

NEWS EDITORIAL

PARTNERSHIPS IN CRIME - IMPLEMENTING CHANGE

Cost of Crime

The total cost of crime in this country in 2000 was £60 billion according to a Home office study. One fifth of that is the money spent by the criminal justice system while the rest is the cost to victims of crime, business and other parts of government such as health services and benefits claims. One way or another, we are all paying an enormous bill.

Young Adults in Trouble – Government Figs

In 2004 just over 32,000 young adult offenders aged 18 – 24 were sentenced to imprisonment. Over two thirds of those will re-offend within two years of release, with over 40% being returned to prison. With male adolescents the reconviction rate rises to 82%. In 2004, it was estimated that the costs of crime attributable to young adult offenders was £19.2 billion.

In its two reports ‘Young Adults with Troubled Lives’ and ‘Transitions’, the Government’s Social Exclusion Unit has identified many issues surrounding the needs of young adults. In autumn 2004, there were around 5.5 million people aged between 16 and 24 in England. Of these, around 750,000 (15%) were not in employment, education or training and were claiming benefits. Up to 20 per cent of 16- to 24-year-olds have a mental health issue, mostly anxiety and depression. Young men aged between 16 and 24 were most at risk of being a victim of violent crime in 2003/04. Over a 12-month period, nearly a third of 16- to 17-year-old males reported committing a violent crime. A third of all problem drug users are homeless or in need of housing support and a third drop out of treatment within the first 12 weeks.

Why are we failing so many young people and wasting so much money; money that should be spent on other essentials such as improved health, schools, public transport, the elderly and pensions?

Barrow Cadbury Commission on Young Adult Offenders

A recent Barrow Cadbury Trust Commission on Young Adults and the Criminal Justice System (CJS) entitled ‘Lost in Transition’ suggests that criminal justice policies in England and Wales do unnecessary damage to the life chances of young adult offenders and often make them more, not less, likely to re-offend.

The report goes on to say that the CJS makes it harder for young adults to lead crime-free lives and exacerbates the widespread problems of social exclusion that other government policies aspire to reduce. The circumstances in young adults’ lives that diminish their life chances and make them vulnerable to social exclusion also makes them more likely than

others to commit crimes. As a society we therefore lose too many young adults in the transition from adolescence to adulthood.

The report identified that over the past few decades, the divide in life chances' between those with and without school qualifications has hardened. While students have been encouraged to stay on in full-time education beyond the compulsory school leaving age, those who leave early often drift between low-skilled, low-paid casual work and unemployment. These young people face the greatest risks associated with social exclusion and are most likely to be found in the criminal justice system.

'Lost in Transition' describes how some people mature earlier than others and at different times and stages of their lives. Physical, emotional, sexual and social maturity and the ability to handle drink and drugs, all occur at different stages and are often provoked by different triggers. Many young adults remain emotionally and socially immature, dependent on parental or state support, powerfully influenced by peers, and living experimental lives of trial and error. These realities are sadly overlooked by the CJS. Critically, there is currently no specific criminal justice regime for young adults who are over the age of majority but still developmentally young. Although many try, neither Judges nor Magistrates are under any obligation to take into account the age or maturity of offenders when they pass their 18th birthday. The fact is there are few special programmes for young adults offenders that deal with such issues.

The C-FAR Lead

Yet here within the South West we had such a programme. C-FAR, formally based at Highampton in North Devon was a registered charity that worked to help young adult offenders break out from the cycle of crime and exclusion. Many of the young people who undertook the programme suggested that it had saved their lives. Similarly, professionals and others suggested that it was a pioneering, creative and innovative programme, all of which the Home Secretary has been promoting strongly in his recent Penal Reform policy statements. Why then was it compelled to go into voluntary liquidation?

C-FAR stemmed from New Labour's 1997 manifesto which called for 'change' within the CJS, including innovative partnerships with voluntary organisations and a focus towards rehabilitation and alternatives to custody. In good faith and a belief in what Ministers said, the project evolved. Many regular readers will recall that the Centre became operational in June 2000 and was temporarily based at Okehampton military training camp on Dartmoor. At the time of its demise in March 2005, the charity had gained the support of local people in Highampton and grown to include 58 staff and 40 volunteers. It had acquired five years comprehensive experience in delivering what many saw as a dynamic and successful programme that helped young adult persistent and prolific male offenders forge new lives.

C-FAR Outcomes

The outcomes achieved were repeatedly affirmed by professionals (Prison, Probation and Police officers, Judges and Magistrates), trainees and their families. Re-offending rates were more than 30% lower than the national average and for those that did re-offend levels and type of offending were also lower. Rather than remaining net debtors to society, many former trainees are now contributing positively. One is at University; others have gone to college or full-time work. One went on a voluntary humanitarian support trip to Gaza and two became members of the staff. Another is planning to go to Africa to help children suffering with Aids and one has recently been accepted into the Army. Normal MOD rules would require him to wait another 5 years before his convictions were spent; however, because of what he achieved with C-FAR and during his selection course and interviews, he was accepted now. This is yet another precedent initiated by C-FAR.

Importantly, since June 2000, the number of referrals increased significantly, with approximately 70 people on the waiting list at any one time. Of note, just over 40% of referrals were from the Courts as an alternative to custody with Judges publicly applauding the programme. An Ethnographic study by Professors David Wilson and Julian Killingley from UCE Birmingham, described how “something different was happening at C-FAR”. Based upon figures from the 2002 Social Exclusion Unit (SEU) report, - ‘Reducing re-offending by ex prisoners’, C-FAR estimated it had saved the Treasury over £12million. Yet, this was ignored by a system that the SEU described as being ‘risk averse’ to change.

None of this success would have been possible without the enormous support of major charitable trusts, private individuals and the commitment and hard work of a highly motivated staff and Trustees. All believed in the concept and the vision and wished to see it replicated. Sadly, with the exception of a few enlightened people, there was little reciprocal response from within the CJS. Rather, it is understood that C-FAR was viewed as a ‘maverick’ organisation and a threat to budgets and ongoing service delivery by statutory sector providers. Despite continuing Ministerial calls for innovative partnerships and Audit Commission reports questioning the value of some statutory programmes, the National Probation Directorate was unwilling to support the project. Indeed, there was little evidence of any congruent implementation of other policies such as the ‘Compact’, ‘full cost recovery’ or the plethora of other Home Office Ministerial statements that had been issued.

Voluntary Liquidation

The decision by Trustees in March this year for C-FAR to go into voluntary liquidation arose from a projected cash flow deficit of approximately £200,000. This stemmed from the delay in the introduction of the anticipated NOMS / ROMS budgets until 2006. Money that had been expected that year through contestability and local service contracts was not to be available. Having requested the Home Office bridge the gap, C-FAR was told to find the funding from elsewhere. The alternative was yet more charitable funding. In light of the number of referrals, this was seen by Trustees as morally indefensible; the decision was therefore reluctantly taken to close the Centre.

Individual civil servants suggested that C-FAR had ‘failed’ and was not a good investment of tax- payers’ money. Yet, as the Ethnographic study by UCE Birmingham and other evidence clearly demonstrated, nothing could be further from the truth. The programme was unquestionably successful. Had C-FAR received ‘full cost recovery’ for its work, and the policies of the ‘Compact’ ‘Cross Cutting’ been implemented, there would have been fewer victims of crime and more young men would today be forging new lives. A lack of appropriate statutory funding and implementation of policies was the true failure.

The Way Ahead

Many supporters have asked how C-FAR staff felt when the decision to close was announced. In the main sadness and confusion prevailed. Sadness that so much success, energy, commitment and potential were being wasted and confusion as to what the other agendas were that prevented its development. It has been said that C-FAR was simply ahead of its time and that the system was not yet ready for such a step change in delivery. Assuming this has some validity, we can only hope that lessons have been learned and that following the Home Secretary’s latest speech, ‘Where Next for Penal Policy’, and other government calls for increasing partnerships with voluntary and private sector organisations, similar failures will not arise again. Undoubtedly, were strong political change leadership to be forthcoming, many more young people could soon become net contributors to our society rather than continuing debtors.

Following enormous public support, three of the former management team continue to work as volunteers in an effort to resurrect the programme. Whilst considerable private and other funding has been identified, the critical factor remains the willingness or otherwise of the CJS to make an appropriate contribution towards the costs of future delivery. Historically, less than 9% of funding stemmed from the CJS. By far the majority was provided through charitable and private sources.

The new company is called Life Change UK – www.lifechangeuk.com . Those interested in supporting can contact Trevor Philpott by email trevor.philpott@lifechangeuk.com or on 07779221162.

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