

# Policy Briefing

From **Children in Scotland** and **YouthLink Scotland**

## Scottish Executive debate - December 6<sup>th</sup> 2001 Improving Scotland's Youth Justice System

Children in Scotland and YouthLink Scotland would like to identify the following key issues for today's debate:

- A. There is an urgent need for establishing facilities for young people throughout Scotland. These facilities need to be properly resourced and fully involve young people in the planning and operation of them.**
- B. Youth work can play a vital role in crime prevention. More support needs to be provided in this area.**
- C. There is a need to improve the range and effectiveness of services that work with children and young people who have offended.**
- D. A national youth offending strategy needs to be put in place.**

- A. There is an urgent need for establishing facilities for young people throughout Scotland. These facilities need to be properly resourced and fully involve young people in the planning and operation of them.**

We are pleased that the Scottish Executive's motion makes reference to the need for 'increased sports, leisure and educational opportunities' as this is exactly what young people themselves have been saying for a long time. So far there has been no national strategy for developing youth facilities and this is an issue that needs to be taken on board by the Scottish Executive. Young people have told us repeatedly that if they had something to do they are less likely to get into trouble. If they have somewhere to go they are less likely to be hanging around the streets and therefore less likely to get into trouble.

- B. Youth work can play a vital role in crime prevention. More support needs to be provided in this area.**

*"Youth work is crime prevention's best kept secret. Youth work offers early intervention opportunities to identify risk factors with young people, and the potential for diversionary activities through learning. Above all, it helps create social capital by building community relationships between young people and adults. Research and more than a century of experience within local communities provides the evidence. If youth work didn't exist, the Scottish Executive would need to invent it."*

- Simon Jaquet, Chief Executive, YouthLink Scotland

Research has shown that crime can be reduced by countering certain characteristics associated with offending (eg. lack of adult supervision, boredom) and by developing positive personal and social skills amongst young people. Youth work has the potential to achieve both these aims, although more long-term research into its effectiveness is needed.

A report published by The Princes Trust in 1997 (*Young People and Crime in Scotland*) also highlighted the financial benefits of preventing crime. At that time, a

study by Coopers & Lybrand found that the average cost of each recorded youth crime was £2,100, of which £1,700 would be saved for each crime prevented.

Peer education programmes, such as the 'Pentagon Project' in Coatbridge, is one example of successful youth work that can help prevent crime.

**C. There is a need to improve the range and effectiveness of services that work with children and young people who have offended.**

We know the type of services that work. There are an increasing number of examples of effective services on Scotland that are decreasing the rate of youth offenders and operating within the scope of the Children's Hearing system. The pressing need is to ensure that the success of these services can be replicated throughout Scotland.

Barnardos currently operates 6 services throughout Scotland and they are agreed that the key issue is in increasing the range of resources that are available for Children's Hearings to use. Their CHOSI project, that is run in partnership with South Lanarkshire Council and supported by other agencies, has produced an 80% reduction in offending over a 2 year period.

The funds that have been allocated by the Scottish Executive following the Youth Crime Review are welcome but a key issue in the success of projects like CHOSI has been effective inter-agency partnership working. *This will require the adequate resourcing of all partner agencies in a sustainable manner.* Many social work departments throughout Scotland would currently struggle to find the resources to ensure the effectiveness of such projects. Special and mainstream educational resources are often key to meeting needs but educational representatives are not always actively involved in panels. It has to be recognised that there is a need to find a national solution to this issue to ensure that there are equally effective services available to all the young people in Scotland who require it.

**D. A national youth offending strategy needs to be put in place.**

The Scottish Executive's response to the Youth Crime Review agreed with the calls for a national strategy and framework and a national strategy was due to be in place by April 2001. We are still waiting for publication of this strategy.

Most of the suggestions for improving the system have already been accepted by the Scottish Executive in their Youth Crime Review of last year. Any action that is to be taken also needs to be firmly rooted in the principles of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. *The important thing now is to ensure that action is taken on these recommendations.*

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