

YOUTH CRIME ACTION PLAN: CONSULTATION RESPONSE BY THE PRINCE'S TRUST

The Prince's Trust: a brief introduction

The Prince's Trust is a charity that believes in young people who often don't believe in themselves. We seek out those young people that need our help the most, and work with young people who struggle at school, are in or leaving care, are long-term unemployed or have been in trouble with the law. We work with young people aged 14-30 to help them get back into work, education and training.

2. The Prince's Trust is helping to break the cycle of crime by offering offenders training and support so they can turn their lives around and give back to society. In 2007/08 over 5,800 participants on Prince's Trust programmes were offenders or ex-offenders. Almost 80% of the (ex)offenders we assisted moved into employment, self employment, further education or training.

3. The Trust's age range starts at 14, and we recognise that many young people who come to us may already be offending or at risk of offending. We therefore work on reducing their offending behaviour and do this through a number of programmes, e.g.:

4. **xl clubs**, which are a team-based programme of personal development based in schools and some custodial institutions for pupils aged 14-16 'at risk' of truancing and under-achievement. Clubs aim to improve attendance, self-esteem, motivation and social skills and enable young people to take part in a community project. By engaging young people back into education we are helping them to increase their basic skills and reduce their likelihood of getting into crime. In 2007/08 6,176 pupils took part in xl in more than 1,012 schools across the UK.

5. **The Team Programme**, which is a 12 week personal development programme for 16-25 year olds, the majority unemployed, to develop their confidence, motivation and skills through teamwork in the community. In 2007/08 8,033 took part in the programme in over 692 locations across the UK. 62% of unemployed participants find work or enter full time education or training after completing the programme. Through the Team programme, The Trust contributes more than £4.75m to local communities through community projects.

6. The Trust's success is dependent on the strength of its partnerships, and we work with a range of statutory and voluntary organisations to provide better outcomes for offenders, e.g.: Youth Justice Board, Probation Service, prisons, NACRO and Clinks. The Trust supports the Smart Justice campaign for alternatives to custody, and is part of the Coalition on Social and Criminal Justice. The Trust also works with the Police, the Ministry of Defence and Fire Service to build community confidence.

7. Many of the young people The Trust works with have complex needs that need an holistic multi-agency support system. One intervention on its own will not necessarily help break the cycle of offending. The Trust actively engages with the multi-agency approach and works with specialist partners such as Rethink, Addaction, Drugscope, Foyer and Centrepont.

8. The Trust understands and acknowledges the strong link between mental health and offending. Our programmes help develop self-confidence and motivation, improving the health and wellbeing of young people. 79% of young people who participated in a Trust programme during 2007/08 report higher life satisfaction than one year ago. Comparable rates amongst unemployed 16-24 year olds in the general population are 34%¹.

General comments on the Youth Crime Action Plan

9. The Prince's Trust welcomes the opportunity to comment on the Government's plans to tackle youth crime, youth re-offending and youth victimisation. The Trust particularly welcomes the strong emphasis on prevention as the evidence-based approach of early intervention. As the report makes clear we need to understand the underlying reasons behind the negative behaviour of young offenders – ranging from multiple and complex family issues to negative peer effects – and ensure they are successfully addressed.

10. The Trust is also keen that the report is used as an opportunity to ensure that resettlement process for young people upon leaving prison becomes far more effective. All our evidence shows that if we really are going to bring down the high rate of re-offending then we must ensure that all ex-offenders not only have someone to 'meet them at the gate' on release but also that have mentors and role models who have been where they have been and managed to turn their life around in order that they can avoid the pitfalls and avoid falling back into a pattern of offending. The Trust will continue to role out its mentor programme in prisons and Young offender institutes and campaign for every young offender in detention to have an ex-offender role model.

11. The Trust is concerned that the strong focus on youth crime overshadows the fact that the vast majority of young people are law-abiding citizens who make a positive contribution to this country. It adds to the general public's fear of crime and fear of young people in particular. It also does nothing to aid understanding that young people are more likely to be victims of crime than most other age groups. To counter-act this approach, The Trust will launch **Youth Week** this autumn to tackle the negative perceptions of young people. The campaign will challenge views about young people by highlighting the positive contributions they make to their communities. It will also encourage young people to seek help from

¹ British Household Panel Survey 2004

organisations like The Prince's Trust.

12. The week-long national campaign, taking place in November, follows the concern around teenage knife and gang crime. It also coincides with a report by The Trust that reveals 60 per cent of press coverage on young people is negative. The Trust will run Youth Week in parallel with other initiatives such as BBC Radio 1 and 1Xtra's Careers week. The campaign has received ministerial support, in particular from the Minister for Children and Young People, Beverley Hughes.

13. The Trust will also launch an initiative called "Youth Week on YouTube" on our branded [YouTube](#) channel. The Channel will run positive clips of young people throughout the week.

14. The Trust supports the focus on early intervention, but is concerned that this work does not replace the good work that is going on to support the older teenage group who are in need of support which does not stigmatize them as offenders. If the only way that they can access support is through the criminal justice system, then we can be said to have failed another generation

15. The Prince's Trust would like to see more emphasis on addressing the "Transition to Adulthood" issues that have been identified by the Barrow Cadbury Trust and others. This is important for young people, not just in the criminal justice system, but also in mainstream ETE support.

16. The Plan does not provide much detail on the different groups of young people who enter the criminal justice system, and for whom different issues need to be addressed. These include young female offenders and black and minority ethnic young offenders.

17. Finally, The Trust is disappointed that the Plan does not make more of the need to engage young people to contribute to policy and the design of services that affect them and their communities. This could be linked to volunteering opportunities for young people: The Trust has significant experience of working with young volunteers as Ambassadors for The Trust as well as developing programmes which make use of volunteering to help improve their communities and build confidence and self-esteem.

Responses to consultation questions

18. The Prince's Trust has focused on those consultation questions which we think we have most expertise. We have not, therefore, responded to those questions which look at the under-14 age group and issues around parenting.

Chapter 2

- (i) What are the most effective ways for local agencies to increase further their focus on prevention and early intervention?

The Trust believes that it is important to focus the co-ordinated support for young people before they are permanently excluded, when it might be almost too late to make a difference. The Trust supports schools doing just that by providing xl clubs which help young people who face difficulties at school, including those at risk of exclusion. It is important that schools, YOTs, CDRPs and local communities who need information about what support is available for them and young people can get it quickly and efficiently. This requires co-ordinated work by local authorities. In addition, if local authorities are made financially responsible for failures in prevention and early intervention (e.g. if the cost of custody is passed to them), that would certainly focus their attention on this work.

Chapter 4

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

The Trust is currently researching the links between YOTs and The Trust's programmes. Initial findings would suggest that YOTs do not have ready access to a comprehensive database of projects in their area, and, due to pressures of work, rely on a few "tried and tested" programmes, which might not be suitable for all young people. YOTs need assistance to identify projects in their area and match them to the young people with whom they are working. This could be done either through the YJB or the local authority., but in any event, it needs co-ordinated effort and bench-marking to identify what is "good" practice. This is linked to the wider issue of how charities and the third sector as a whole can prove to Government that their programmes work, and are effective in meeting not only their targets but also Government targets. As a large charity able to research and evaluate its programmes, The Trust is better placed to demonstrate effectiveness, but it still faces the challenge of meeting high level Government research requirements. Support for a standard set of outcome measures would be welcome.

Chapter 5

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

We would support such a link within the local authority, who could develop strong connections with those responsible for housing, ETE, health

(including mental health), parenting support and preventative work through the YOTs and CDRPs.

(iv) 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 should last for?

The package of support should not only include elements related to housing, parental support and reintegration into the family (where appropriate), access to ETE, drug and alcohol services and mental health treatment (again, where appropriate), but also access to a mentor or supporter who is separate from the statutory services and, therefore, viewed as a “critical friend” rather than part of the apparatus of the state. For young offenders, it provides positive role models they can grow to trust and believe in; for mentors, the positive impact on young people’s lives provides a real sense of worth, while for society at large it is one way of helping to reduce offending.

Mentoring is not something that professionals are trying to impose on young people; it is something that is welcomed and sought after. A Prince’s Trust survey found that 65% of young offenders under the age of 25 said that having the support of a mentor would help them to stop re-offending; 71% said they would like a mentor who is a former offender and 85% said that starting mentoring whilst in custody would be welcome.

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

Measures include revisiting the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act as well as the criminal age of responsibility. Both act as barriers to future employment, and criminalizing large numbers of children damages their life prospects and the communities in which they live.

More work needs to be done by Government to demonstrate to employers that they are not taking a gamble by employing someone with a criminal record. This includes evidence that Government also employs people with a criminal record. Currently, the private and voluntary sectors are being asked to take that “risk” by Government, and there appears to be no reciprocal action. Providing employers with a contact who can provide advice and guidance and ongoing support during the initial employment period would be welcome.

Chapter 6

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

Yes. This would enable a better, co-ordinated level of support for young people and their families within mainstream services.

(x) Do you agree with the proposals set out to further strengthen the contribution of local authorities in the prevention of offending?

It is important that local authorities lead the way in the prevention of offending. This gives local communities a say in what happens and taps into local knowledge. At the moment there is little incentive for local authorities to develop prevention schemes, as they suffer no financial penalties when young people who offend end up in custody. Indeed, there is a perverse incentive not to take preventative action: do nothing and the cost is picked up by central Government. By focusing on a justice reinvestment model, local authorities can be rewarded by custodial resources being reinvested in local areas to improve services, develop job opportunities and prevent offending.

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