



3 Good practice in... reducing anti-social behaviour and working with young people who have offended or are at risk of offending

Introduction

There is little conclusive evidence in the UK of what works in addressing youth offending. In a 2011 report on the Youth Justice system, it was reported that:

“Little is known about the relative effectiveness of interventions with young offenders. The Youth Justice Board had not been able to isolate which programmes had had the most impact on youth offending, and why.”

Young people who engage in anti-social behaviour (ASB), who offend or are at risk of offending were among the main beneficiaries of the Big Lottery Fund's (BIG) Young People's Fund (YPF) activity across the UK.

Projects that received YPF funding demonstrated a range of approaches to addressing anti-social and offending behaviour in their local communities.

This short guide outlines the approaches and activities which have worked well for YPF projects in engaging and supporting these young people.

The guide provides advice, practical examples and sources of further information and support that may be useful if you are working with this group. It is based on findings from the YPF evaluation carried out by GEN Consulting and Wavehill Consulting.

ASB and offending behaviour – a policy priority

Anti-social and offending behaviour is an emotive issue and one which has been high on the political agenda for a number of years.

The general public are concerned about ASB and the impact it has on their quality of life.

However, there is no consensus about what exactly constitutes ASB or the extent of it in our communities.

Discussions around ASB tend to include issues such as: noise disturbance, environmental degradation (litter, graffiti, vandalism), and young people congregating in public places. Anti-social behaviour and perceptions of it can impact negatively on community cohesion.

There is evidence that ASB is often a precursor to more serious offending behaviour among young people.

Once this pattern of behaviour is established it can be difficult to break the cycle and reoffending rates for young offenders are relatively high.

The importance of intervening early to steer young people away from ASB and offending behaviours is therefore a policy priority for government and one which the youth sector is well placed to contribute to.

Reducing ASB and youth offending results in significant economic and social benefits to young people, communities and society as a whole.

The role of YPF

YPF activity tackled ASB and offending behaviour in a number of ways. This involved direct and indirect approaches including:

- ▶ Providing activities that divert young people away from negative behaviours and peer groups and engage them in more positive recreational and community activities.
- ▶ Working alongside the Youth Justice sector, and community structures to engage young people at risk, and bring about positive behaviour change.
- ▶ Activity which directly addressed the factors underlying ASB or offending behaviour, for example unemployment, debt, substance abuse, poor relationships and social networks.

What works?

Diversionsary activities – enjoyment is key to success

Engaging young people in positive and enjoyable activities in the presence of a positive peer group is an important first step in addressing ASB; in many cases young people become involved in ASB and low level offending as a result of boredom and peer pressure¹.

¹www.audit-commission.gov.uk/SiteCollectionDocuments/Audit-CommissionReports/NationalStudies/hangingaroundyoungpeoples-views.pdf

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If you can provide engaging activities that allow young people to channel energy and enthusiasm in a positive way, this can have notable impact when targeted in areas with limited local facilities and recognised ASB problems.

The YPF evaluation and other research highlight the success of physical activity, and outdoor pursuits in this regard.

This proved successful for some YPF projects (case study example 1).

Case Study Example 1

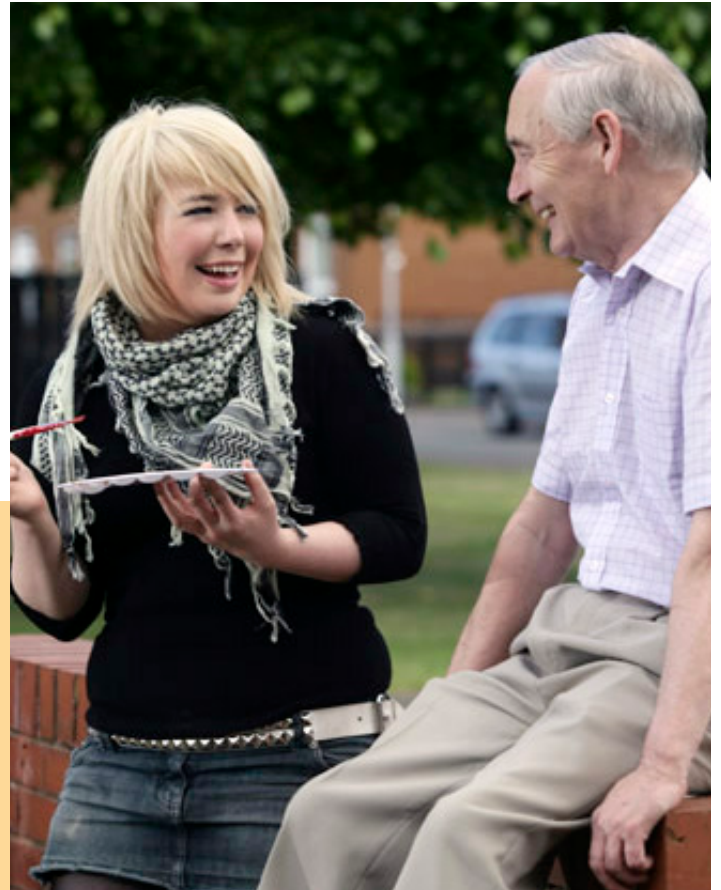
Country: Scotland

Project: Street League Scotland

Street League provided a two stage progressive programme; Street Sports and Directions 2 Work (D2W). Street Sports was an incentive to engage participants before moving them into the employability programme. D2W used football to deliver personal development opportunities to participants. Young people developed skills to enhance their employability and worked towards accredited qualifications. The project worked with hard to reach young people, those experiencing deprivation and unemployment. Participants included young people with a range of needs including mental health issues, homeless people, offenders, and those at risk of offending.

Street League established a night-time Soccer League in the east end of Glasgow. This engaged those who did not generally access services and provided a positive activity to aid community cohesion and get young people off the streets. Feedback from the police indicated a significant reduction in reports of ASB, disorder and violence following the introduction of the programme.

One participant reported: "I ended up doing all the wrong things; drinking, taking drugs, gang-fighting and laying about. Street League put a bit



of structure into my day, as I joined the 12 week volunteer programme, and that was great for me, as it ran three days a week, meaning my days were taken up doing stuff, and gaining qualifications that would help me eventually get a job. It also helped me get away from the wrong things I was doing such as drinking during the day and taking drugs, as well as gang fighting at night. My confidence improved a lot, and I started staying in on a Friday night as I had joined the 11-a-side team, so I wanted to be fresh for the games on the Saturday mornings."

For more information see:

Evaluation of the YPF Year 2 (2008)

Or

www.streetleague.co.uk

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Where activities are enjoyable and stimulating, young people will want to engage with them, and will be more likely to attend voluntarily.

Where young people choose to attend this in turn brings about greater motivation and sustained engagement.

Opportunities for personal and social development

Diversionary activities provide opportunities for young people to build trust in others and gain self confidence before they progress to more focussed and targeted interventions.

Our research highlighted many examples of projects that used fun and enjoyable diversionary activity as a route into structured support.

An example was provided by Street League Scotland in case study example 1 and by the Tullymore Young People's project in case study example 2.

Case Study Example 2

Country: Northern Ireland

Project: Tullymore Young People's Project

Organisation: Upper Andersonstown Community Forum (West Belfast)

Support from YPF allowed the forum to expand their programme of youth activity to include an outreach programme to engage hard to reach young people in positive activities. The YPF funded detached youth workers to engage local young people in project activities. This included young people engaged in anti-social or offending behaviour.

The project provided a wide range of recreational and leisure activities along with structured personal and social development programmes and Open College Network accredited training.

Young people took part in a wide range of community activities to break down barriers

Breaking the cycle – the importance of a positive social network

Where young people are learning and enjoying in the presence of a positive peer group and trusted adult role models, this can influence behaviour change.

Our research demonstrated success where:

1. Interventions involved young people interacting with a different social group

This helps break links with negative peer hierarchies (such as those found in gangs or communities with territorial divides).

It helps young people learn, and put into practice new social norms in terms of their behaviour – learning what is acceptable and what is not, the impact of problem behaviour on others and what constitutes positive behaviour.

Mixing outside their previous groups offers young people the chance to experience new ways of communicating, to learn new social skills and relationships, and think for themselves.

between young people and other sections of the community and help young people to be viewed in a positive light. Examples include:

- ▶ An environmental project where young people spent the day clearing up litter from the streets. The event received a lot of publicity and the local MP joined the young people to help.
- ▶ Young people made flower baskets which they distributed to elderly people in the neighbourhood.
- ▶ Young people assisted elderly members of the community by going to the shops for them, doing their gardens and dropping by their houses to see they are managing and talk with them.

For more information see:

Evaluation of the YPF Year 4 (2011)

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2. Young people formed friendships in addition to just mixing with others

There is evidence that friends protect young people from negative and high risk activities. This has implications for understanding how peer influence may be used to influence teen behaviour².

Opportunities for active involvement

Being actively involved in the development, delivery, management and evaluation of projects can bring about significant benefits for young people, organisations, communities and society as a whole.

This subject is explored in detail in the Good Practice Guide - '2-Good Practice in Actively Involving Young People' that accompanies this series.

There are many ways that you can support young people to be involved in your project.

YPF projects working with young people engaged in ASB, young offenders, ex-offenders and those at risk of offending found that active and meaningful involvement increased engagement of young people, helped motivate them to be more involved and encouraged others to participate.

Involvement builds respect and promotes good relationships with adults. An example is provided in case study 3.

Case Study Example 3

Country: Northern Ireland

Project: Youth at Risk

Organisation: Lurgan YMCA

Lurgan YMCA worked across the community divide to engage young people who were at risk of participating in anti-social, offending or sectarian behaviour. The project provided a range of recreational and learning opportunities.

Young people were actively involved in the delivery and management of the project.

They were represented on a youth committee and were actively involved in decision making with regard to programme delivery. Young people's representatives also had voting rights within the organisation. One young person commented that:

"It made me feel special and empowered as I get to make decisions and the other young people felt I would be good in this role... it's not tokenism, I have a real input and I feel listened to by the adults".

For more information see:
Evaluation of the YPF Year 5 (2011)
Or

www.ymcalurgan.com/



The case study shows the way that active involvement can develop the technical, personal and social skills of young people. Active involvement also makes young people feel valued and can bring about greater engagement and motivation for participation more widely.

²Maxwell, Kimberley A. (2002). *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, Vol. 31, No. 4, August, pp. 267–277.

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Role models that young people can relate to – the success of peer led approaches

You may find that young people very often respond best to messages about behaviour change when they come from others who they feel are like them and with whom they share some common ground.

Peer-led activities are therefore a successful way of engaging young people³.

Peer-led approaches to awareness raising and education worked well for YPF projects looking to influence the behaviours and perceptions of young people, including young people at risk of ASB or offending activity (case study example 4).

Case Study Example 4

Country: Scotland

Project: Peer Leaders in the Community

Organisation: Granton Youth Centre

Granton Youth Centre was established due to concern over the lack of youth provision in North Edinburgh. The Centre is located in an area of economic and social deprivation. It runs clubs for local young people of varying ages and offers a range of activities to enhance the employability skills of young people and support them in the move from primary to secondary school.

The Peer Leaders in the Community project was established to encourage discussion around issues of gang violence and territorialism. This was recognised as a significant issue in the local area.

The project trained 47 peer educators over three years. Peer educators developed awareness raising and teaching materials in collaboration with project workers and delivered sessions to younger children in schools.

The project worked with young people to highlight issues of gang violence and territorialism. It provided a forum for discussion and encouraged young people to realise that there are alternative, more positive activities that they can take part in.

Young people in schools responded well to the sessions as they were delivered by other young people, many of whom were local and had personal experience of these issues.

For the young people involved as peer educators, outcomes include increased confidence and the development of personal, social and employability skills that will assist young people as they move into their adult lives.

For young people who had previously been involved in gang activities, there is anecdotal evidence that the peer education project helped to change their attitudes and behaviours and that they are now more likely to avoid confrontation and gang related activities.

Although the Peer Leaders in the Community project has come to an end, elements of the work have carried on. The centre is now running a project for young people interested in youth work and the creative arts. This group includes three of the former peer educators.

The group has developed a play based on the themes of knife crime and cyber bullying. This has been recognised by the No Knives Better Lives campaign and as a result the group have been awarded £23,000 from the Scottish Government Cashback for Communities programme to perform the play and deliver workshops in schools.

For more information see:

Evaluation of the YPF Year 5 (2011)

Or

www.grantonyouth.com/

³www.ejprob.ro/uploads_ro/693/Pro-social_modelling.pdf

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Early intervention is important

Early intervention can steer young people away from criminal behaviour⁵. Engaging with young people before negative behaviour patterns emerge or are ingrained is the most effective means of prevention. As a youth worker you are well placed to contribute to early intervention.

Young people involved in YPF projects often told us...

“The project engaged them at the right time, and in the right way, meaning that they did not go on to offend.”

An example of a project which successfully used early intervention and diversionary activities (discussed previously) to address anti-social behaviour and prevent offending is described in case study example 5.



Case Study Example 5

Country: England

Project: Newbald Church Rooms

The project provided a space for young people aged 13 to 18 to come together and socialise. YPF funded a play worker to supervise and support the activities that young people chose to do.

Activities were young person led and included: meeting and listening to music, playing pool, playing table tennis, getting help with school work, holding jumble sales, going trips and outings.

The young people felt that the project gave them something to do and kept them out of trouble. They said being bored meant that they were more likely to get into trouble, and the project helped remedy that. Following the introduction of a Friday night session young people were less likely to drink alcohol on the streets as they had somewhere else to go and other activities to take part in.

Some young people felt that for some of the group, if the space to socialise and the activities provided were not available, they would have got involved with offending and may have ended up in a young offenders institution. Instead they are now in employment, having been supported by workers to develop the skills to find and secure a job.

For more information see:

Evaluation of the YPF Year 4 (2011)

⁵www.homeoffice.gov.uk/publications/science-research-statistics/research-statistics/crime-research/horr19/horr19-key-implications?view=Binary

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The value of community engagement

Working in, with, and for the community is key to successful interventions with young people who participate in anti-social or offending behaviour or are at risk of doing so.

Youth projects are most successful when all key partners and stakeholders are involved. This may include community police, education and social work staff, youth workers and community leaders.

Working closely with the community allows you [a youth project], partners and stakeholder to better:

1. Identify anti-social behaviour and crime hotspots.
2. Develop appropriate interventions and allocate resources accordingly.
3. Deliver a joined up approach to tackling ASB and offending at a local level.
4. Deliver effective restorative justice interventions that involve young people in their communities, develop ownership and give them a sense that they are making good on past mistakes, so that they can move on.

Where can I find out more?

There are a number of sources of information and support if you are trying to engage with young offenders, ex-offenders, young people at risk of offending and young people involved in anti-social behaviour through your work.

If you would like further information on national structures and policies for addressing these issues see:

- **England and Wales:** Youth Justice Board
- **Scotland:** SCARO: Safeguarding Communities – Reducing Offending
- **Northern Ireland:** Youth Justice Agency of Northern Ireland.

If you would like information about the national evaluation of the Young People's Fund contact:

BIG: 0845 410 2030

Copies of the YPF evaluation reports and supporting documents are available online from BIG at:

www.biglotteryfund.org.uk/eval_ypf