

REPORT NO. 4
EVALUATION OF THE COVENTRY AND WARWICKSHIRE CONNEXIONS
SERVICE 2000 – 2001

Connexions Service for Young Offenders

Sue Westwood
Associate, Centre for Guidance Studies, University of Derby
December 2000

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 The Youth Offending Team (YOT) is a multi-agency body set up under the Crime and Disorder Act 1998. From April 2000 onwards, all local authorities with responsibilities for education and social services were required to establish a Youth Offending Team (YOT). This requires probation, police, education, health and social services to work together in order to provide a more coherent and cohesive response for work with young offenders. A range of key agencies provide the core membership and the YOT is managed by an appointed YOT Manager. In Warwickshire, a YOT Manager was appointed in August 1998; however, in Coventry the YOT Manager joined in June 2000. In each of these areas, there is evidence of strong inter-agency collaboration and support which has provided a positive foundation for the development of the Youth Offending Service in Coventry & Warwickshire.
- 1.2 In late September 2000, the Coventry & Warwickshire Connexions Partnership commissioned an interim evaluation to identify how the Connexions Strategy is being implemented within the Youth Offending Teams and to highlight the emerging issues. This reports covers the following four key areas of development:
- management and organisation;
 - delivery of the new service;
 - involvement of young people;
 - effectiveness of partnerships.
- 1.3 The evaluation was carried out during October and November 2000 and in-depth discussions were held with YOT Managers in Coventry & Warwickshire. Interviews were also held with a YOT Operational Manager in Warwickshire, responsible for managing the Personal Adviser within the YOT; and a Personal Adviser who has been instrumental in the development of the Connexions Service within the YOT programme. The report is structured into seven sections. Sections two to five detail the findings in the key areas of management, delivery, involvement of young people and partnership workings. Section six highlights areas of good/interesting practice and added value. Finally, section seven outlines a series of recommendations to inform the future development of YOTs within the context of the emerging Connexions Service.

2.0 Management and Organisation

- 2.1 From November 2000 onwards, two Personal Advisers will be seconded from the local careers service to the Coventry Youth Offending Team (YOT). One Personal Adviser will also be seconded from Warwickshire Careers Service to work within the Warwickshire Youth Offending Team (YOT). Personal Advisers will be located within the management structure within each YOT, but they will be jointly managed by the YOT and the local careers service.

The nominated YOS Operational Manager will plan work allocation and daily supervision. Issues linked to employment contracts, career development, Connexions policy and practice requirements will be provided by the nominated careers service line manager. This dual management system is a new way of working and therefore its effectiveness for all involved will require careful monitoring. This is especially important given that this dual management system will directly impact upon certain fundamental aspects of the work of the Personal Advisers. For example, one of the issues that arose from discussions with YOT staff, was directly linked to the recording of client data and outcomes from Personal Adviser work. Should data be recorded onto Aspire, the Careers Service database, onto YOT recording systems, or both? At this stage, further discussions are necessary to help clarify procedures and ensure consistency across the areas.

- 2.2 In both areas, the role of the Personal Adviser within the YOT has yet to be finalised. Some guidance has been given centrally and a representative from each YOT attends a practitioners' forum to keep up-to-date on developments linked to the role of the Personal Adviser. The YOS in both areas have some clear ideas about how the role could usefully be developed. They have jointly prepared a draft document that could be used as the foundation for a Personal Adviser job description. This paper is currently being refined and developed in consultation with key partners. It is clear that the role and job description of the Personal Adviser within each YOT will need to be agreed in the very near future.

- 2.3 One of the key priority areas highlighted from discussions with staff was the need for supervision of Personal Adviser work in order to ensure that they operate effectively within the confines of their expertise and role. Respondents indicated that the needs of this client group will be varied and complex and mechanisms for supervision will be vital in terms of helping staff to develop a clear understanding of the boundaries of their work. All respondents highlighted that support in this role is imperative and procedures need to be clearly defined. This will be especially important given that Personal Advisers will have joined a relatively new multi-disciplinary, multi-agency team, where all staff are learning about how the different professions operate and how they can all work most effectively together. This has raised some potential concerns by those who fear that the Personal Advisers may be used to "mop up bits and pieces" if their role was not made clear. To prevent this from becoming an issue, there needs to be:

- a) clarification of the role of the Personal Advisers;
- b) effective communication of this role to all staff within and outside the Youth Offending Teams;

- c) identification of how Personal Advisers can work best alongside existing staff;
 - d) strong leadership and management support to ensure that channels of communication are clear and consistent.
- 2.4 In Coventry, an example of good practice was identified as taking place within regular YOT multi-disciplinary meetings. These are held within the YOT and will be led by a manager or practitioner. The primary aim is to enhance and improve multi-disciplinary and multi-agency working by offering staff an opportunity to share 'difficult' cases, to jointly agree strategies and tactics, and to discuss referrals mechanisms. It also provides Personal Advisers with a platform to discuss professional and personal development issues. It is envisaged that these meetings will also provide useful feedback on the effectiveness of the role and work of individual Personal Advisers. In order to enhance and develop Connexions Service provision, managers in Coventry & Warwickshire have agreed to Personal Advisers meeting on a regular basis to discuss their work, to share lessons learned, and to identify good practice. It is hoped that this will provide a useful informal network. The YOS and Connexions managers plan to jointly review the work of their Personal Advisers and ensure the sharing of good practice across the sub-region.
- 2.5 Obtaining and sharing client information has always been, and will continue to be, a significant issue. The success of Personal Advisers work will to some extent be measured by their ability to network effectively and to gather relevant information. All respondents indicated that this is often a problem not only between agencies but also within their own organisations. In response to this, one YOT manager is developing local practice guidelines regarding the disclosure of information for all staff. There is a need to investigate at local management committee level how client information could be best shared and recorded across institutions and professions. Protocols will need to be fully developed and agreed. It may be helpful to explore the possibility of creating, maintaining and interrogating a shared database on 'young people at risk of school and social exclusion' in order to ensure effective communication and co-ordinate activity, as suggested in the Youth Justice publication, "Guidance on engaging young offenders in education, training and employment" (July 2000). Work is also currently being developed by the National Connexions Unit to help facilitate the sharing of client information.
- 2.6 In Warwickshire, the respondents reported a lack of information regarding the finances that are available to them to fully develop the Connexions Service for young offenders. They are currently unsure about whether there is any funding available for administrative support, or for evaluation purposes, and they are interested in setting up a control group. There needs to be clarification regarding the Connexions Service finances available. YOT staff feel that the amount of resource that each team has given, in terms of staff time, computers, rooms and administrative support, should be recognised by the Connexions Partnership. There was a general feeling that resentment may build if this investment is not duly acknowledged.

3.0 Delivery of the Service

- 3.1 Respondents believe that it will be the personal skills of the Personal Adviser that will determine the success of the Connexions Service more than the structures in which they are placed. This view is reinforced from the research evaluating the 'New Start' programme (DfEE Report, November 1999), which found that the Personal Advisers needed distinctive attitudes and values to work successfully with this client group. A genuine interest in this area of work was thought to be crucial hence the recruitment and selection of Personal Advisers is of paramount importance. The YOTs are clear that any Personal Adviser seconded to them must share the underlying ethos of their work and take on the principles that guide the work of the reformed Youth Justice System.
- 3.2 All respondents envisage that the role of the Personal Adviser within the YOTs will help develop the work already started from previous interagency collaboration activities. Part of the potential added-value of this service, is the opportunity for Personal Advisers to develop more in-depth support and to build effective working relationships with those young people who are potentially amongst the most disengaged. It is therefore imperative that all staff ensure that they and their clients are clear about the role of Personal Advisers, and that they are made aware of the difference between Personal Advisers and other YOT staff who have a statutory role to fulfil. To this end, a short information leaflet will be produced for young people and their parents/carers, explaining the role of the Personal Advisers within the YOS.
- 3.3 A further area of good practice within the YOTs is that all clients have a nominated YOT worker. Should the Personal Adviser not be present, there will always be someone at hand who should have access to information relating to the client. The issue of recording client contact is discussed earlier in para. 2.5.
- 3.4 Two of the respondents indicated that a formal system for referrals and prioritising caseloads needs to be developed promptly, to ensure the most effective use of Personal Advisers. The limited time available to work with some young people in this client group within the YOT may mitigate against marked success. Personal Advisers felt that it may prove more effective to work with fewer young people and to prioritise their work with those most in need. The Warwickshire YOT Manager indicated a preference for an initial maximum caseload of ten clients, until the role of the Personal Adviser had been sufficiently developed and the boundaries for their work established. The YOT's have ideas on criteria for prioritising referrals to Personal Advisers. If accepted, part of the added-value of this service would be providing a service to those young people for whom statutory involvement with the YOS has ceased and who would otherwise receive no continued support.
- 3.5 Assessment forms an important part of the work of Personal Advisers and all respondents understand that an assessment tool may be developed centrally for Personal Advisers' use. There is some concern that whatever is developed must be compatible with both Social Services and YOT assessment tools. YOTs currently use Asset as their main assessment tool. YOT staff are aware that it is not all encompassing but they use it as an aid to determine which areas may need a further detailed assessment and the level of intervention required. It is likely that information analysed from completion of an Asset form may provide a trigger for referral to a Personal Adviser.

There were some concerns that Asset did not provide sufficient information to assess young people's basic skills, an area known to be a problem for many young offenders. In order for this to be overcome and to ensure that sufficient relevant information is obtained from Asset, YOT 'specialists' from education and health, will train staff to complete assessments so that they will be better equipped to interpret data more fully. It is hoped that this will provide sufficient information to enable Personal Advisers to offer relevant interventions to meet specific needs.

- 3.6 At present, there are no strategies in place to evaluate the work of Personal Advisers. Respondents acknowledged that there are a number of potential measures that could be used given the YOTs recording and tracking systems.

All respondents agreed that it is crucial to establish monitoring and evaluation systems at the beginning in order to obtain relevant information that may provide invaluable feedback for improving and developing the service. In one area, they are examining the possibility of a control group that would provide invaluable baseline data for assessing the impact of the work of the Personal Adviser. Whatever methods are used, there is a need to clarify how the success and failure of the work of the Personal Advisers will be monitored and evaluated in order to demonstrate the added-value from this service. This is an area of work that needs to be further developed. The Centre for Guidance Studies, University of Derby can offer information, advice and guidance to assist with this process.

- 3.7 Three respondents expressed their concern regarding the accountability of the Personal Advisers. If their role is primarily one of 'broker' for their clients, to whom are they accountable? An example given was who will be answerable if a significant number of 16 and 17 year old YOT clients are not in work, training or education? Furthermore, respondents felt that there may be the potential danger of Personal Advisers adding another level of adult involvement in an already complex area. The issue of potential power and influence of Personal Advisers was also raised as part of this discussion. It would be useful to plan on a sub-regional level a discussion to explore ways of addressing these potential issues.

4.0 Involving Young People

- 4.1 So far, there has been no systematic involvement of young people in the planning, development, delivery or evaluation of the Connexions Service within the YOTs. One operational manager has begun to ask young people for their views. It is envisaged that these will impact upon the development of the YOT service as well as the new Connexions Service. Another manager plans to interview a sample of their clients to obtain feedback on the quality of the service provided. The YOTs need to agree a strategy for involving young people in the future. YOT clients were included in the Marketry research where their views were sought. The YOTs should decide what action, if any, will be taken as a direct result of this survey.

- 4.2 Coventry YOT is developing a 'Connexions Certificate' as a means of accrediting work undertaken and achieved by YOT clients which is currently not being formally recognised. Young people could use this certificate to show potential employers and training providers the skills, attitudes and knowledge they have acquired without the stigma that may be associated with such a certificate coming from the YOS. This is a very good example of the added-value of the Connexions Service.

5.0 Partnerships

- 5.1 Young people with offending behaviour problems are likely to experience other problems which may result in multi-agency contacts. Therefore to work effectively with this client group, it is essential for Personal Advisers to adopt a multi-disciplinary approach and to co-ordinate access to a range of relevant services. Personal Advisers will need to continue to improve partnership links in order to ensure the best service for their clients. A planned approach needs to be developed and implemented in each of the sub-regional areas.
- 5.2 The YOS is a multi-agency organisation where working alongside partner organisations is a daily activity. The benefits include improved information exchange and a growing awareness of the cultures and practices of other professions, although this inevitably takes time to fully mature and develop. Additionally, the fact that the Warwickshire YOT is based in the grounds of an F.E. college and is located within the same building as the careers service, social services, pupil referral unit and a training provider assists communication and networking links. Such interagency working has direct benefits for the development of the Connexions Service. An example of the added-value of partnership working is the training received by the Personal Adviser on 'The Real Game'. As a result, the careers service has also allocated a place to another member of the YOT staff. This will serve to contribute to the development of Personal Adviser and YOTs knowledge, skills and awareness of motivational programmes for young people.
- 5.3 In Coventry, some joint working has already taken place between the Careers Service and the Youth Service for YOT clients. This included the delivery of group work on such issues as confidence building and motivation. It was reported that this was well received by the young people who participated. This is another example of good practice in partnership arrangements. The Personal Adviser involved in this initiative feels it would be valuable to continue such joint working. Similarly, in Warwickshire there are examples of joint working between the Careers Service and Youth Offending Services, which include the 'First Gear, Safe Driving' initiative whose activities were accredited nationally, and the 'Double Take' initiative which involved outreach work with disengaged young people. This demonstrates that there are good partnership links in place upon which the Connexions Service can build and develop.
- 5.4 It is apparent that the YOTs view the development of the Connexions Service as an opportunity to further develop partnership working with a range of organisations for the benefit of their clients. They have worked hard to improve links with education and training, and with leisure providers. In Warwickshire during the school holidays, YOT staff were able to include their clients with other young people in five-a-side football tournament.

This was beneficial for their clients as it helped them feel part of the community, not outcasts as so many perceive themselves to be, and consequently it helped these young people “to build steps out of the YOS” which is vital for their longer term futures. This was a by-product of partnership working. As one of the YOT managers’ remarked:

‘There is no doubt that the interagency dynamic pays huge dividends regarding opportunities for the development of our services and our clients’.

- 5.5 Parents can be invaluable partners in work undertaken with young people, even though this can be an extremely time consuming process. However, there were concerns from two of the respondents that the role of the Personal Adviser may further disempower parents. Although it is agreed that part of the role of a Personal Adviser is to help young people make sense of the world and their place within it, it was felt that there is scope to marginalise parents because of this. It is therefore essential for Personal Advisers to clarify how they might best work with parents to support vulnerable young people.

6.0 Good/Interesting Practice and Added Value

- The use of regular multi-disciplinary meetings held within the YOT that can be led by either manager or practitioner (paragraph 2.4).
- Personal Advisers in the Coventry and Warwickshire YOTs plan to meet regularly to discuss their work, to share lessons learned and identify good practice (paragraph 2.4).
- The local development of practice guidance regarding the disclosure of information for all staff (paragraph 2.5).
- The opportunity for Personal Advisers to develop in-depth guidance and support measures with young people who are potentially amongst the most disengaged (paragraph 3.2).
- Information leaflet produced for young people and their parents / carers, explaining the role of the Personal Advisers within the YOS (paragraph 3.2).
- Joint case working should ensure that all YOT clients have access to someone who is familiar with their case (paragraph 3.3).
- The provision of a service to those young people for whom statutory involvement with the YOS has ceased, who would otherwise receive no continued support (paragraph 3.4).
- Specialist workers will train staff to complete assessments so that they will be in a more informed position to gain the necessary client information (paragraph 3.5).
- The development of a ‘Connexions Certificate’ as a means of accrediting work undertaken and achieved by YOT clients (paragraph 4.2).

- Joint training stemming from the partnership working arrangements between the YOT and the Careers Service (paragraph 5.2).
- Joint working has already taken place between the Careers Service and the Youth Service for YOT clients in Coventry, and between the Careers Service and the Youth Offending Services in Warwickshire (paragraph 5.3).
- Warwickshire YOT have developed strong working links with leisure providers for the benefit of their clients (paragraph 5.4)

7.0 Recommendations for Action

- Monitor the dual management system to ensure its successful implementation (paragraph 2.1)
- Agree the role and job description of the Personal Adviser within the YOTs (paragraph 2.2).
- Ensure support procedures are in place for Personal Advisers working within the YOTs (paragraph 2.3)
- Clarify the role of the Personal Adviser and communicate this to all YOT staff and young people (paragraph 2.3 and 3.2)
- Identify how Personal Advisers will work most effectively with existing staff (paragraph 2.3).
- Investigate at a local management committee level, how information could best be shared and recorded across institutions and professions to aid the development of the Connexions Service and the work of the Personal Advisers (paragraph 2.5).
- Develop a policy on the sharing and recording of information for the Connexions Service (paragraph 2.5)
- Clarify the finances available to the YOTs in relation to the development and implementation of the Connexions Service (paragraph 2.6)
- Develop a formal system for referrals and for prioritising caseloads (paragraph 3.4).
- Clarify how the success of the work of the Personal Advisers will be monitored and evaluated in order to be able to demonstrate the added-value from this service (paragraph 3.6).
- Plan on a sub-regional level a response to the issue of accountability and what action to take with service providers who disregard Personal Adviser recommendations (paragraph 3.7).
- Identify how to involve young people in the planning, delivery and evaluation of the Connexions Service within the YOTs (paragraph 4.1).

- Identify action for the YOT's arising from the findings of the Marketry survey (paragraph 4.1).
- Plan how Personal Advisers will continue to improve and develop partnership links (paragraph 5.1).
- Clarify how Personal Advisers might best work with parents to support young people (paragraph 5.5).

References

Department for Education and Employment (1999) *New Start: Paving the Way for Learning: An Interim Evaluation of the Second Round Projects*. DfEE Research Report Series. Sheffield:DfEE

Department for Education and Employment (2000a) *Connexions: The best start in life for every young person*. Sheffield: DfEE

Department for Education and Employment (2000b) *Connexions Planning Guidance*. Sheffield:DfEE.

Youth Justice Board (2000) *Guidance on engaging young offenders in education, training and employment* Youth Justice Board for England and Wales, London