

## Collaborative projects on youth crime Sept 08 – March 09

### Sheffield City Council – Case Study

#### 1. Where the project started

The Catalyst project team in Sheffield was formed following a meeting with senior staff where the view was that, in order to reduce offending, those serious and prolific offenders who commit a disproportionate amount of crime should be targeted. The Intensive Supervision and Surveillance Programme (ISSP) seemed the ideal vehicle to use for innovation within the Youth Offending Service (YOS).

There were some key issues the team felt needed addressing within ISSP:

- Young people were receiving custodial sentences for non-compliance with rigorous programmes such as ISSP
- The guidance for delivery of the current alternative to custody focuses on contacts and hours completed rather than flexibility and evidence of effectiveness
- There was no suitable venue conducive to multi-modal approaches and maximising engagement with young people

So, the team wanted to innovate by working in two key areas:

- **Increasing participation of young people in designing services, in particular, through research and co-design by a coalition of young people, magistrates and ISSP staff**
- **Developing an alternative model of intensive support more in keeping with the principles of effective practice**

They wanted to work with a particular group of young people – those facing a custodial sentence, secure remand or remand to custody – and, for the first time, to both consult with and involve these young people and magistrates in service-redesign and service delivery.

The project would support two key service priorities: risk management (prioritising resources around young people presenting the greatest risk of re-offending and harm) and community based working (increasing the visibility of the YOS through greater engagement with local communities and exploring opportunities for delivery of services within the community and tailored around local need).

#### **Understanding ISSP**

ISSP is a very prescriptive programme that often doesn't reflect the need for a tailored approach to the specific needs of individual young offenders.

Nationally in 2006/7, 40% of young people subject to the programme failed to complete it. Of those that were breached, over half (55%) were sent to custody.

It is felt that in order to make the programme more effective, intervention and resources should be targeted based on individual risks and needs, and that a 'one size fits all' approach is not the most effective way to engage with young people. One critical consideration is that the programme must have the confidence of the courts in order to ensure that increased flexibility and discretion did not have a negative impact on sentencing decisions and confidence in the YOS.

12% of the 3,000 children and young people in prison in England & Wales are there for breaching their supervision conditions, not for committing a further criminal offence.

## 2. Defining success

In a workshop with YOS officers, young people and magistrates in November 08, the following success criteria for the project were discussed:

Youth Offending Service	Magistrates	Young people
Reduction in offending	Young person doesn't come back to court	Feel happier, safe and secure
Reduction in frequency and seriousness	Reduction in gravity and seriousness of offences	Zero tolerance to crime
Sustainable and ongoing ETE (following ISSP)	Young person responds positively to ISSP	More effective relationships with YOS worker
Moving from compliance to engagement in ISSP	Tailored programmes to meet young person's needs	Rewards and praise
Young person has less chaotic lifestyle	Increased levels of engagement in ISSP	More engaging activities and group work
More 'good things' to say about the young person		
Increased self-esteem, sense of hope and awareness of improvement		
Young people as advocates and agents for change		

## 3. Identifying emerging issues together

In bringing YOS team members, magistrates and young people together to discuss openly the current issues with ISSP, two clear frustrations emerged:

- The balance is off – there is too much time focused on services and systems which prioritise talking *to* adults, and insufficient emphasis on adults **creating good relationships** and providing appropriate support to young people
- Quantity vs quality – the desire to provide really **high quality tailored ISSP provision** in an appropriate space can conflict with the pressure to fill programmes with hours and the onerous recording demands required

### Step-change moments so far

- Re-defining the ISSP philosophy
- Asking 'why are we doing what we're doing?'
- Bringing together practitioners, young people and magistrates
- Securing dedicated business support for the project

## 4. Researching the key issues

From December to January, detailed research was carried out to provide the Catalyst project team in Sheffield with a clearer and greater understanding of the issues they were trying to tackle. The overall focus of the research was on looking at alternative approaches to custody that are as robust as ISSP but employ different approaches.

The research focused on the following:

- Patterns of offending in Sheffield
- National and international alternatives to custody
- Innovative work by other ISSPs in England
- Perceptions of stakeholders in Sheffield to alternatives to ISSP, incentives, tagging and other related issues

It involved desk-based research, observation of current ISSP provision, and focus groups with ISSP staff, young people, sentencers and partners of ISSP (tagging company, ETE providers, housing, education etc).

Key findings from the desk research were:

- The peak time for offending in Sheffield is 3-6pm, although currently all young offenders on ISSP are subject to a curfew between 7pm and 7am.
- The value of alternatives to custody (such as intensive fostering and community compliance checking) and the need to make a case for these to Magistrates.
- ISSP teams around the country are using different methods to work more creatively with the 25 hour programme – some offer single sex programmes, others offer mentoring and Multi Systemic Therapy, others run vocational projects.

Key findings from the practical research were:

- Consensus across the board that the current ISSP is too prescriptive, failing to fully meet the needs of the diverse range of young people who are on the programme.
- Magistrates, practitioners and young people were all in favour of a programme which could be more easily tailored to each individual young person, though many were conscious of the likely increase in costs this would bring.
- Many commented on the need to reinforce messages from traditional education – reading and writing skills, discipline etc – but they also emphasised the importance of equipping people for ‘real life’ such as life skills sessions, relationships advice, understanding how to interact socially and present themselves, as well as specific modules related to improving offending behaviour.
- There was also a strong desire to repeat the exercise of bringing young people and magistrates together more often.

## 5. Moving from research to design

Informed and fuelled by the research outcomes, a series of design sessions took place during March, with the aim of generating new ideas and approaches for each key project area that could be tested and then implemented.

The design sessions were undertaken in two phases – first with the core team to produce an initial set of ideas to take forward, and then with a wider group of stakeholders, including young people and magistrates, to review and refine the ideas, agree a shortlist of ideas to take forward and begin planning how this would be achieved. During the design phase, the team considered the journey a young offender who is assigned to the ISSP programme would go through from assessment and sentencing to leaving the programme through completion or breach.

The eight most promising ideas that emerged from the design phase were:

Idea #1: Introduce detailed assessment of young people at the start of the ISSP

Idea #2: Agree formal discretion over the number of hours ISSP must include

Idea #3: Vary tagging/curfew times for young people on ISSP

Idea #4: Increase leisure activities available to ISSP young offender

Idea #5: Improve incentives offered to young people for completion of key milestones

Idea #6: Develop role for volunteer tracking officers to monitor compliance with ISSP

Idea #7: Ensure young people and magistrates work together

Idea #8: Hold an education summit to kick-start the development of a stronger partnership with education providers

## 6. Planned next steps

In the coming months, the team in Sheffield plan to take forward their Catalyst project in the following ways:

- Hold meeting with representatives from education and the head of Children’s Services to address issues around school age young people on ISSP who are NEET
- Continue liaison with the courts regarding the new ‘offer’ of ISSP to maintain the confidence of sentencers
- Develop detailed proposals highlighting the Sheffield approach to ISSP delivery and flexibility within the national ISSP guidance
- Forge partnership links with Activity Sheffield regarding the provision of sustainable constructive leisure activities
- Consult young people consulted on a regular basis regarding their experiences of ISSP and consider their feedback alongside that of sentencers to inform an evaluation of changes made
- Introduce a new induction and assessment process whereby young people contribute to the design of their timetable and are encouraged to take some ownership of the process
- Explore the possibility of developing a ISSP tracking officer role