

Participation in Youth Justice: Measuring Impact and Effectiveness



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The National Youth Agency (NYA) is one of three Education Support organisations to receive funding from the Department for Communities and Local Government, under the Local Government Finance Act 1988. The Local Government Association (LG Association) has oversight of the NYA's work supported by this funding. The annual funding supports key areas of the NYA's work and promotes the role of local government and its partners in youth policy.



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Acknowledgements

The National Youth Agency would like to thank Community Research Company and Ross Little for their support with this report along with all the youth offending team staff who took part in the consultation.

Executive Summary

Involving service users makes services more effective and can also have benefits for service users too. During 2010-2011 the Local Government Association (LG Association) commissioned the National Youth Agency to examine the impacts and effectiveness of participation in the youth justice system. This report considers current youth justice policy and research, together with voices from practice and explores the extent to which the impact and effectiveness of participation can be measured within the youth justice system. A summary of the key findings are as follows:

- Current youth justice research does not provide a direct link between young people's participation and improved outcomes (reducing the number of first time entrants, reducing offending and reducing custody numbers). However, this does not mean that participatory approaches do not 'work' but there is simply a lack of rigorous research into whether participation in youth justice improves outcomes.
- This research suggests both young people and youth offending teams benefit from a more participatory approach and participatory approaches are a necessary pre-condition for effective work to bring about a reduction in (re)-offending and thus make a real impact.
- Reducing reoffending can only be achieved through a participatory approach between individual young people and adults working at a local level and in a way that places the young person's needs at the centre of the work.
- Participation cannot counteract the effect of other factors that might be present in a young offenders life, past or present (e.g. substance misuse, abuse, neglect, learning disability, homelessness, detachment from education and employment), but these bigger problems cannot begin to be approached without a relationship based on trust and empathy with a caring professional who is willing and able to help.
- Understanding the effectiveness of any service must begin with young people as service users and improving the quality of their lives. Not starting here risks ignoring a range of vitally important issues and alienating the young person further.
- Participation, as part of a general approach to youth justice that values an individual, their attitudes, values, beliefs and experiences, is a necessary component of reducing an individual's likelihood of reoffending. This paper raises wider questions about the nature of the research evidence that should inform policy and practice in understanding the effectiveness of various interventions in the youth justice system.

Introduction

*Some initiatives have had a positive impact and deserve to be extended. But the time has come for a fresh start. Pressures on public spending make it imperative to eliminate waste and invest in services that deliver value for money. The Commission urges the new Government ... to take youth crime issues out of the political firing line and instigate a process of reform.*¹

This report includes the latest policy and research developments, together with voices from practice. It focuses on measuring the effectiveness and impacts of young people's participation in the youth justice system.

The report is published at a time of considerable interest in the future of youth justice in England and Wales. In October 2010, the Ministry of Justice (MoJ) announced its intention to take over the functions of the Youth Justice Board (YJB). The responsibility for the youth justice system has been with the YJB since it was established by the Crime and Disorder Act of 1998. The MoJ has consulted stakeholders on its intended 'rehabilitation revolution' as articulated in the Green Paper *Breaking the Cycle: Effective Punishment, Rehabilitation and Sentencing of Offenders*². A key element of the Green Paper is the proposed use of 'payment by results' in the youth justice context. Implementing a system of this type links directly to questions of effectiveness and impact.

This report considers that participatory approaches are essential for the youth justice system to improve its effectiveness and impacts in the future. In Baroness Neuberger's (2009) review of volunteering across the criminal justice system she wrote:

*"Former offenders and victims know like no one else what it is like to experience what they have been through. As such they are ideally placed to help influence strategy, and inform service design and delivery from sentencing to treatment"*³.

For a variety of reasons, understanding effectiveness is not simple in this context. In this report we pull together and summarise existing research and practice to make suggestions for local councils and their partners responsible for commissioning and delivering youth justice services to ensure the services meet the needs of young people and *"will result in high-quality services that adequately reflect user need."*⁴

Our findings are consistent with others who have stated that the current context represents an opportunity for us to do things differently to help benefit young people and the communities they live in.

1. *Time for a Fresh Start*, The Report of the Independent Commission on Youth Crime and Anti-social Behaviour (October 2010).
2. *Breaking the Cycle: Effective Punishment, Rehabilitation and Sentencing of Offenders* (2010), The Ministry of Justice, HMSO <http://www.justice.gov.uk/consultations/breaking-cycle-071210.htm>
3. Neuberger, B (2009) *Volunteering across the criminal justice system*, p.13.
4. Joseph Rowntree Foundation (2010) *Involving users in commissioning local services*, York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation, p.9.

Context

Before we explore the impact and effectiveness of young people's participation in youth justice, we need to define what we mean by these terms.

To understand what we mean by 'participation' practice in this document, it is important that we see it as a process over time – not a discrete, 'bolt-on' initiative or one-off consultation – by which children and young people are able to influence change. Participation is: *a process where someone influences decisions about their lives and this leads to change*⁵. Change can be within children and young people themselves (skill or knowledge development or a change in attitudes and behaviours), within a service (such as different working methods or patterns) or in society (better perception of children and young people's contributions). These changes are examples of outcomes associated with the participation work – directly, indirectly and/or in combination with other factors.

We define participation as young people having a voice and influence within the youth justice system, consistent with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)⁶. The UNCRC applies equally to all young people under the age of 18, regardless of whether they are involved in the criminal justice system. The commitment to *"assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters..."* (Article 12) is reflected in the Children Act 2004. We believe that effective participation requires young people to have a voice and influence within their individual orders and with the service design and delivery more akin to co-production as suggested by service users interviewed as part of previous NYA research⁷.

Young people can 'participate' in the youth justice system in four main ways – as victims, witnesses, perpetrators of criminal acts and those considered to be 'at risk' of committing anti-social behavior and/or criminal offences. Perhaps understandably, most discussions about young people and the youth justice system have focused on young people who commit offences and this group is the one we also focus on in this document.

Young people who have committed offences are generally involved in the youth justice system on an involuntary basis. Indeed, the involuntary nature of the intervention is one of the main features that distinguishes working with young people within the youth justice system and work with young people more generally. Participation by young people in youth services and other areas of civic society, such as commissioning public services, being a member of a youth council or making budgeting or expenditure decisions, has become well established in local authority areas over recent years. A lot of this work has been a powerful way for young people to make a difference to their communities. There is an opportunity to learn from some of this work in supporting the participation of young people in the youth justice system.

5. www.participationworks.org.uk

6. UNCRC, Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, <http://www2.ohchr.org/english/law/crc.htm>

7. Voice and Influence in the Youth Justice System (2011) National Youth Agency http://nya.org.uk/dynamic_files/targetedsupport/Voice%20and%20Influence%2017.01.11.pdf

Impact and effectiveness in youth justice

In terms of what we mean by impact and 'effectiveness' in *Breaking the Cycle* Green Paper effectiveness is measured by three key outcomes: reducing the number of first time entrants, reducing offending and reducing custody numbers. It is clear to us that achieving any or all of these outcomes requires some understanding, and practice, of participatory approaches with young people. The desired results can only be achieved through collaborative efforts between individual young people and adults working at a local level and in a way that places the young person's needs at the centre of the work.

Researching the impact and effectiveness of participation in youth justice

In recent years the Youth Justice Board has stated: "*there is a shortage of research about effective engagement with young people*"⁸. Many studies have been devoted to this subject matter only to reach this same conclusion (e.g. Stephenson et al, 2007⁹). Whilst research has been able to tell us a lot about what types of programme intervention are most effective for offenders, very little research has focused upon the characteristics of effective staff practice to use in the delivery of these interventions¹⁰ and the importance of the human relationships between youth justice professionals and young offenders.

It perhaps isn't so surprising that the research literature has not been able to directly link young people's participation to improved outcomes. This lack of a direct link reflects the complexity of the social world and the lives that we all lead, including and perhaps especially, young people who commit criminal offences. As Stephenson puts it: "*the idea that interventions can be neatly formulated and applied so that they provide an entirely predictable, controllable outcome is unsustainable when faced with the complex, ambiguous and uncertain circumstances in which many young people involved in offending find themselves*"¹¹.

That the 'magic bullet' of a direct link between participation and the desired outcomes (reducing the number of first time entrants, reducing offending and reducing custody numbers) does not seem to exist, does not mean that there is no relevant information or that participatory approaches do not 'work'. The rest of this section summarises the current position with regard to youth justice and what we can say with confidence about the impact of participatory approaches within it. The available evidence suggests that both young people and taxpayers will benefit from a more participatory approach.

8 Youth Justice Board (2008) *Engaging Young People Who Offend. Key Elements of Effective Practice Quality Assurance Toolkit*. London: YJB.

9 Stephenson, M., Giller H. and Brown, S. (2007) *Effective Practice in Youth Justice*, Devon: Willan.

10 Dowden, C. and Andrews, D. A. (2004), The importance of staff practice in delivering effective correctional treatment: A meta-analytic review of core correctional practice. *International Journal of Offender Therapy and Comparative Criminology* 48(2): 203-214.

11 Stephenson, M., Giller H. and Brown, S. (2007) *Effective Practice in Youth Justice*, Devon: Willan, p.255.

The Independent Commission on Youth Crime and Anti-Social Behaviour has recently estimated that the relevant annual costs relating to youth crime and antisocial behaviour come to just over £4 billion. According to a recent report by the National Audit Office, offending by all young people in England and Wales is estimated to have cost the economy between £8.5 and £11 billion in 2009¹².

The report by the Independent Commission reminds us that a large minority of children and young people get into trouble with the law at least once in their lives, with criminal behaviour most likely to occur between the ages of 14 and 18. Crime committed by people under 18 is likely to have declined in a similar way to overall crime levels (increasing between 1950 and the mid-1990s and falling since). Against this evidence, most people believe crime has continued to rise and tend to over-estimate the amount of serious offending by young people. This issue is also explored by a previous LGA funded study *Young People, Crime and Public Perceptions*¹³.

Provisional data shows that nearly 202,000 offences were committed by young people in 2009-10. Custodial sentences are applied for around 3% of offences. However, these custodial sentences use up 38% of the financial resources set aside for the youth justice system (£304m of a total of £800m). Yet there is a 75 per cent re-conviction rate within a year of sentence completion¹⁴. The head of the National Audit Office recently highlighted high reconviction rates and the need for evidence of effective interventions during a period of increasing expenditure on the youth justice system:

*"[This]... report recognizes that key measures of youth crime, such as the number of young people entering the youth justice system, and the volume of reoffending by young offenders, show real improvement. However, young people receiving more serious community sentences and custodial sentences are just as likely to reoffend today as they were in 2000. More should be done to find out which interventions are the most effective in dealing with offending behaviour so that, in future, money can be directed at what works."*¹⁵

Indeed some research has suggested *"that the stubbornness of re-offending rates is partly due to the failure to take on board the views of criminal justice service users, and to admit the possibility that offenders may 'know best'"*¹⁶.

Looking beyond the youth justice sector, Prior and Mason¹⁷ helpfully suggest that research from practice in the fields of child and adolescent development and the nature of human relationships are particularly helpful

12 *The youth justice system in England and Wales: Reducing Re-offending by young people* (December 2010). National Audit Office, Ministry of Justice.

13 *Young People, Crime and Public Perceptions (2009)*, National Foundation for Educational Research for the Local Government Association.

14 Time for a Fresh Start – Independent Commission on Youth Crime and Anti-Social Behaviour.

15 Amyas Morse, head of the National Audit Office, 10 December 2010.

16 Silvestri, A. (2009) *Partners or Prisoners? Voluntary sector independence in the world of commissioning and contestability*, Centre for Crime and Justice Studies, London.

17 Prior, D. and Mason, P. (2010) A different kind of evidence? Looking for 'what works' in engaging young offenders, *Youth Justice Journal*, December 2010, 10(3) 211-226, Sage.

in offering explanations, derived from theory, about why certain practices work. They note the following from their review of the literature:

- To be effective practitioners must be able to act beyond the confines of risk and protective frameworks (acknowledging the use of such frameworks at a broader level) to recognise the 'reality' of the 'lived experiences' of young people. To be able to communicate and empathise with a young person.
- Having a good relationship with the young person is a pre-requisite for a professional to be able to be directive or persuasive, when appropriate. Trevithick (2005)¹⁸ lists the precise skills needed for practitioners to form effective working relationships with their clients in the field of social work, consistent with the practice literature in general.
- Clarity and openness relating to factors such as shared ownership and understanding of ground rules, confidentiality, roles and the purpose of the intervention/time spent together help achieve more effective engagement and better outcomes with what Trotter terms 'involuntary clients' (Trotter, 1999)¹⁹, which including young offenders.
- 'Relationship factors' have been identified as the most important of a range of 'core correctional practices' required by practitioners if programmes with offenders are to be delivered effectively. More specifically these factors are 'maximized under conditions characterized by open, warm, enthusiastic communication' (Dowden and Andrews, 2004: 205)²⁰.

The significance of individual needs and different contexts has also been highlighted by other research. A recurring finding is that no one method of intervention is, in and of itself, any more 'effective' than any other. Common features of effectiveness include "*empathy and genuineness; the establishment of a working alliance; and the adoption of person-centred, collaborative and 'client-driven' approaches*" (McNeill, 2006: 130)²¹; a more scientific way of saying putting the needs of the young person first and actively listening to them.

In combination, this research strongly suggests that participatory approaches are a necessary pre-condition for effective work to bring about a reduction in (re)-offending and thus make a real impact. In and of itself 'participation' cannot counteract the effect of other factors that might be present in a young offenders life, past or present (e.g. substance misuse, abuse, neglect, learning disability, homelessness, detachment from education and employment), but these bigger problems cannot begin to be approached without a relationship based on trust and empathy with a caring professional who is willing and able to help.

18 Trevithick (2005) *Social Work Skills: A Practice Handbook*, 2nd Edition. Maidenhead: Open University Press.

19 Trotter (1999) *Working with Involuntary Clients: A Guide to Practice*. London: SAGE.

20 Dowden and Andrews (2004).

21 McNeill, F. (2006) Community supervision: Context and relationships matter. In: Goldson B and Muncie J (eds) *Youth Crime and Justice*. London: SAGE.

Recent research by the National Youth Agency²² has found that whilst there are some examples of good participation practice this is not widespread across Youth Offending Teams (YOTs) and there is a general lack of strategic direction within YOTs on this matter. Furthermore the youth justice system doesn't encourage user participation. YOTs are governed by National Standards and reporting requirements and there are insufficient measures on participation performance included in these standards. As one interviewee (a YOT manager) responded to a question on why there isn't a better understanding of youth participation in the youth justice system: "*it's because it isn't in the National Standards*". However, in line with the Localism Bill and Justice Green Paper the Youth Justice Board have announced there will be more flexibility over National Standards.

Participation in youth justice – measuring impact and effectiveness

Previous work by the NYA on young people's voice and influence shows that young offenders have little experience of participation and have low expectations about their ability to influence their individual plans and shape YOT services, but many would like more opportunities to do so. Considerable youth justice research has focused on generic risk and protective factors for young offenders or those 'at risk' of offending but can say very little about the individual level²³. It is clear that change is needed to how we understand effectiveness and the tools we use to measure it. Moving from large-scale, broad-level meta analytical research methods,²⁴ to approaches that help provide a better understanding of local contexts, individual circumstances and motivations and which are the key mechanisms operating will support this change.

A paper by Clinks²⁵ suggests that government policy has prevailed over what individuals need and make a number of practical suggestions to improve the situation:

- Better use of both quantitative and qualitative data as evidence sources.
- Improving access to reoffending data to smaller voluntary sector providers.
- Understanding that incremental steps form the basis of reducing reoffending.
- Asking the offender themselves is one of the best ways to assess things like readiness and motivation.

22 Voice and Influence in the Youth Justice System (2011) National Youth Agency.

23 Muncie, J. (2010) Youth Justice, in reviewing Case, S. and Haines, K. (2009) Understanding youth offending: risk factor research, policy and practice. Willan Publishing, Cullompton.

24 Meta analysis techniques provide average measures of changes in re-offending. Use of averages masks a performance range above and below the central score.

25 *A new focus on measuring outcomes* (November 2010) London: CLINKS.

<http://www.clinks.org/assets/files/Measuring%20Outcomes%20Discussion%20Paper.pdf>

This is clearly a more participatory approach that involves the offender in the process of measuring impact. It is more likely to be accurate and reduces the sense of the offender being 'done to'. This approach is consistent both with the messages emanating from our research and by work undertaken by Substance and NESTA²⁶. Amongst their six guiding principles, they make the simple but much overlooked point that, first and foremost, understanding the effectiveness of any service must begin with service users and the quality of their lives. Not starting here risks ignoring a range of vitally important issues and alienating the young person further.

The Green Paper *Breaking the Cycle* focuses on reducing first-time entrants to the youth justice system, reducing offending and reducing custody numbers. These are appropriate objectives, but it is the how that matters. Impact is usually defined as the extent to which outcomes are achieved²⁷. Therefore having an easy way to measure progress or 'distance travelled' that works well with young people is important. There are a number of tools that have been developed to help achieve this, outlined below, and should be considered for use at the local level. The important thing about most of these tools is the way they can be adapted for effective use in different local contexts. With the SEED Star tool, for example, young people are invited to assign their own dimensions, so they have a say in thinking about their objectives and their progress in working towards them.

The SEED Star is a self-assessment tool that can be adapted by service users to help understand the extent to which they have improved on a range of dimensions over time. The tool has been used by the Young Foundation as part of its Youth of Today programme.

The Outcomes Star is an outcome measurement tool that allows frontline practitioners across a range of sectors (e.g. homelessness, youth justice, substance misuse) to measure progress for service users receiving support through a set of 'change ladders', developed in close collaboration with practitioners and tested with service users. A report by CLINKS²⁸ includes four case studies of using the tool in practice.

BHUG, a user-led organisation that works with homeless and disadvantaged people, offers commissioners a Mystery Shopping service. Mystery shoppers are recruited and trained from BHUG's client base of economically and socially disadvantaged people to assess services and provide recommendations from the point of view of users.

Act by Right²⁹ developed by the NYA is an accredited resource to promote children and young people's participation. Act by Right is a skills workbook, developed with young people and accredited by ASDAN. It takes children and young people through five stages of a journey to develop their knowledge and skills to take effective action and make change happen. It is rooted in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, which is the international human rights framework that promotes the full participation of children and young people to help secure their rights to a fulfilling, safe and secure upbringing.

26 *Whose Story is it Anyway? Evidencing impact and value for better public services* (2010), Substance and NESTA.

27 Stephenson, M., *Young People and Offending*, p.168.

28 *A new focus on measuring outcomes – where do we start?* (November 2010), CLINKS.

29 <http://www.nya.org.uk/quality/act-by-right>

The What's Changed³⁰ for young people tool, which accompanies the Hear by Right standards framework developed by the national youth agency, is designed to capture the changes that have occurred as a result of children and young people's participation. It is used to record, measure and report the results of participation where a tangible change has taken place. It captures the story of children and young people's participation, drawing upon their own perspectives and showcases and celebrates their achievements. The story does not need to be a complex issue, just real and visible change for the better.

It is helpful to see these tools in the context of a wider framework of children's participation and rights. This is currently the focus of a group of researchers in Wales who are developing a tool to measure the outcomes of children and young people's participation that sits alongside their National Participation Standards³¹. The framework recognises three different dimensions of change, one of which is changes in personal development and well-being. It also states that changes need to be assessed in accordance with the objectives for involving young people and those indicators for measuring progress and change need to be based on clear objectives. Given that we know progress with young people, including young offenders, tends to be incremental, it suggests that the measurement of outcomes needs to reflect these smaller steps too. Key indicators of success need to be agreed at the start to allow for measurement of distance travelled. Timescales need to be realistic and allow for the building of relationships between professionals and young people. It is important that young people themselves are involved in the monitoring of progress as valued participants.

As recognised in by the YJB in *Engaging young people who offend*³², participation goes beyond mere attendance; *"it includes their motivation, commitment to, and participation in, activities offered in programmes of intervention. This increases the chances of successful completion, which is an important element in achieving effective outcomes"* (p.11). Making this a reality in practice and using appropriate tools that have a chance of capturing the improvements made are current challenges that should not be underestimated.

Key findings from research

We now consider the key findings from research following on from our previous research presented in the *Voice and Influence* report which comprised a further 22 telephone interviews with key YOT staff and a focus group (eight participants) with YOT focusing on measuring participation impact and practical examples. Key points emerge strongly from this and are as follows:

There was a broad consensus amongst the YOT staff that using participatory approaches with young people is a good thing. The most positive views about the value of this work came from staff working with the lower tiers on the offending scales. General quotes around attitudes towards participation included the following:

30 <http://www.nya.org.uk/quality/hear-by-right/what-s-changed>

31 *Youth Participation in England and Wales* (2011), NACRO Cymru and Save the Children Wales. In draft.

32 *Engaging young people who offend* (2008), YJB Key Elements of Effective Practice.

"It's about young people sharing ideas. Expressing their views and being involved in the decision making process." YOT Head of Service.

"It's about young people being allowed to contribute in the widest sense to delivery, design and strategy." YOT Prevention Manager.

"Participation is absolutely integral to the work we do, we can't do our work without their active involvement and young people won't change without buy-in." YOT Participation Officer.

"It's about our young people feeling valued and welcomed." YOT worker.

With the exception of two areas, the staff interviewed agreed that in general *"it's a good thing to get young people engaged and involved"*.

"Our YOS has always viewed service users as young people who happen to be at risk of involved in crime, they are not seen as young offenders and as such we have always asked young people what they think of our services. I believe there is a cost benefit to participation within the youth justice system, our performance in reducing 1st time entrants and reoffending rates is way ahead of national figures, I believe part of the reason, especially for reoffending is because we ask young people what would make a difference to them, of course this is empirically impossible to prove, but we can at least argue that in terms of reduced numbers of offences this saves money." Head of Integrated Youth Support Services and former Head of YOS.

However, even amongst those that think it's a good idea there was a recognition of real challenges undertaking participatory approaches in practice, including the organisational culture, and particularly the motivation of colleagues operating in a bureaucratic system face with *"huge spending challenges"* and yet based on getting young people to comply *"when most of them would rather not be here with us."* YOT worker.

"It's seen as a bit of a luxury in YOS to be honest, but don't quote me!" YOT worker.

"At the end of the day it's down to the staff. Their commitment, background, flexibility and attitude. You can't really train someone to be that kind of worker." YOT worker.

"It's really not about engaging the kids; it's about engaging the staff, getting them motivated." YOS Area Manager.

"At the end of the day it doesn't really make a jot of difference, the real world is that these kids are forced to come here and comply or we have to breach them. So when the more hardened young offender asks 'well, what difference does that make to me and my sentence? What will I get out of it?' We cannot give them a false sense of security, it's not in their own interests to be too open and trusting with us is it really?" We are not a youth service." YOT Manager.

"Its generally about doing to (the young people) rather than done with or by them." YOT Manager.

Likewise as another YOT put it:

"There is no imperative or requirement to report on this in our YJ Plans, no proper capability self-assessment or pressure to seek and make public feedback from the customers on how we are doing and thus to inform future practice and service improvements." YOT Manager .

"Getting a young person to attend regularly is sometimes the best we can hope for... and for that youngster it may be a major step forward but some (magistrates) will see that as a token effort. There is a lot of mistrust by youngsters of people working in the youth justice system." YOT worker.

Others identified the real and not to be under estimated effectiveness, impacts and benefits for staff and the advances in job satisfaction of taking a more participatory approach:

"It makes a real difference to staff morale and improves their job satisfaction. Young people's attendance also improves when they feel engaged in the process." YOT Manager.

"In our team staff are much more engaged themselves as the contact time with young people improves by doing group sessions and outreach." YOS worker.

Similarly one worker expressed the view borne out by managers that staff are not always tested and recruited on their ability to communicate and engage effectively with young people. One manager forcibly expressed the view that what was needed was staff who *"keep their records and assets bang up to date"*.

One senior manager explained that *"whilst motivating staff and young people was important in the current climate of savings and threats to jobs and project funding unless we can show the impacts on resources it just will not happen"*. YOT Manager.

However some YOTs have been able through the recruitment of key staff with an inclination or remit to build upon participatory approaches have made progress on creating a participatory culture and systems that support such working practices as the following examples illustrate:

Trafford Children and Families Services have created a monitoring spreadsheet detailing the participation work undertaken with children, young people and families to provide an overview of the findings and outcomes of participation work in the Borough.

In Nottinghamshire Takeover Day at Nottinghamshire YOT, three young people who had been on Intensive Supervision and Surveillance Programme (ISSP) and in custody spent the day looking at budgets, plans and shadowing the YOT manager.

In Rotherham mutual respect between workers and young people from BME communities has improved from a joint participatory approach to issues and consultations. With regular reports to the Head of Service and Steering Group holding all staff to account.

For a more comprehensive summary of youth justice participation examples please refer to NYA (2011) Voice and Influence in the Youth Justice report.

Our research identified some practical steps in YOT areas that are helping to embed a culture of participation in the service. For example, the following self-assessment questions can be used to consult young people about their experience of the services they have been involved with³³ and helps provide young people with opportunities to express their views, and be listened to:

Experience of the service	All of the time	Most of the time	Some of the time	Never
I knew why I was attending the YOT				
I knew what the YOT was helping me with				
I was asked for my views				
Feedback was given back to me about my views				
I was asked about and involved in my plan				
I felt that staff helped me				
I felt comfortable with my worker				
I felt listened to and understood				
I was encouraged to talk about my life and problems				
The YOT was a safe and positive place to be				
I know what would happen if I did not attend my appointments				
What was the most positive thing about your contact with the YOT?				
What did we not get right and why?				
How can we improve?				
How can young people be involved in what the YOT does?				

33 *Youth justice and participation in Wales* (2011) Draft document by NACRO and Save the Children Fund, Wales.

At Rotherham Youth Offending Service young people across the range of court orders in are encouraged on a voluntary basis to provide feedback by expressing their views about their experiences during their time at the YOS; this can be done in two ways:

1. Have your say form – forms are distributed at YOS receptions and staff are encouraged to provide opportunities for young people to complete the forms at any time, which are simple to complete and consist of 4 questions. Feedback is collated every 6 months by the Voice and Influence Coordinator who produces a Voice and Influence report presented to the strategic director and YOS Management Board, on average 150 feedback forms are completed a year.
2. Young people's Questionnaire – at the end of the court order each young person is offered a voluntary appointment with the Voice and Influence Co-ordinator. The YOS aims to gain feedback from 1 in 10 service users and in the first 6 months of 2010 90 young people took up this opportunity, of annual 150-200 clients. Feedback from meetings is fed into the Voice and Influence report along with Have your Say feedback.

Flintshire Youth Justice Service has circulated a postal questionnaire to all young people in contact with them to find out their opinions of the provision they received

Nottinghamshire Youth Offending Service offers all young people in contact with the service the opportunity to provide feedback on the services they receive including the opportunity to meet with the Head of Service at regular meetings.

The overarching principle behind these approaches is to facilitate the participation of young people in the youth justice system, and from a young person's perspective participation means that it is their right to be involved in making decisions, planning and reviewing any action that might affect them.

Conclusion

Our review of current youth justice research has found insufficient evidence to prove a direct link between young people's participation and improved outcomes (reducing the number of first time entrants, reducing offending and reducing custody numbers). However, this does not mean participatory approaches do not 'work' but there is simply a lack of rigorous research into whether participation in youth justice improves outcomes.

Our research with YOT practitioners suggests both young people and youth offending teams benefit from a more participatory approach and participatory approaches are a necessary pre-condition for effective work to bring about a reduction in (re)-offending and thus make a real impact. The NYA believes the effectiveness of any youth justice service must begin with young people as service users and should improve the quality of their lives. Not starting here risks ignoring a range of vitally important issues and alienating the young person further.

We believe reducing reoffending can only be achieved through a participatory approach between individual young people and adults working at a local level and in a way that places the young person's needs at the centre of the work. Participation cannot counteract the effect of other factors that might be present in a young offenders life, past or present (e.g. substance misuse, abuse, neglect, learning disability, homelessness, detachment from education and employment), but these bigger problems cannot begin to be approached without a relationship based on trust and empathy with a caring professional who is willing and able to help.

In the current environment radical reductions in budgets are making local authorities take tough decisions about how they can deliver youth justice services more efficiently and effectively. There is now an opportunity for local authorities to re-think approaches to youth justice and consider a participatory approach.

Understanding what we mean by impact and effectiveness in the youth justice system and the ability to demonstrate this is now particularly important as we move towards the adoption of a 'payment-by-results' approach for the youth justice sector. It will be vital that we focus sufficiently on the 'result' for the young person relative to the 'payment' for the organisation and that adequate resource is built in to develop relationships that help meet the, often complex, needs of young people involved in the youth justice system.

Participation, as part of a general approach to youth justice that values an individual, their attitudes, values, beliefs and experiences, is a necessary component of reducing an individual's likelihood of reoffending. This paper raises wider questions about the nature of the research evidence that should inform policy and practice in understanding the effectiveness of various interventions in the youth justice system.

Recommendations

Through our research we have identified the need for further research to assess the impact and effectiveness of participation in youth justice and at a local level we have identified steps local authorities can now take to further develop a culture of participation and begin to demonstrate the effectiveness and impacts of such activity:

- Policy and strategy at a local area level needs to encourage a culture of participation between youth justice professionals and young people as service users.
- YOTs and their stakeholders can involve young people (their customers) in writing a pledge, developing standards and monitoring progress towards a practice that incorporates a genuinely inclusive way of working with young people and their carers.
- YOTs should consider consulting with young people about staff and services in a user friendly format and young people's feedback should be regularly included at YOT management and performance meetings and within service inspections.
- YOTs should consider ways to evidence the impact of participation and report locally on participation work.

- There should be more opportunities for YOTs to share effective participation practice examples across the youth justice system.

Useful Resources

Hear by Right

Hear by Right is a tried and tested participation standards framework used widely across the statutory and voluntary youth sector to assess and improve practice and policy on the active involvement of young people. Hear by Right enables organisations to map current participation practice and plan improvements. It relies on self-assessment and is based around a core set of values for the participation of young people that need to be owned and shared by all those involved.

Act by Right

Act by Right is an accredited resource to promote children and young people's skills. Act by Right is a skills workbook, developed with young people and accredited by ASDAN. It takes children and young people through five stages of a journey to develop their knowledge and skills to take effective action and make change happen. It is rooted in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, which is the international human rights framework that promotes the full participation of children and young people to help secure their rights to a fulfilling, safe and secure upbringing.

What's Changed

What's Changed for young people tool, which accompanies the Hear by Right standards framework developed by the national youth agency, is designed to capture the changes that have occurred as a result of children and young people's participation. It is used to record, measure and report the results of participation where a tangible change has taken place. It captures the story of children and young people's participation, drawing upon their own perspectives and showcases and celebrates their achievements. The story does not need to be a complex issue, just real and visible change for the better.

Positive Participation: Youth Justice Training

This introductory training has been developed by the National Youth Agency to raise awareness of participation within youth offending teams. The training is aimed at providing youth offending team staff with an understanding of what is meant by young people's participation in the youth justice system, the benefits for young people, staff and youth offending teams and an understanding of the legal and policy context for young people's participation in the youth justice system.

More information about these resources can be found on the National Youth Agency website:
<http://www.nya.org.uk>



About the National Youth Agency

The National Youth Agency works in partnership with a wide range of public, private and voluntary sector organisations to support and improve services for young people. Our particular focus is on youth work and we believe strongly that by investing in young people's personal and social development, young people are better able to live more active and fulfilling lives.

Working with young people, we advocate for more youth-friendly services and policies. We have four themes:

- Developing quality standards in work with young people
- Supporting services for young people
- Developing the youth workforce
- Promoting positive public perceptions of young people.

We deliver our work through training and consultancy, campaigning, publishing and online communications. Through our activities we want to ensure that young people have a strong voice and positive influence in our society.

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