

Sunderland City Council – How Sunderland got 91% of its young offenders engaged in education, employment or training and exceeded the national average by 20%.

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Name of LSP	Sunderland Partnership
Region	North East
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	Sunderland Youth Offending Service is a multi-agency partnership between Sunderland City Council, the Probation Service, Northumbria Police and Sunderland Teaching Primary Care Trust. Sunderland Youth Offending Service works with a range of education and training providers as well as employers in the City of Sunderland.
Keywords	Young people, youth crime, anti social behaviour, not in education, employment or training, NEET
National Indicators Addressed	
NI 45 Young offenders engagement in suitable education, employment or training	

Is the person signing-off the case study happy for it to be publicly available?

YES NO

Abstract

By obtaining comprehensive and timely data, creating a Difficult to Place Panel, developing an innovative New Direction programme and agreeing restorative justice contracts with 60 local firms Sunderland City Council's Youth Offending Service has increased the proportion of young offenders in employment, education or training from 76% in 2004 to 91% in 2008, 20% above the national average. The New Direction programme is an award winning unpaid work scheme for long term unemployed offenders that develops 'trade skills' in young people.

Case Study (2,445 words)

Background

Evidence shows that strategies designed to tackle prolific offending can have a significant impact on crime. According to Home Office research a small number of offenders are responsible for a significant proportion of the number of crimes committed. These individuals have a significant impact on crime levels and feelings of community safety in an area

Despite running a high performance Youth Offending Service, Sunderland City Council were concerned about one quarter of young offenders who could not be consistently placed in employment, education or training. These were often young people who had not been in employment, education or training for a long period of time. They tended to have very limited aspirations and very limited life and communication skills (e.g. understanding the need to turn up at work on time and how to dress appropriately for work).

The indicator for the level of young offenders engaged in employment, education or training had been a Youth Justice Board target before being included into the National Indicator set (NI 45). Sunderland achieved a rate of 76% in March 2004 in line with the national average suggesting that there was a performance ceiling if only the normal range of approaches were used. To increase the level of young offenders in employment, education or training Sunderland identified that they had to improve the quality of their information and the make changes to their services.

Better Information Collection and Management

Getting comprehensive and timely information about those 16 to 18 year olds who were Not in Employment, Education or Training (NEET) was identified as the starting point. As Sunderland City Council's Youth Offending Service provides supervision and support to about 200 young people each quarter for a period of a few weeks to many months, the information also has to be timely to maximise the period when help can be offered. To increase the levels of young people engaged in employment,

education or training beyond 76% Sunderland concluded that each quarter they had to identify and help an additional 20 to 50 young people to make changes to their lifestyles.

The information collected about young offenders is complex and relates to their status including their history of convictions and any final warnings which can lead to short term, voluntary interventions. The Youth Offending Service would also need to know, for example, if a young person left a training scheme after just three days and risks becoming disengaged from education and training. Building an accurate record for a young person requires collecting information rapidly from across a range of organisations (e.g. Police, Training Providers). Problems occur if parts of the service are not recording data correctly or promptly.

Sunderland City Council had a good electronic case management system (Youth Offending Information System) with new and existing staff trained in collecting information. Data analysis was used to help with targeting and the quality of data was good (e.g. Sunderland had very low levels of inconsistency between their data). However information gaps remained.

To address the information gaps Sunderland Youth Offending Service made sure managers and case workers understood their responsibilities for recording accurate and timely information about individual young people and for getting them into employment, education or training before they left the Youth Offending Service. This approach to performance management and the responsibility for data collection was embedded across the service at all levels. Sunderland helped frontline workers to see the need for and benefits of collecting information about young offenders.

A new short performance management meeting (30 minutes) for managers was instigated. Managers were also made responsible for communicating the information requirements to frontline staff. Information was supplied in advance of the performance management meeting so it was clear which teams were responsible for any missing gaps. Individual practitioners were identified who needed to get additional information about specific young people so the accountability was clear. This approach resulted in more complete and timely data.

Difficult to Place Panel

Having obtained timely and comprehensive data on the status of the 16 to 18 year old offenders not in employment, education or training Sunderland also had to ensure their services met the needs of young offenders not taking up more mainstream opportunities (e.g. courses provided by City of Sunderland College.). Lacking a range of life skills and having been out of employment, education or training for some time, this group of young offenders were very difficult to place in the opportunities provided through local training providers.

To develop more appropriate opportunities and identify barriers that stopped take up the Sunderland Youth Offending Services set up a **Difficult to Place Panel** which included relevant local employment, education and training providers. The aim was to provide holistic support and to share information. With one panel per child this was a very customised approach and aimed to identify the specialist placements and support required. This approach helped to identify the particular issue which was a barrier for the young person and why certain placements were not working. For example, the barriers could include problems in getting to the placement rather than a lack of appropriate placements, problems of working in groups or problems of working in a group with other difficult young people. The aim was to provide "wrap around" assistance from support workers, advocates and mentors (e.g. a mentor would drive and collect the young person and sit with them for the first hour of a training course). A joint Youth Offending Service and employment education and training plan of tailored support was produced rather than separate plans, as had been the case previously.

Service Improvements and the New Direction Project

Sunderland operates a number of innovative schemes that provide intensive support to reduce the use of custody for young people. These have included the Resettlement and Aftercare Programme (RAP) for engaging young substance misusers, the Intensive Supervision and Surveillance Programme (ISSP) and Keep Young People Engaged Programme (KYPE).

As part of the Intensive Supervision and Surveillance Programme and funded by Youth Offending Service, the New Direction project offered unpaid work to long term unemployed young offenders. The project has included the opportunity for young offenders to learn construction trade skills while working on community projects and to gain work experience in local firms that have been victims of crime, an approach known as restorative justice. About 40 young people have taken up opportunities in the New Direction project.

A Youth Advocate has been key to getting small groups of young offenders (2 to 4 young people) to work on small community projects to develop basic trade and other skills (see below). The sessions have been very informal and can involve just painting a couple of walls. The approach allows young people to understand the consequences of not turning up to work or training. The young person is also able to spend a significant amount of time with an adult and this gives the opportunity to build up a positive relationship.

Painting and Decorating

A painter and decorator by trade and a Youth Advocate, Andy Lamb undertook an intensive plastering training course, which enabled him to pass on a variety of skills to young offenders through the New Direction project and to offer a direct alternative

to custody. The most challenging young offenders have gained new skills in painting and decorating, plastering and tiling.

Andy negotiated the use of local college facilities to conduct the initial training, and took the young offenders into the community to work on worthwhile projects, such as re-decorating the house of a terminally ill cancer patient, a women's centre and crèche, and a community centre. Taking part in worthwhile projects has given the offenders a sense of purpose which makes them want to succeed. Besides their practical skills, the young offenders have gained confidence and improve their self-esteem. Concepts of victim awareness have also been introduced into the programme. The scheme has led to reduced re-offending and several of those who have taken part in the scheme have been nominated for accreditation from the Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme.

As part of the Sunderland Youth Offending Service restorative justice agreements have been signed with 60 local businesses who have agreed to restorative justice / unpaid work schemes for children and young people who have committed offences against businesses. Often as repeat victims of crime (e.g. shoplifting and retail theft), these firms have a vested interest in reducing the level of offending by young people. With the offender doing something on behalf of the victim this Community Payback project has had a number of positive employment, education or training outcomes. For example Alex Smiles, a waste disposal and management firm, was involved in the Big Recycle and offered a range of opportunities for young offenders including full time employment (see below).

The Big Recycle

In June 2008 Sunderland Youth Offending Service supported the national Big Recycle through a Community Payback scheme focused entirely on litter collection and recycling. In one week young offenders collected 45 bags of litter including aluminium cans, plastic and glass bottles, paper and cardboard. This Community Payback activity was combined with a short education programme on the importance and reasons for recycling in Sunderland, including a tour of a recycling plant and a talk from the company health and safety representative. The visit was aimed at delivering key messages to young people around the importance of recycling and the shortage of landfill sites for the future. The event enabled a positive partnership to be forged with possibilities around the provision of skips for Community Payback activity and three of the young ex-offenders were offered paid employment.

Impact

At the end of March 2004 76.1% of young offenders in Sunderland were engaged in employment, education or training. By the end of the final quarter of 2008 Sunderland's performance had improved to 91.1% and exceeded the Youth Justice Board target of 90%. The latest figures from the Youth Justice Board for the first six months of the current performance year (April to September 2008) show that

Sunderland has sustained this performance with a performance figure of 91.4%, almost 20% above the national average of 71.7%.

Overall Sunderland has improved the levels of both youth and adult offending. Youth offending has been reduced by 8.5% and Sunderland is now the safest city in the north with a 27% reduction in recorded crime since 2002/3. The crime rate is now 5% below the national average.

In March 2008 Sunderland City Council was awarded Beacon Status for its success in reducing re-offending with beacon exemplars in Leadership, Partnership, Innovation, Unique and Creative Data Management and Community Engagement.

The New Direction project won a Howard League for Penal Reform Community Award in 2007.

The Lessons

Sunderland's Youth Offending Services believes there are a number of lessons that underpin the success of their approach to increasing the proportion of 16 to 18 year old offenders who are in employment, education or training from 74% to 91% in four years:

- **Get comprehensive data.** Comprehensive and timely data has to be collected from a range of organisations (e.g. police, training providers, Youth Offending Service). This has to give a current and complete picture of the status of a young person as the Youth Offending Service only have a three month period in which to work with the young person. It is particularly important to spend time with frontline staff so they understand the importance of collecting data when their desire is to be working with young people.
- **Target the critical few.** With comprehensive data Sunderland have been able to target the small number of young people who are persistently not in employment, education or training. Working with providers Sunderland has developed very customised programmes as a "one size fits all" approach did not work.
- **Work closely with employment, education and training providers.** A Youth Offending Service must have a very close working relationship with local employment, education and training providers. Providers are likely to need help in dealing with young people with very challenging behaviour and do not easily fit into their normal delivery models (e.g. have problems working in groups).
- **Engage with employers.** It has been a huge mind shift to engage 60 local businesses to work with young offenders. However the success of the approach

is such that a local employer has offered young offenders paid employment after working with them.

- **Achieve community understanding and confidence.** It is important for the wider local community to understand the life stories of a group of "bad lads". An appreciation of their circumstances helps the community to understand that they will not be a repeat victim of crime. It important that the public has confidence in the Youth Offending Service.
- **Realise that the local media play a very important role.** There is a need to proactively tell the story even though the media will put their own interpretation on issues and events. It is possible to change the perspective on youth offending to one of achievement rather than the standard tale of crime and disorder (see below). The young people involved have rarely, if ever, been told that they have done a good job and this positive encouragement builds self esteem.



- **Locally developed programme.** The New Direction project was internally funded and the outcomes are accredited. The project is relatively resource intensive but it is what was required to address the issues of the young offenders who were persistently not in employment, education or training.

Future

While some of the work completed through the New Direction project has been accredited and linked to the Duke of Edinburgh Award, in the future Sunderland want to expand the structured accreditation so young people are able to move into training and employment progression routes through Job Linkage. Job Linkage is

Sunderland's advice and guidance service that aims to link local people into employment. For example there is current demand for fork lift truck drivers and training can be completed in one week. This represents an achievable opportunity for young people taking part in the New Direction project.

There is also the challenge of sustaining the high performance of their service with the possible impact of recession. One area Sunderland is exploring is how to continually learn from practitioners in the frontline and what structures and systems allow the innovations and ideas that help to achieve impact and value for money to be collected and shared.

Further Information

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Youth Offending Information System (YOIS)

<http://www.socialsoftware.co.uk/Development/172.asp>