Alliance, the Youth Justice Board and YMCA England are supporting the demonstration of good practice in the relationship between Peterborough Youth Offending Service and Peterborough and Cambridgeshire YMCA. It has been determined that central to this relationship is a common concern shared throughout each partner at all levels to intervene and alter the attitude and behaviour, in a positive way, of young people in order to prevent them offending or re-offending.
- 4.1.3 Although currently in an initial phase, this demonstration project offers a model which may then inspire wider participation as occurred in developing good practice to prevent and tackle to youth homelessness.

Chapter 5: Breaking the cycle of offending

1) Should there be a requirement for local authorities to have a senior official responsible for overseeing resettlement and what should this role cover?

5.1.1 We have answered this in the previous question from Chapter 2.

2) What should the key elements of a package of support for children leave custody include; how can this best be delivered and how long should the support last for?

5.2.1 When young people are leaving custody, there needs to be a commitment to their full reintegration into community. Rarely in the developmental process is the appropriate answer a quick one – and, for that reason, a minimum package of support should last 12 months, if not more. Developmental changes take not only long enough to allow for young people to create good habits, but long enough to see that stability in those habits is established.

5.2.2 If time and resources were no object, 18-24 months would be preferable. YMCA England, because of its 15 year history with youth offender services, knows that these timelines require joined up working and lots of personnel – and it acknowledges that YOT teams are short on time, money, energy and space to be as innovative as they would like.

5.2.3 Additionally, young people need to be included in the design of their own support package. Being included in the design of their own package of support could be as wide as choosing the appropriate (re)training classes, educational programme, or job. It might also involve young people choosing ramifications for not following through on support orders, parole meetings, or attending training classes. Having ownership over the process should, ideally, mean that young people

feel they share in the success of it – and are more likely to complete the process.

- 5.2.4 Even before young people are back in their communities, there needs to be a strengthening of support that starts while young people are in prison to help them transition back to the outside. YMCA runs *Through the Gate* programmes that start while the young person is on the inside of prison, and help them get connected with help outside as well. YMCAs are ideally placed here with their work inside the prisons, and as a staple in 135 communities around England. How can we allow young people to leave prison without someone there to usher them to safety and help them with their reintegration? All those who work with young people routinely do risk assessments for all activities they do, ensuring they are protected from harm – we must do at least the same for young people in trouble.

3) Should housing authorities be represented on a YOT management board?

- 5.3.1 A member of the housing authority needs to be represented on YOT boards because they are the legal authority in the housing arena. However, in some cases, the housing authority may not be an *authority in housing*. That is, organisations like YMCAs, or Foyers, or other experts in housing for young people at risk may actually be an authority in how housing plays a specific role in getting young people back on the road to contributing positively to society. Much talk is given to *re-habilitation* or *re-settlement* of young offenders when they've never been settled to begin with. Housing authorities need to be included, but *not only* housing authorities; we need people with a holistic view on housing.

4) What measures could be taken to improve the employability of young people with a criminal record?

- 5.4.1 Crucially, we need to give young people opportunities to find an identity outside of crime. Young people deserve a wide variety of opportunities to try new activities and get valuable

training to succeed as adults. For those young people in the criminal justice system, this needs to happen before they leave YOI or secure estates. Job opportunities and increased training while young people are still in prison ensures that time spent in prison is not wasted. Moreover, it would go a long way in equipping young people with valuable skills, and once they have exited the prison, would better position young people from choosing crime again for economic reasons.

5.4.2 In addition to the addressing the economic needs of offenders, emotional support will also ensure better success in employment. Compelling evidence now exists for having those who have experience with the system and who have succeeded in getting on with their lives positively, mentor young offenders still in the system. A process where ex-offenders mentor other offenders ideally would offer an additional support mechanism to young offenders and would give practical advice about how to move on.

5.4.3 Finally, having a criminal record check that is more discerning would help the employment prospects of ex-offenders as many are unfairly targeted with old offences never being wiped off their record, and sentences that are spent still negatively affecting employment prospects. The government could work to educate employers about criminal record checks better, and seek to partner with (or reward with suitable incentives) companies or organisations working with ex-offenders successfully.

Chapter 6 Questions

Do you agree that Children's Trusts should be given a formal role to prevent re-offending by children and young people?

- 6.1.1 Children's Trusts have a role to play in terms of using their money for preventing re-offending. However, our members have expressed concern that money gets diverted away from preventative measures toward punitive arrangements. If Children's Trusts were designated to address some of the preventative measures toward reducing crime, whilst the Crime and Disorder Partnerships focus on aligning their work through the Local Strategic Partnership, this might provide a more reliable and consistent source of funding to ensure this diversion schemes continue.

How can the youth justice system assessment procedures and CAF be best aligned to ensure thorough assessment of risk and need?

- 6.2.1 Assessment is only as good as the information collected and shared. The current issues with regard to assessment (CAF, ASSET or otherwise) concern the alignment of these different assessment surveys or mechanisms. Information is not measured against consistent benchmarks, and reports fail to follow the child/young person/young adult through the criminal justice system in-line with their development towards independent adulthood.
- 6.2.2 The YMCA applauds the application of Every Child Matters (ECM) standards in assessing young people's well-being. This framework - to the extent that it is applicable, should be continued in CAF, and also the ASSET assessments. Moreover, the information that is collected on a young person should be able to follow that person as they move through the system, even (and particularly) as they move from YOIs to adult prisons.

6.2.3 Assessment that is shepherded through the system with the young people allows a cumulative, if not more holistic, view on a young person's development. As information is gathered, it begins to paint a picture of that young person's journey to crime, and to rehabilitation. Too much information is held in silos in different organisations and departments. To be sure, some information is appropriately held as confidential, but often even basic information is not passed effectively from one organisation/institution to the next. It can make for a frustrating experience for both the young person and the adult/civil servant.