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## COMMUNITY DRIVEN YOUTH CRIME PREVENTION – LESSONS FROM NEW DEAL FOR COMMUNITIES

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### **Abstract**

The importance of community involvement is stressed in government policy generally and has been widely advocated with regard to crime prevention initiatives. This paper considers youth crime prevention projects implemented under New Deal for Communities to consider the benefits that the essential community based nature of this programme has brought. It also points to some problems that have been generated by this same approach. It suggests that success is more likely where a strong multi-agency professional team implements schemes in partnership with community representatives, the latter adding the essential dimension of local knowledge, the legitimacy of a wider sense of ownership and the assurance that outcomes are attuned to local needs.

### **Introduction**

The importance of community involvement has been stressed in government policy for many years, at least as far back as 1984 (Home Office 1984) although Liddle and Gelsthorpe (1994) found that there was still a lack of community consultation in their study areas in 1994, community consultation being a usual prerequisite for community involvement. Garland (1996) describes a developing government policy of “responsibilisation”, which seeks

to prevent crime indirectly by encouraging action by non government agencies and the community. Arguments in favour of involving the public have rested on a number of rationales. Firstly there is the desirability of residents participating in decisions which affect their lives (Crawford 1998, Fitzpatrick et al 2000). Secondly there is an assumption that local residents, being closer to experiences of crime in the area, have the best understanding of what their needs are and how those needs might be met (Cairns 1996; McArthur et al 1996, Crawford 1998). Certainly public consultation can generate data to fill gaps in information concerning local crime problems, for example by providing data on victimisation to supplement recorded crime figures and on perceptions of crime. Public consultation can also help to generate ownership of crime prevention work and thus enhance public participation, encourage residents to take responsibility for their own problems and improve their capacity for self help. This has results in making schemes more self sustaining and durable (Liddle & Gelsthorpe 1994; Thomas 1999). Local people need to feel that they are stakeholders in the crime prevention process and that they have something to contribute as well as receive.

Liddle and Gelsthorpe (1994) found ownership to affect participation in both social crime prevention and situational measures. Lack of community involvement may lead to crime prevention measures aimed too much at symptoms rather than at the underlying causes. Where communities are not involved, funds may be directed in ways that do not benefit residents or interventions may not be delivered to areas of greatest need. The National Audit Office (2004) points to past regeneration programmes which, while

being well intended, have not always understood the difficulties faced by residents and have not therefore been as successful as hoped.

Since the election of New Labour in 1997 and the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 there has been renewed emphasis on the need for statutory agencies and the private and volunteer sectors to work with the community to address local priorities (Foley & Martin 2000). New Deal for Communities (NDC) has seen unprecedented levels of consultation and a strong focus on tackling deprivation by putting communities at the centre of proposals for change and giving the responsibility for effecting change to the partnerships created. Each area is required to establish a new organisation to represent the interests of local people and to work in partnership with delivery agencies to reduce levels of crime, poor health, unemployment and low educational performance and to improve housing and the physical environment. NDC has provided the opportunity for some of the most disadvantaged areas in England to tackle youth crime problems within tightly defined neighbourhoods. A wide variety of approaches has been used, including new orders and programmes working with young offenders and those at risk of offending introduced since the Audit Commission's Report on Misspent Youth in 1996 (Audit Commission, 1996) and early risk prevention and diversionary schemes.

NDC was launched by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister in two stages – phase 1 in 1999 and phase 2 two years later. The programme will see £2 billion invested over 10 years in 39 areas drawn from the lowest 10% of wards on the Index of Multiple Deprivation which are thus some of the most disadvantaged in the country. The 39 NDCs are spread across England, each

consisting of around 10,000 residents and receiving approximately £50 million over 10 years. This paper is informed by case study work on youth crime prevention projects carried out for the national evaluation. It will briefly describe the main interventions being implemented and consider the implications for those projects of the central community theme of NDC.

### **Methodology**

The case study research used a variety of methods and was not carried out in the same way for all case study areas, mainly because of variations in the availability of information. An initial telephone survey of the 22 NDC partnerships proposing youth crime prevention interventions in their delivery plans provided information on the basis of which four case study NDCs were selected (Bradford, Brighton, Hackney and Norwich). Each of these was implementing two projects. For all the study areas, in house reports were reviewed, some output statistics were obtained and interviews were carried out with some ten NDC community safety staff and project managers of the eight individual projects. For some, but not all, detailed figures on youth offending were available. For some projects, which were linked to or part of nationally evaluated programmes, information was derived from these evaluations. For most projects interviews were conducted with project workers and the views of thirty young people were obtained from a mix of interviews, focus groups and videos produced by the young people. Reports on this work are published on the NDC Evaluation website (Adamson 2003a, 2003b, 2004).

### **NDC Interventions to tackle youth crime**

Under NDC the approaches to youth crime prevention fall into two main groups:

1. Youth diversionary activities

NDC is currently funding youth diversion projects in 22 partnerships which have made varying degrees of progress. The range of interventions and funding amounts is very wide. Youth Clubs are being started in several NDCs, and some are attempting to provide other, less formal, venues for young people to meet such as Rochdale's planned Youth Tolerance Zones. Sport is frequently a component and includes soccer schools and teams, canoeing, abseiling, boat clubs, and swimming. Music and the performing arts are other features, for example a theatre school and dance group in Norwich, dance in Hackney and an academy of music and the performing arts in Luton. Summer holiday activities are provided in many NDCs, some having been connected with the Summer Splash programme of the Youth Justice Board (YJB). Reflecting research which suggests that merely introducing young people at risk of offending to sport or leisure activities is unlikely to reduce criminality (Utting 1996), several of the programmes claim to be holistic and include one to one sessions, support work, education and training, issue based workshops and mentoring as well as the more 'fun' leisure activities.

A number of NDCs have projects aiming to improve relationships with the police. For example, case study interviews in Hackney indicated that a project consisting of role play by police officers and young people with their normal roles reversed has been implemented. Monitoring forms completed by police and young people participating indicate that both have learned from the

experience. Anecdotally there has been more communication between young people and police on the streets and a few young people have expressed interest in a career in the police. Newcastle has been actively encouraging communication between police and youths on the streets, handing out free passes to the swimming pool as an incentive, and the NDC team has noted a reduced rate of youth crime compared with the previous year which may be linked to the project (personal communication from NDC team). Provision is being made for younger children by a few partnerships, for example an adventure playground and play park at Hackney.

## 2. Offender based projects

Since the establishment of the YJB in 1998 a wide variety of measures and programmes to tackle youth offending by working with young offenders or those at risk of offending has been introduced. NDCs have adopted some of these YJB interventions. These include the Youth Inclusion Programme (YIP) where the YJB provides £75,000 per year per project which projects have to match from other sources. NDC is currently providing all or part of this matched funding for 17 Youth Inclusion Projects. A local variant of the YJB Intensive Supervision and Surveillance Programme (ISSP) is being implemented in Bradford and Acceptable Behaviour Contracts (ABC) in several NDCs including Brighton where the scheme now includes an element of restorative justice. There are some other youth offender based projects planned or at an early stage such as a youth mediation project with victims (Lambeth), specific work with young burglars (Birmingham Aston), and working with a small caseload of disaffected young people (Wolverhampton).

### **Community based interventions?**

Although, as has been stated above, the central theme of NDC is involvement of the community the degree of emphasis which has been placed on this, and the way in which it has been implemented varies widely between partnerships. Some NDCs have created an effective multi-agency partnership of statutory and voluntary agencies and community groups. Others appear to be driven by community interests to the extent that one NDC director regarded the NDC input being driven by the projects rather than projects being designed to fulfill a strategy for dealing with youth problems. Involvement of the community has had undoubted advantages in local support. However it is questionable whether the community always knows best in terms of youth crime prevention any more than in crime prevention generally. NDC partnerships have encountered a variety of issues and problems, many of which are described in the literature having been encountered with regard to previous crime prevention initiatives. Some of these are detailed below under headings relating to the planning, implementation, and monitoring and evaluation aspects of project delivery.

#### **Planning**

Research by Liddle and Gelsthorpe (1994) found wide variations in the way information about crime problems was collected and analysed by multi-agency partnerships, and in the relationship of that information to the interventions made. They found that some projects could justify their aims only in terms of anecdotal evidence or impressions about appropriate targets. A similar situation has been found in many NDCs where the emphasis on involvement of the community has led to reliance on how residents perceive problems

rather than what the problems actually are and a lack of clearly defined outcomes and mechanisms. 34 of the 39 NDCs have identified a youth crime problem in their area but there is no NDC wide youth crime survey and the individual NDCs seldom quantify the problems in the delivery plans. Decisions to tackle youth crime were mainly based on perceptions of residents expressed in consultation exercises. Moreover there is question concerning the reliability of consultation methods such as panels and focus groups as a basis for formulating policy. Foster (2002) for example suggests that focus groups produce decontextualised snippets with no sense of being able to place the views into a broader framework. NDC household surveys asked questions about youths hanging around on street corners but not specifically about youth involvement in crime. Some NDCs used higher than average youth populations (MORI, 2002) together with national figures for youth involvement in crime to justify youth crime interventions.

Other NDCs on the other hand have provided evidence including Southwark where 26% of reported crime was said to be committed by those aged 10-17 compared with 20% in the borough as a whole. In the case study areas these NDCs have tended to be those where the focus has been on a strong professional agency involvement. In East Brighton 84 young offenders were resident in the area in 2000/2001. In Bradford youth offending is more than twice that in the district as a whole. In line with research (e.g. Flood-Page et al 2000; Graham & Bowling 1995; West & Farrington 1977; Wolfgang et al 1972), most of the youth crime in the Bradford NDC area is committed by a small number of prolific offenders. 7% of young people committing offences in a six month period to May 2003 accounted for 32% of the youth offences.

Some NDCs have not considered the need for baseline information against which to measure progress even well into implementation. Objectives of projects are therefore stated in general terms and do not have measurable outcomes. Others have pursued a more strategic approach, again especially those with a professional input. For example Bradford NDC has used the Youth Offending Team (YOT) database to assess the youth offending problem. The ISSP has clear quantifiable objectives in reduction of numbers of young offenders, offences and offence seriousness, in increases of clients accessing work and training and in hours of supervision delivered. Mechanisms for achieving these objectives are spelled out in support offered, breach procedures, levels of surveillance and contact hours with staff.

As Foley and Martin (2000) found, community priorities can be very parochial. In NDC a lack of experience and expertise of community representatives in forward strategic planning and problem solving means that some projects, while ensuring that what is provided is what is wanted, fail to take a strategic view and have too great an involvement of personalities and emotions. In one NDC, the activities of one project were felt to be reaction to a situation rather than the result of planned development with no consideration about where the young people should go when they move on from the project. Attempts are being made to resolve the problem by grouping youth projects together to create connectivity. This in itself is not easy because of the personalities involved and identification of individuals with projects. However, another NDC, which has a strong agency involvement, has developed a multi-faceted strategy against youth crime which includes an

ISSP, a YIP, Princes Trust and Home School Mediation and thus tackles different levels of offending and risk of offending. The projects all know the range of other programmes available in the area. Where a particular client might benefit from an additional or alternative programme, inter-project referral is possible and in fact frequently used.

### **Representativeness**

Previous researchers have identified problems with community involvement around the extent to which a few individuals can represent the diverse views of a variety of residents. Edwards (2002), for example, found two coalitions of views on an estate in Leicester with regard to solutions to identified problems. Foley and Martin (2000) suggested that local people rarely speak with one voice and that initiatives such as NDC simply shift power to self appointed community representatives who are often atypical if only because, unlike most residents, they are willing to become involved. Some of the case study NDCs have found problems with factions within the community resulting in dissent between groups as to directions and implementation. One NDC project was started by a small nucleus of people and has become run by extended family and friends of that nucleus, resulting in criticisms that the project provides only 'jobs for the boys'. This project was started for problem young people and, although it now has a wider remit, that reputation has meant that some people on the estate are reluctant for their children to be associated with it. There is therefore a sharp division between those who are for and against the project and some prejudice against those involved.

Fitzpatrick (2000) suggests that typically community representatives are older people who have lived in an area for some time and that young people rarely have a voice. In NDC, community members involved in shaping delivery plans have generally been adults. There may therefore be problems in engaging young people, particularly those of minority ethnic groups, with the initiatives implemented. Marshall (2004) found that awareness of NDC was limited among young people, mainly depending on whether the young person had been involved in an NDC funded project and that there was a need to consider sub groups in age gender, race, interests and a number of other factors. Effort was required to attract young people by working with them on their own terms and in their own places and by use of specialist youth workers.

The NDC diversionary projects studied have been successful in engaging a range of young people in their areas perhaps because they are offering something that the young people want. For example, case study research found records for one project indicating 60 young offenders among its 233 members. These, together with 7 young people on Anti-Social Behaviour Orders and others who self exclude from school, all have behaviour and attitudinal issues. Attendance statistics for another project show that it draws young people from all parts of the NDC, and has nearly doubled its clientele since the New Deal funding. The project manager of yet another regards the scheme as successful in attracting young people of a variety of ages and ethnic backgrounds although the proportions have changed over time. When the project started those attending were mainly white and aged 15 and under but more lately the age range has become 9-25 and a black majority better reflects the ethnicity of

the area. For one YIP consultation with young clients has led to a change of emphasis. In interview the YIP manager explained that at the beginning activities were mainly diversionary with little focus work on problems but this has changed after comments from the young people themselves such as ‘How is taking us swimming going to stop us breaking the law?’ There is now a programme of group-work and one to one work around issues such as anger management, offending behaviour, local identity, sexual health, self esteem and substance misuse.

### **Management**

Sound operating processes are important for several reasons, discussed by the National Audit Office (NAO) in regard to NDC (2004). Good decision making processes are necessary to ensure that best use is made of limited resources and to encourage community involvement. Clear, transparent and well managed arrangements, particularly those which relate to finance, help to demonstrate accountability, important in a community led programme. Poor operating processes on the other hand may lead to project delays caused by lengthy discussion of criteria for project approval, cynicism within communities that fair and proper processes being applied, disengagement of potential delivery partners who were wary of the decision making process, and risk that money is not being spent for intended purposes or to best value. Authors such as Hancock (2001) have pointed to the importance of strong leaders in mobilizing and motivating community groups and the NAO study (National Audit Office 2004) found that perceptions of strong leadership were related to assessment of performance.

The experience of some NDC youth crime prevention projects has been that their community centred nature has led to some management problems. As Hancock (2001) also found, there are examples of inexperience of members of management committees for NDC youth projects in committee working, management, finance and legal requirements. The management committee for one project was perceived as talking but not acting, having insufficient knowledge and being weak in chairmanship. Problems resulting have included lack of available guidance to projects, inconsistent decisions and poor perceptions of the NDC's commitment and leadership. As Skogan (1988) also found there is a clear need for training of personnel to combat these difficulties. In the case study areas such problems have had more impact where there is a lack of strong professional agency involvement and established expertise to combat them.

Management also includes the need for monitoring and evaluation in order to be able to demonstrate progress towards achieving targets. It became apparent from the case studies that production of such data was a problem for some projects, particularly some diversionary schemes with no strong professional agency input and limited experience of such procedures. As Liddle and Gelsthorpe (1994) found, monitoring can be time consuming and labour intensive. Inexperienced and non-professional staff have sometimes felt pressure, particularly in projects with a strong community base, to act and be seen to act and therefore have had a reluctance to devote resources to data collection, regarding this as bureaucracy. There are training issues in poor systems for recording activities in some NDCs. The result has been that such projects have been unable to quantify their effects but produce only anecdotal

evidence. Case study projects with a stronger professional input tended to have fewer difficulties of this kind.

### **Partnership**

The NDC programme was designed in such a way as to place emphasis on forming partnerships between communities and delivery services. Although NDC funding is considerable, it is unlikely to be sufficient to tackle the problems identified without contributions from agencies and it also necessary for NDCs to work closely with agencies that are legally responsible for delivering services in the area. Combined initiatives will often have greater effects than the sum of individual agency operations.

NDCs have found that there are two issues here: partnership between agencies and partnership between agencies and the community. Most youth crime interventions work by identifying and addressing a range of risk factors for young offenders or those at risk of offending. That tackling this wide range of issues for individuals and groups requires partnership working of both statutory and voluntary agencies to provide expertise and experience as well as funding in money or kind is well established (e.g. Youth Justice Board 2001; Utting 1996; Audit Commission 2004). NDC youth crime prevention projects generally have embraced inter-agency working and developed a range of beneficial relationships providing funding, staffing, accommodation and bought in services. This has not been confined to projects with a strong statutory emphasis but has also been developed by more voluntary led diversionary schemes.

It is also clear that there may be difficulties in these agencies working together because of conflicting approaches and examples of such problems were found in the case study areas. An early problem in Bradford concerned a statutory (the YOT) and a voluntary (YMCA) agency with different ways of working and different viewpoints which clashed at times. There are also differences in rates of pay between the two agencies. Elsewhere it has been felt that there have been problems in the reluctance of statutory bodies to enter into partnership with projects which are voluntary, problems which have been solved with varying amounts of success.

In NDC generally stakeholders have found that the programme has assisted them to focus at a local level and in one case study NDC the YOT has used the success of the NDC ISSP to justify extensions to a similar scheme elsewhere. It has also given them confidence to recruit local people and start a modern apprenticeship scheme. Other NDCs have found that partnership working has been assisted by the provision of a forum. This may simply be a regular meeting such as Bradford's Crime Working Group or it may be that NDC has permitted the creation of joint offices within the area. For example in Brighton NDC offices are shared by a variety of staff including the police, wardens, housing staff and the YIP providing benefits in implementation. Half the young people in the YIP target group have an ABC or an Anti-Social Behaviour Order. Visits by the police and housing help to check on them, which helps the YIP, and positive feedback from the YIP informs the police and housing staff who make the visits. In Bradford partnership working with the YMCA has provided accommodation and especial benefits in other resources within the building which the ISSP can tap into such as reparation

and an anger management course. So far as the community is concerned location of joint offices within the area enables easy access on a range of issues and may assist in developing a sense of ownership.

Previous researchers have found that partnership between the community and agencies is, however, not easy to achieve. For example Evans (2003) found a lack of trust between the “expert” and “lay” personnel because of their different social spaces, environments and economic stresses. Foley and Martin (2000) pointed to difficulties both in the willingness of agencies to cede power to community groups and in the extent to which community members are willing to collaborate with agencies. Part of the problem may be that crime is not always as important in the view of the community as other issues such as environmental problems and anti-social behaviour. While few NDCs could quantify youth crime, teenagers hanging around on the street was regarded as a serious problem by 41% of residents (MORI 2002) compared with 32% nationally in the British Crime Survey. National programme targets required crime reduction but one NDC made it clear that its priority was the provision of activities for young people as part of a process of social investment in young people’s lives which may also carry anti-crime messages and impact on crime, an approach which has been seen elsewhere (Foster 2002). The community often sees no benefits in joint working either because there is no feedback of news of successes or because it feels that its views are not truly represented.

Due to the extent of community consultation, NCD projects started off with the support of the community. For example some projects were born out of

local voluntary initiatives and still have close ties with local residents. Secondly, rooting projects in the community may help by empowering those communities for example by providing jobs and training so that the prospect of sustainability of the schemes may be improved. In Bradford the ISSP is felt by the YOT to have the support of the local community. Part of the reason for this has been the employment of local people as workers on the scheme who have strong local connections.

### **Durability**

NDC funding is for ten years which seems a long time by previous regeneration programme standards but effort is still required to ensure sustainability of projects after funding is finished. Previous research (Liddle & Gelsthorpe 1994) has shown that a succession of short-term projects is less effective in crime prevention, because the public see the approach as piecemeal. Furthermore, youth crime prevention projects generally, while they may present early successes, frequently require considerable time for their real effects to be seen. Such projects are generally aiming to impact on behaviour, whether by offering alternative activities to occupy young people's time or by more focussed educational or attitudinal interventions. Although there is little evidence for reduction of offending as a result of sports activities alone (Utting 1996), if a football club does divert young people from crime it is likely to have an effect only if the project is maintained over a period of time.

Sports schemes in West Yorkshire and Hampshire found that effects on offending behaviour were seen only in those young people who maintained their attendance over weeks or months (Utting 1996). Moreover, any effects

will be short term if, for lack of funding, the club closes after a year or so. Alternative education programmes will need time for young people to achieve educational attainments. An offender based programme such as ISSP may successfully reduce offending among its clients but must expect to have new clients either growing into the at risk age or moving into the area. In their pursuit of mainstreaming, some NDCs have caused problems in setting funding to one or two years with resultant pressures on immature projects. Staff involved in diversionary projects have felt considerable stress because of the pressure to seek alternative sources in anticipation of the cessation of short term NDC finance. In Bradford the ISSP, in spite of its success, is seeking funding to maintain the same level of service after March 2005. Matched grants from other bodies may also be short term. One YIP lost staff because of uncertainty about continuation of YJB funding.

It is important to NDC that progress can be measured in order to demonstrate success to partner agencies to ensure continued funding and to maintain community support, combat cynicism, increase participation and build momentum. This requires monitoring and evaluation of performance but, as mentioned above this has sometimes caused problems in NDC youth crime prevention projects, which have therefore had difficulties in developing strategies and justifying bids for funding. There are also issues in relation to lack of baselines and clarity of objectives previously discussed.

NDC residents have been found by the NAO report (2004) to complain of a lack of visible results and a lack of information about what is happening. There have also been issues for some NDCs in tension between community

expectations and delivery/results. A clear strategy is needed to help streamline project approval and community expectations must be managed so that residents appreciate the time taken to approve projects and time lags between approval and delivery and project implementation and results. One case study project took 18 months for funding to be approved. Management of community expectations can be helped by including activities which are easy to deliver and can show early intermediate outcomes where full effects are likely to be long term. For example, in one area young people in general are regarded as being the main perpetrators of crime and anti-social behaviour, unfairly in the view of the young people themselves. One young person said “Old people look at us like we are criminals.” To combat this prejudice and close the generation gap, the project ran ‘wine and dine’ evenings in which young people put on a show for the older community, cooking and serving food and waiting at table. The aim of this was to build relationships between the generations and feedback received showed that this was achieved to some extent. Greater efforts are needed to communicate successes, for example, where levels of youth offending are decreasing but there are difficulties in that newsletters are often regarded as junk mail. There may also be literacy and language barriers. Few partnerships use the internet to communicate success although of the case study areas Brighton has a website providing useful information to the community.

### **A two edged sword?**

NDC has provided the opportunity for the development of a variety of youth crime prevention schemes, many of which can point to early success in reducing youth offending in their areas. Some interventions have been more

community driven than others. Those which are offender based, particularly those relating to statutory court orders, necessarily require implementation by statutory agencies, and therefore have professional staff bought in. They may depend for funding on NDC and may be accountable to the community but implementation is by trained personnel used to strategic thinking. Other schemes, particularly some of the diversionary projects, are more strongly rooted in community perceptions and constrained by community abilities.

NDC youth crime prevention projects have illustrated again that community involvement is not without difficulties and may be something of a two edged sword. The case study approach taken by the evaluation means that conclusions about the community driven nature of NDC youth crime prevention must be based on limited information. However in the areas studied the projects which were most able to demonstrate success in reducing youth offending in the area and within their client groups were those which had a strong professional input and laid an emphasis on inter-agency working. Some of those which showed strong community input but less agency involvement were less able to show results, if only because of a lack of baseline, clear focus and evaluation data. It could therefore be argued that, while community involvement in local initiatives has undoubted importance, this alone is not sufficient for effective youth crime reduction. Effective youth crime reduction rather requires the community to work with a strong multi-agency team to target problems. Community representatives should not be required to become experts but to take advantage of the expertise of the professionals. Their contribution should provide the essential dimension of local knowledge, the

legitimacy of a wider sense of ownership and ensure that outcomes are attuned to local needs.

#### **NOTE**

The Neighbourhood Renewal Unit is currently sponsoring the 2002-2005 national evaluation of New Deal for Communities. This evaluation is being undertaken by a consortium of organisations co-coordinated by the Centre for Regional Economic and Social Research at Sheffield Hallam University. The views expressed in this paper do not necessarily reflect those of the Neighbourhood Renewal Unit. Those wishing to know more about the evaluation should consult the evaluation's web site in the first instance:

<http://ndcevaluation.adc.shu.ac.uk/ndcevaluation/home.asp>

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