

Before and after youth crime Speaking Out London Regional Event Report 26 February 2009

1. Background on the Speaking Out project

Speaking Out is a strategic partnership project funded by the Office of the Third Sector in the Cabinet Office, run by Children England (formerly the National Council of Voluntary Child Care Organisations) and the National Council for Voluntary Youth Services (NCVYS), which seeks to build a voice for the children and young people's voluntary and community sector across government.

The project aims to develop closer links between a range of government departments and the voluntary and community sector in delivering cross departmental policies in areas affecting children and young people such as health; education, employment and training; youth justice; community empowerment and citizenship; and housing and homelessness.

Speaking Out aims to support children, young people and family voluntary and community organisations to better understand the impact on their users of a wider range of government policies and provide routes to influence them.

2. Introduction

Before and after youth crime brought together practitioners, policymakers and young people to discuss issues around youth crime in London. The event included presentations from young people and representatives from NCVYS and Children England networks and Government¹.

Key discussion themes were:

- prevention and intervention to reduce re-offending
- transition and resettlement; and
- sharing good practice.

This report will set out key recommendations that arose from the roundtable, summarise the presentations which took place and highlight key discussion topics.

3. Key recommendations

Key recommendations that emerged from the roundtable are:

Recommendation 1: Government should explore alternatives to custody and increase focus on prevention and intervention in order to minimise the number of young people at risk of entering the criminal justice system.

Recommendation 2: Local authorities should re-align budgets so that money moves with children and young people across services and age boundaries to aid transition and address individual need.

¹ A full list of participants is given in Appendix A.

Recommendation 3: Government to recognise soft outcomes, as well as quantitative measures, in its commissioning requirements.

Recommendation 4: Local voluntary and community sector infrastructure organisations should be used as a conduit to promote consultation and engagement and share information about commissioning opportunities to ensure opportunities reach all, large and small, voluntary and community organisations.

Recommendation 5: Local authorities need to adopt a consistent universal approach to reducing offending, aimed at all children and young people at risk of engaging in criminal or anti-social behaviour.

Recommendation 6: Status of children and young people in custody should be based on similar principles to that of other vulnerable children, e.g. looked-after children, to ensure that their rights are protected, services are based on individual need and that there is full access to mainstream services.

Recommendation 7: Safeguarding procedures need to be in place and understood that protect children and young people but allow ex-offenders to engage in volunteering and employment opportunities when appropriate.

4. Presentation by Tim Broadbent, Community and Youth Worker, Oasis UK and Sade, Nathan and Liam, Southside (project funded by the Speaking Out Small Grants Programme)

Southside is a youth-led media project and radio station based in South London, aiming to inspire young people through music and creativity, and giving them the chance to express their views, showcase their talent, produce, MC or make a video. Young people are also involved in organising and coaching football teams.

Key attributes that ensure the success of Southside include the youth workers that work there and the relaxed atmosphere and safe environment that it provides. Southside relies mainly on word-of-mouth communication to engage young people.

The project helps to reduce youth crime by giving young people something to do and engaging young people from different estates, helping to break down territorial barriers.

Being involved in football sessions has enabled young people to gain coaching qualifications and leadership skills. It has also given them something to look forward to each week and some structure in their lives.

The Southside project is run by Oasis UK and is an example of how good practice can be replicated and transferred. Oasis UK has academies around the country that are working together so that every academy has a radio station and Southside representatives have been training others to ensure consistency of practice.

Introduction and brief update by Mick Duggan, Secretariat, London Youth Crime Prevention Board

The London Youth Crime Prevention Board² was established in 2007 and focuses on action, not just recommending actions. The Board is winding down and its final report will be published at the end of March 2009.

Key work that the Board has carried out includes:

- work around Safer Schools Partnerships – piloted a new system with 27 schools and key partners to agree what more can be done by, and around, schools. The system is being developed into an Award which schools can show to demonstrate that it has looked at safety and identified key actions for improvement;
- Pupil Referral Units (PRUs) – London Councils is leading on work around PRUs and has submitted an application to DCSF for a London-wide programme to improve PRUs;
- work around young people in custody and developing diversionary approaches to reducing re-offending. Work around what happens when young people enter the criminal justice system for the first time, as offender, witness or victim; and
- new public ‘dashboard’ for London – website to provide a picture of young people’s experiences of crime and safety. (Further information will be available in the Board’s final report).

5. Presentation by Joe Murphy, Youth Crime Action Plan Implementation Team, Joint Youth Justice Unit, Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) / Ministry of Justice (MoJ)

The Joint Youth Justice Unit is shared between the DCSF and the MoJ. It works alongside DCSF’s Youth Inclusion Team which looks at crime, teenage pregnancy, drugs etc. The presentation gave an overview of actions since the *Youth Crime Action Plan* and highlighted priority areas for Government. The presentation is available separately.

Key points from the presentation included:

- Government recognises that too many young people are leaving custody without necessary support and is being told that YOTs working in a silo. Government wants to make sure Directors of Children’s Services (DCS) see youth offending as a priority;
- there is also recognition that central government needs to be more aware of what is happening at local level, be aware of local good practice. Government needs to join-up policies, e.g. links between safeguarding, youth crime and homelessness; and
- Government appreciates the role of third sector and how it can influence policy through its strong lobby groups. The VCS should not underestimate the power it has.

Participants discussed issues around transition and resettlement. Key points are included in the discussion below.

² Further information on the London Youth Crime Prevention Board is available via: http://www.gos.gov.uk/gol/Community_safety/LCSP/LCSPWorkPlan/587700/

Before youth crime – discussion around prevention, intervention and reducing re-offending

This section highlights key issues raised during a discussion around prevention, intervention and reducing re-offending and offers recommendations on how to take this agenda forward.

Custody , sentencing and alternatives

The number of under-18s in custody has more than doubled since 1989 but over eight out of 10 boys under 18 who are released from prison are reconvicted within two years, and even more reoffend³.

There was concern among participants that prevention strategies are concerned with custody and ignore viable alternatives to putting young people in prison, e.g. restorative justice. There is also a link with positive activities, restorative justice and preventing re-offending, which need continued support in order to ensure the delivery of diversionary activities that steer young people away from a life of crime.

Alternative forms of custody and service provision, e.g. provided by social enterprises, need to be transferable and one participant suggested that if local authorities (LAs) had to pay for a young person to go to prison they might think about alternatives to custody.

Recommendation 1: Government should explore alternatives to custody and increase focus on prevention and intervention in order to minimise the number of young people at risk of entering the criminal justice system.

Problems with sentencing young people need to be raised and voiced by the voluntary and community sector (VCS). Participants were concerned that sentencing guidelines are not always followed. Government is currently revising sentencing guidelines and considering creating new community sentencing procedures. It was also suggested that funding should be redistributed from secure estates to preventative work.

Local commissioning and funding

There is a problem with commissioning services based on outcomes as it is difficult to define positive outcomes for young people involved and leaving the criminal justice system. There are examples of LAs being inflexible when it comes to outcomes. For example Hilltop Wood is an educational programme for excluded young people which had a success rate of 75% of young people into employment but the LA did not renew the contract because it didn't get enough young people into further and higher education.

All services are outside of secure estates but they need to be started inside where the young person feels quite safe. However, some organisations are no longer being commissioned for this kind of work around resilience, e.g. Leap Confronting Conflict.

One problem is that there are cases where LAs are not commissioning services on a holistic basis across all services. Another problem might be the focus on capital return. There also needs to be consideration for different age groups of young people as these require different

³ 4Children (2008) *Unlocking Potential – Alternatives to custody for young people*. Available via: http://www.4children.org.uk/uploads/information/UnlockingPotential_Dec2008.pdf

service provision, e.g. is there a gap in provision for 8 to 13 year olds? Perhaps this is linked to the age of criminal responsibility? There also needs to be a focus on young people going through transition, 18 to 21 years old.

Recommendation 2: Local authorities should re-align budgets so that money moves with children and young people across services and age boundaries to aid transition and address individual needs.

It is difficult for VCS organisations to evidence sustainable long-term work at a local level. Another problem, particularly for small, local VCS organisations is having the capacity and knowing the formula to write successful funding applications.

There is also the on-going debate about the recognition of soft outcomes and demonstrating their impact for young people. Soft outcomes are integral to children and young people's development and transition into adulthood. It can be difficult for voluntary and community sector organisations to meet commissioning requirements when they are based on hard outcomes and statistics.

Recommendation 3: Government to recognise soft outcomes, as well as quantitative measures, in its commissioning requirements.

There was concern among some participants that voluntary and community sector providers are not viewed as credible by local authorities. This could limit the support and engagement that VCS organisations receive from and have with LAs.

Participants discussed commissioning and some had experienced situations where LAs commissioned to the same organisations because they knew them. This also raised the issue that LAs might not know what VCS organisations can offer.

Recommendation 4: Local voluntary and community sector infrastructure organisations should be used as a conduit to promote consultation and engagement and share information about commissioning opportunities to ensure opportunities reach all, large and small, voluntary and community organisations.

Partnership working

Links with schools were seen as important to carrying out preventative work, however some service providers have found it difficult to engage with schools. The extended schools agenda⁴ provides an opportunity for joined-up working but this is challenging.

There was recognition of the heavy workloads that Youth Offending Teams (YOTs) are faced with and the problems that this can cause in working in partnership with them. The Integrated Youth Support Services (IYSS) model should be used as a vehicle for linking up YOTs and mainstream youth services.

Government is mapping the experiences of young people going through the youth justice system and more ground-level experiences, including experiences at home. It is important to consider

⁴ Further information on the extended schools agenda is available via:
<http://www.everychildmatters.gov.uk/ete/extendedschools/>

how much support comes from families and communities and how much money should really go on services for children and young people or work with families.

The Mayor of London's *Time for Action*⁵ strategy highlights Project Oracle which is designed to share best practice and raise the profile of the work of the youth sector.

LAs statutory duties and access to services

Participants were concerned that LAs are not focussing on their statutory duty to reduce offending.

Recommendation 5: Local authorities need to adopt a consistent universal approach to reducing offending, aimed at all children and young people at risk of engaging in criminal or anti-social behaviour.

LAs have numerous issues to focus on, the VCS's responsibility is to highlight issues to LAs, in particular the DCS, and help them to consider them in a different way, for example the care agenda. Participants were supportive of children and young people in custody being designated the looked-after care status.

Access to mainstream services is key during a young people's resettlement period; young offenders should not be seen as a special category. LAs have duties to all children and young people.

Recommendation 6: Status of children and young people in custody should be based on similar principles to that of other vulnerable children, e.g. looked-after children, to ensure that their rights are protected, services are based on individual need and that there is full access to mainstream services.

A big issue was seen to be transition from care into society. There are examples of 'through the gate' mentoring, working in prison with young people preparing for when they get out. Mentoring is important for young people, in particular peer mentoring, however it is often underfunded as cuts across different funding streams.

The Youth Justice Board has specific resettlement funding which provides support for young people in finding and accessing services. The Greater London Authority is piloting the Diamond Initiative⁶ which works with people when they leave prison and aims to stop the cycle of re-offending.

Entering employment

The role of volunteering needs to be recognised as means of engaging young people and giving them valuable experiences and skills in order to enter or re-enter employment. However, there is a problem for young people in passing CRB (Criminal Records Bureau) checks if they have a criminal record.

⁵ Further information on *Time for Action* is available via:

<http://www.london.gov.uk/mayor/crime/timeforaction/>

⁶ Further information on the Diamond Initiative is available via:

http://www.london.gov.uk/view_press_release.jsp?releaseid=17875

There is also a need to promote a culture of sensible risk assessment whereby agencies recruiting ex-offenders understand when it is appropriate to reject an applicant based on information gained from a CRB check.

Recommendation 7: Safeguarding procedures need to be in place and understood that protect children and young people but allow ex-offenders to engage in volunteering and employment opportunities when appropriate.

VCS and young people's participation

Smaller VCS organisations need to be engaged with Government consultations and policymaking, perhaps through infrastructure organisations.

Young people need to be engaged better, Government and VCS organisations needs to be more flexible and subtle. However, there was recognition that it is difficult to engage young people with top-level policymaking.

Children's rights

Children's rights are highly important for those in the youth justice system. There is now a statutory basis for this to be recognised and provided for and UN Convention on the Rights of the Child⁷ should be adhered to. Children are children first, offenders second.

All children and young people need to be considered within the youth justice agenda. There needs to be more focus on young women and youth justice, for example looking at how young women are alienated from preventative strands of strategies.

Media

A problem is the media and general public's perception of custody and sentencing. The general public might not understand alternative forms of custody. However, participants were concerned that young people learn more about criminality in jail than they do 'on the outside'.

The media and public perceptions may also relate to the criminalisation of 'normal' behaviour by young people, for example the introduction of Anti-Social Behaviour Orders (ASBOs).

6. Next steps

Speaking Out will send this report to the Ministry of Justice, Department for Children, Schools and Families and the Mayor's Office. It will also be promoted throughout NCVYS's and Children England's (joint deliverers of Speaking Out) networks⁸.

Following consultation with NCVYS and Children England member and allied organisations, youth justice has been identified as a priority policy area for the Speaking Out project 2009-2010. Speaking Out will continue to analyse youth justice and facilitate discussion between the children and young people's voluntary and community sector, Government and other key stakeholders.

⁷ Further information on the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child is available via:

<http://www.everychildmatters.gov.uk/uncrc/>

⁸ Speaking Out is jointly run by NCVYS and Children England. Further information is available via:

<http://www.ncvys.org.uk> and <http://www.childrenengland.org.uk>