

2007 ALARM AWARD SCHEME

ENTRANT: Sunderland City Council

CATEGORY: People risk: Young offenders \ Community

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Young offenders and young people at risk of offending, are a very vulnerable “people group” and represent significant risk to themselves and to the wider community. The city’s overarching strategic vision is that: “Sunderland will be a prosperous city. A desirable, **safe** and healthy place to live, work, learn and visit, where **all people** can reach their full potential.” With reducing crime and the fear of crime is one of the strategic priorities within the Sunderland Strategy. This is first risk identified on our Corporate Risk Register and crime, the fear of crime and youth disorder is barriers to us fulfilling this prime objective. The city’s Youth Offending Service (YOS) is working with partners from all sectors to prevent offending by children and young people and has introduced several risk management systems to ensure services are targeted and delivered effectively. We also believe prevention is better than cure and we now commit 20% of our YOS budget to preventative work. Our innovation includes:

- devising cutting edge internal risk management systems to reduce risks for young people
- a proactive media and communications strategy to drive down the fear of crime – all 27 stories about young people in the press in 2006 were positive. This has helped increase people’s perceptions of safety in the city
- a scheme whereby highly trained volunteer mentors work with young people at all stages in the criminal justice system
- a fire safety project where YOS-referred young people, including fire setters, are trained as recruits for one week by firemen so they understand the dangers and costs of arson
- Youth Inclusion Project has developed a range of programmes, such as the popular ‘Midnight Basketball’ which combines education about health and social welfare with the promotion of sporting activity and is held at times of the day [e.g. evenings] when young people are most likely to offend.

As a result we are seeing positive outcomes. Our statistics show:

- fewer youths offending
- fewer youth crimes
- a significant reduction in youth re-offending rates
- more people feeling safer in the city centre day and night
- a fall in youth disorder
- high numbers (over 90%) of all young people ending an intervention with the YOS are in full-time education, training or employment
- a wide range of best practice awards
- high performance indicators which consistently make us one of the top YOS organisations
- and vitally....a safer city

NEED FOR THE INITIATIVE

The city's overarching strategic vision is that: Sunderland will be a prosperous city. A desirable, **safe** and healthy place to live, work, learn and visit, where **all people** can reach their full potential. Reducing crime and the fear of crime is one of the strategic priorities within the Sunderland Strategy. We therefore had to devise ways of preventing offending by young people, for their own good and that of the wider community. It was also important to raise the perception of safety felt by our residents. Sunderland Youth Offending Service (YOS) is a multi-agency partnership comprising of health, police, probation and the local authority. Those partners and other key stakeholders constitute its board. As the partnership matured we developed robust performance and risk management arrangements to ensure that services were delivered effectively to children and young people, parents and carers and the victims of youth offending. We also recognised the need for a robust risk management tool to make certain that services delivered through multi agency partnerships, such as accommodation and mental health, were appropriately targeted to the risks and needs of individual young offenders. Another pressing issue was the media coverage of young people. A Young People Now survey in 2004 showed 71% of articles researched had a negative content, increasing the fear of crime. We wanted to reverse this trend locally.

OUR APPROACH

Firstly, we recognised that prevention is better than cure and committed 20% of our £4m YOS budget to working with young people at risk of offending.

Secondly, we continued to form strong partnership links with all sectors recognising that external expertise and involvement was vital to making a difference to the lives of vulnerable young people.

Thirdly, we set up key risk management processes to make certain that working in partnership with others was effective and targeted. We needed to ensure services delivered by the multi-agency partnership were being delivered effectively; and that young people with multiple risks and needs were being appropriately catered for. We identified the annual Youth Justice Plan as the key vehicle for planning the delivery of youth justice services which are designed to manage the risks and needs of young offenders. The 2006-2007 plan therefore sets out the targets and expected outcomes for each area of service delivery. We introduced a risk management process to ensure the early identification of services not being delivered effectively, or not on target to meet desired outcomes. Key actions, outcomes and targets are identified and quarterly action/improvement planning surgeries are held between the YOS Manager, the YOS Policy and Performance Manager and team managers for service areas. Together they monitor progress of action and identify risks to achievement of outcomes. Risks identified are then twin tracked through the Strategic Management Team and up to the YOS Management Board, which is made up of key partners described earlier. This enables effective governance arrangements and accountability among partners and ensures the effective delivery of services. These risk management arrangements are set out in the Youth Justice Plan.

Fourthly, we also set up a specialist system of risk management for the most persistent young offenders and those presenting the greatest risks. Using assessment data for all young offenders, a scoring threshold was identified above which young offenders were considered 'High Risk'. We designed a risk review so youth justice practitioners and managers can identify the risks associated with individual young offenders, and assess the extent to which the risks are manageable by the service. The lead practitioner presents the risk review to a YOS High Risk Strategy Group comprising of managers from across the service. The role of this group is to use the risk review template for the early identification of a possible failure to manage the risks presented. This could be due to services not being in place, barriers to service provision or disengagement by the young person. If there is a possibility of the young offender's risks not being adequately addressed, the case is progressed to the YOS Strategic Management Team and, if appropriate, to the YOS Management Board. This ensures a strategic response to young offender's risk issues, when the operational teams have exhausted all other options. Young people of concern are placed on the YOS risk register, to ensure continuous monitoring until such time that risks are reduced.

And last, but not least, to reduce the risk of adverse publicity, we developed a media and communications strategy to raise public awareness of the integrity of our work. We agreed to provide the local press with a number of stories, including access to interviews with services users and parents on the condition that there was no negative media portrayal of the YOS services during the same period. As part of the strategy key messages were included in each story aimed at reducing fear of youth crime. These included: 95% of children and young people in the city don't offend, and those who do get the best possible service; and through multi agency partnership working Sunderland is a safe place to live, work, visit and play.

EVIDENCE OF INNOVATION

Our clients are young and vulnerable and often have families who need support and empowerment – one of our innovations is to target the siblings of youth offenders. We have developed a range of effective initiatives with a range of partners from all sectors that have reduced the risk of children and young people offending. Many of them are cited nationally as best practice and they include:

Sunderland Volunteer Mentoring Service was recently short listed, for the National Community Care Awards, for creative and innovative work with young offenders. We have intensively trained around 80 volunteer mentors and matched them with young people at all stages of the criminal justice system to prevent them re-offending.

The **Phoenix Community Fire Safety Project** offers four programmes: (1) work experience weeks, offering training with Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Service; (2) counselling sessions for older teenagers; (3) fire-setting counselling sessions for ages 5 years and upwards; and, (4) an Arson Task Force weekly group targeted at 12-14 year olds. The programmes include classroom based learning, health and safety, teambuilding tasks, work experience, problem solving, equipment use and skill-based work. The Government has cited it as best practice.

The **Drug and Alcohol Initiative** aims to work with young people (aged 10-17) to minimise the harm/risk by reducing substance misuse and related offending. The project provides early intervention in order to develop substance misuse awareness, self-esteem and confidence, and equip the young person with life skills.

Barnardo's Sungate Parenting Project helps parents/carers of 10 to 17 year old children, or from 8 years if referred through the Youth Inclusion Support Panels. We work together to reduce offending and non school attendance and have piloted parenting orders. We have created specific programmes to help parents manage difficult behaviour, increase their confidence and gain greater control.

Rehabilitation and Aftercare Programme scheme allows us to work with young people leaving custody who have an identified substance misuse problem through targeted activities.

Youth Inclusion Project has developed a range of programmes which appeal to young people such as the immensely popular 'Midnight Basketball', in association with National Playing Fields, which combines education about health and social welfare with the promotion of sporting activity and is held at times of the day [e.g. evenings] when young people are most likely to offend.

Positive Futures uses predominantly non traditional sports, linked to positive lifestyle training sessions, to engage with young people at risk of offending. In the past year 146 new young people at risk, aged 10 to 17 plus, have joined and many are on awards courses, some now have jobs and others are doing better at school.

Tackle It is an innovative partnership between the YOS and Sunderland Premiership Football Club, to tackle racism, antisocial behaviour, and bullying and promote good citizenship.

Restorative Justice (Community Payback) allows young people with the opportunity to make amends to the community for their offending and helps them understand the impact their behaviour has had on their families, the victim and the community. Activities include restoration and conservation projects and painting, decorating and gardening in local communities. It earned the YOS a Howard League award.

Drugs Intervention Programme (DIP) has been commissioned by Government Office North East to pilot working with the council's sports development team and introduce 220 clients, who are going through the criminal justice system, to the benefits of physical activities. We're using sport and physical activity to break the cycle of drugs-crime-prison and have engaged with 88% of clients and seen nominal re-offending.

Wear Kids is a free voluntary support scheme for Young people aged 8-13 and their families. The main aim is to help young people stay out of trouble and prevent anti social behaviour. Young people can refer themselves directly to the scheme or can be referred by parents, carers, teachers or other professionals. Following referral, a project worker is allocated and a plan is developed to work with the young person and support them through any difficulties.

PARTNERSHIP WORKING

The success of the YOS is due to mature levels of partnership working with all sectors of the community. One shining example is the award-winning partnership with the Sunderland YOS and Gateshead and South Tyneside youth offending teams. The Intensive Supervision & Surveillance Programme (ISSP) attracted £768,000 of Youth Justice Board grant. It works intensively with 50 persistent and prolific young offenders who commit 25% of youth crime. It trains people from local communities to support the young people and their families, 24/7. It can include curfews and electronic tagging and young people undertake reparative activities. High levels of positive press coverage have earned the partnership national commendations.

The YOS is a key player in the Safer Sunderland Partnership which embraces partners from all sectors and tackles local crime, disorder and drugs issues and which has helped bring Sunderland's crime rate below the national average for the very first time.

All of the initiatives supplied under the **innovations** heading are examples of successful partnership working.

Evidence of impact

- in 2006/07 there was a 2% fall in under 18s committing crime (detected) compared to 2005/06 and a 4.6% fall in the number of offences (detected). Source: Northumbria Police
- in April 2007 there was an 8.5% fall in youth in re-offending rates against a national target of 5%
- 2006 MORI research shows 9 out of 10 people (87%) feel safe walking in the city centre alone in the daytime compared with 85% in 2005. There was a similar increase for night time perception of safety.
- young people say they now feel safer – 2006 MORI shows an 11 point increase for daytime city centre safety and a five points increase for night time.
- 95% of young people in Sunderland do not offend
- in 2006 there were 27 positive YOS stories in the local and regional press and no negative ones
- only 2.9% of YOS clients now go prison compared to 12% in 2001
- overall crime in Sunderland has reduced by 6.6% over the last year, including a 29.2% reduction in household burglary and a 7.3% reduction in criminal damage
- youth disorder has fallen by 28% since 2001/02
- over 90% of all young people ending an intervention with the youth offending service were in full-time education, training or employment
- one of only five youth offending teams (156 in all) to achieve an overall performance level 5, the highest possible score, in the Youth Offending Team Performance Framework
- the only YOS to achieve 100% performance against the 14 key performance indicators
- a plethora of national and local awards