

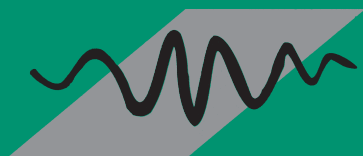
# rights to access

meeting young people's needs for advice

James Kenrick

*“Rights to Access provides valuable evidence of young people’s advice needs, advice-seeking behaviour and barriers to access. I recommend it to my colleagues in government and to our partners in the Community Legal Service.”*

Steve Orchard CBE  
Chief Executive, Legal Services Commission



young  
**ACCESS**

To Information, Advice and Counselling

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*James Kenrick*  
*Advice Services Development Manager, Youth Access*

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### **References**

# 1 Introduction

***‘Children and young people are a unique type of legal client with unique information needs, yet there is no centralised strategy for informing them about their rights.’<sup>1</sup>***

The introduction of a swathe of Government initiatives involving the provision of advice, notably the Community Legal Service and the Connexions Service, has created an unprecedented political climate for realising Youth Access’ long-held vision of a society in which all young people are able to make informed decisions through access to high quality information, advice and counselling services. There remains a suspicion, however, that the unique nature and range of young people’s needs for advice are poorly understood by policy makers and providers alike. Without greater coherence in the planning, funding and delivery of services, there is a danger that young people will remain marginalised from access to quality advice services.

Although young people are a focus of much current Government policy and advice is frequently identified by the advice sector as an intervention that can combat social exclusion, little has ever been published on the subject of young people’s access to advice. This publication is intended to fill that gap by highlighting the unique nature of young people’s needs for advice and the inadequacy of current provision to meet those needs. It contains a number of recommendations for policy makers, planners of services, funders and providers on how to achieve improvements in young people’s access to appropriate high quality advice services.

The evidence highlighted in this publication has been drawn from research carried out by a variety of governmental and non-governmental bodies. Little of that research has focused to any great extent on the specific subject of young people’s needs for advice and none of it has been co-ordinated to enable meaningful comparison between studies or to provide a conclusive national picture. This publication attempts to draw all the available evidence together to provide a base of understanding from which, it is hoped, future research can build. It is worth noting that, due to the paucity of evidence available, very little selection of evidence has been carried out by the author: what is included is, to a large extent, what is known.

Youth Access, the national membership organisation for youth information, advice and counselling services, has over 25 years’ experience of promoting the development of a national network of high quality information and advice services for young people aged 13–25. *Rights to Access* arises from Youth Access’ Advice

Development Project that has been acting as a policy focus for the youth advice sector and providing support, consultancy and training to member agencies since 2000.

# 2 What is advice work?

The Community Legal Service, launched by the Lord Chancellor’s Department in April 2000, aims to *‘improve access for the public to quality information, advice and legal services’*.<sup>2</sup> One of the objectives of the Connexions Service, launched by the then Department for Education and Employment in April 2001, is to raise the aspirations, participation and achievement levels of all young people *‘by providing impartial information, advice, guidance, opportunities for personal development and other support according to their needs’*.<sup>3</sup> At first glance, the overlaps between the two initiatives might seem obvious. Both appear to involve the provision of information and advice, with the Community Legal Service having a legal emphasis and the Connexions Service a remit to work with 13–19 year olds. But does the broadly similar language emanating from the two departments really reflect a shared understanding of what information and advice work is?

With a wide range of professionals making more or less legitimate claims to be advisers, whether they be Personal Advisers in the Connexions Service, independent financial advisers or even customer advisers for multinational companies, further discussion of young people’s need for advice and their access to it must be set within the context of a shared interpretation of terminology. This publication, in using the term ‘advice work’, is referring to two forms of work, classified here as ‘rights-based advice work’ and ‘personal advice work’.

**Rights-based advice work**, often referred to as legal advice work, comprises the provision of advice about legal and human rights, entitlements and responsibilities. It is largely delivered by an advice sector made up of voluntary organisations, including Citizens Advice Bureaux and Law Centres, that provide free, independent, confidential, impartial information, advice and casework. The focus is on social welfare issues, such as housing, welfare benefits, debt, employment, education and immigration, which disproportionately

1 R. Gallagher, (1999), *Children and Young People’s Voices: The Law, Legal Services, Systems and Processes in Scotland*, Scottish Child Law Centre.

2 Legal Services Commission, (April 2000), *The Quality Mark Standard*.

3 DfES, (October 2001), *Draft Objectives for the Connexions Service*.

## Definitions

**Information** is the provision of systems and processes which make comprehensive, up-to-date and accessible information available to young people. There is no assessment or recommendation about the information's appropriateness, and decisions, choices and action are left with the young person. Information work can include signposting to other services or providing young people with resources to discover their own answers to their questions and needs

**Advice** is concerned with helping a young person to change or cope with practical issues and problems. It seeks to widen the young person's choices by providing accurate and relevant information about their rights, options and potential courses of action. The advice worker may identify and recommend ways forward, but decisions and choices are left to the young person. Any action agreed by the young person may be undertaken by, with, or on behalf of the young person.

Source: *Quality Standards for Youth Information, Advice, Counselling and Support Services*, Youth Access, 1999

affect people who experience social exclusion. The advice sector's commitment to the anti-poverty cause and social justice has traditionally seen its work with individuals supplemented by social policy work, campaigning and community empowerment.<sup>4</sup> Some private solicitors' firms and a range of providers in the statutory sector, such as local authority welfare rights units, also contribute to rights-based advice work.

In contrast, **personal advice work**, comprising the advice element in what has traditionally been termed 'personal support' within the youth sector, involves the provision of information and advice on practical, emotional and health concerns, such as relationships, abuse, sexual health, mental health, drugs and alcohol, parenting skills, eating difficulties, careers and leisure. Although the skills employed may be similar to those required for rights-based advice work and many of the matters dealt with may also have a potential legal remedy, personal advice work typically pays little attention to the legal aspects of the issues involved.

Rights-based advice work is the explicit focus of the Community Legal Service, which is intended to co-ordinate the work of a wide range of voluntary, statutory and private sector bodies involved in the delivery of legal information and advice services to the general public. The Connexions Service currently has a

greater emphasis on personal advice work, and on the provision of careers advice and guidance in particular. Indeed it is the Careers Service, with its traditional distant relationship to the advice sector, which has lent much of the language to the developing Connexions Service, hence the prominence of the term 'guidance'. The precise scope of each initiative and their interrelationship remain undefined, however, and it is possible that their boundaries could become blurred in the future through closer joint working.

One established model for youth advice work, advocated for many years by Youth Access and put into practice by its members, combines rights-based with personal advice work to provide services that cater for the holistic needs of young people aged 13–25. This model recognises that young people present with a wide range of issues and that a single approach to a particular issue might fail to identify the range of remedies available. Indeed many youth information, advice and counselling services have played active and important roles in the development of both the Community Legal Service and the Connexions Service.

It is suggested, therefore, that rights-based and personal advice work with young people should be seen as inextricably linked. An agency may be able to help a young person find a solution to a problem or set of problems by using one intervention alone, but the availability of a range of helping strategies, including counselling and other forms of personal support as well as advice, will greatly increase the chances of a successful outcome.

## 3 Understanding the root causes of young people's need for advice

Policy makers and some mainstream advice providers are beginning to recognise that young people's need for advice and their advice-seeking behaviour may not conform to established patterns. Some tentative work has been done to assess that need and behaviour, yet young people remain very much an enigma to the mainstream advice sector. In order to gain a firmer understanding of the subject, it is necessary to explore the root causes of young people's advice needs. There are, perhaps, two principal causes: the nature of adolescent transition and the social exclusion of a significant minority of young people.

4 N. Ardill and M. Holdsworth, (June 2001), *Reclaiming the poverty agenda*, Legal Action Group policy article.

### 3.1 Adolescent transition

Definitions of adolescence will vary from individual to individual, culture to culture and in relation to the current cultural, socio-economic and political climate. What is common is recognition that adolescence entails a time of transition and change when most of a person's characteristics are changing from what is typically considered childlike to what is typically considered adult. Changes in the body are most easily observed, but other attributes, such as thoughts, behaviour and social relations, also change radically during this period.<sup>5</sup>

Arguably, both the period of adolescence and the pressures on young people have increased over recent generations. Puberty is reached, on average, at an earlier age now. Yet gaining full social and financial independence has become more protracted as a result of Government policies encouraging young people to remain at home and in education for longer. Peer and media pressure on children and young people to grow up faster, become independent consumers and experiment with drugs and sex has intensified. Meanwhile, the traditional support structures of the family, community and church have also changed and weakened for significant numbers of young people. Many young people fit into neither services for children nor services for adults and must seek alternative sources of support.

*'Young people occupy the psychosocial 'moratorium' of adolescence, between childhood and adulthood, beginning with puberty's physiological change and ending with social and financial independence. They are neither one nor the other ... Somehow we do not quite know how to treat them, as either adults or children.'* (Feavious, 1994)

The feelings of confusion, uncertainty and insecurity which many young people experience in their transitional years and the practical consequences of their growing independence are undoubtedly key factors contributing to the range of issues and problems on which support may be needed, if not always sought.

*'Arguably, the transition from child to adult and the many choices, conflicts and decisions to be resolved, can present the individual with one of the most testing, confusing and often turbulent periods of her/his life.'* (Rayment, 1991)

Three in four young people leave the parental home before the age of 25. Decisions must be taken about when to leave education and take the first steps in the world of employment. Levels of income poverty amongst young people are high, due to youth

unemployment, lower wages and unequal access to welfare benefits. Young people's lifestyles and attitudes may lead them into conflict with their parents, carers and authorities. Often young people sense a lack of respect from adults and from society in general and reciprocate with a lack of trust. In addition, they endure a sometimes painful psychological transition and may have difficulty in developing a sense of their personal identity and sexuality. As a result, many young people require a broad base of practical and emotional support, preferably under one roof, in a setting that can gain their trust sufficiently to discuss personal matters openly. As we will explore later, this need has implications for those attempting to design advice services with the appropriate characteristics to attracting young people.

### 3.2 The social exclusion of young people

The term social exclusion originates from Europe, where its concept was associated with people's inability to exercise their full economic, social, cultural, civil and political rights, and is intended to capture the complexity of social deprivation.<sup>6</sup> The UK Government's Social Exclusion Unit has identified three locations for the key factors which can put young people aged 13–19 at high risk of social exclusion:<sup>7</sup>

- The family – poor parenting; family conflict; low income; poor housing; being placed in care.
- School – low achievement; truancy; exclusion.
- The community – disadvantaged neighbourhood; friends condoning or involved in risky behaviour.

There is, it was concluded, a high correlation between the presence of these factors in young people's lives and their chances of experiencing 'adverse outcomes', such as drug and alcohol misuse, youth crime, school-age pregnancy, school failure, mental health problems, homelessness and unemployment. It is such outcomes that characterise social exclusion and are likely to present a need for both rights-based and personal advice.

However, the UK Government's Social Exclusion Unit's use of the term has been criticised for its focus on social exclusion as a state of affairs rather than as a process and for the absence of any mention of rights as a tool with which to tackle it.<sup>8</sup> This may partly explain why the

5 S. Lee, F. Taylor Muhammed and R. Downes, (2002), *Listening In Colour: creating a meeting place with young people*, Youth Access and Trust for the Study of Adolescence.

6 Ardill and Holdsworth op. cit.

7 Social Exclusion Unit, (2000), *Report of Policy Action Team 12: Young People*.

8 See, for example, M. Holdsworth, (1999), *Social Exclusion: Is Advice A Solution? (discussion paper)*, London Advice Services Alliance.

## Evidence of social exclusion of young people in the UK

### Housing and Homelessness

- Over 30,000 people aged 16–21 are believed to be homeless in the UK, more than in any other EU country.<sup>11</sup>
- A fifth of all young people experience homelessness at some point between the ages of 16 and 24.<sup>12</sup>
- Every year an estimated 77,000 children under 16 in the UK run away from home.<sup>13</sup>
- Housing allocation policy and practice treats under 18 year olds less favourably than adults.

### Poverty and Unemployment

- 4.1 million children in the UK are living in poverty.<sup>14</sup>
- 34% of children in England live in households with incomes below half of the average, whilst 10.4% of 18–24 year olds were on a means-tested benefit in Spring 1999.<sup>15</sup>
- Young people's independent sources of income are limited by the exemption of 16 and 17 year olds from the National Minimum Wage, lower rates of key social security benefits for under 25 year olds (with no entitlement at all for most 16 and 17 year olds), and a financial support system for under 18 year olds described by the Government itself as *'even more confusing and complicated than support for adults'*.<sup>16</sup>

- The rate of youth unemployment (16–24 year olds) is above the EU average.<sup>17</sup>

### Employment

- Young workers face a range of specific pressures and discriminatory practices in the workplace, including bullying and the payment of low wages, reinforced by the existence of a special lower National Minimum Wage.

### Education

- School exclusions increased almost fourfold between 1990–91 and 1999. 8,636 pupils were permanently excluded from secondary schools in England in 1998–99.<sup>18</sup>
- UK schools experience high levels of truancy.<sup>19</sup>
- 17% of British 16–25 year olds have literacy problems.<sup>20</sup>

### Crime

- Young people are far more likely to commit and be the victims of crime, but are far less likely to report crime than other age groups.<sup>21</sup>
- 41% of all offenders in 1999 were aged under 21.<sup>22</sup>
- 2,300 15–17 year olds were in custody as at 31st January 2001,<sup>23</sup> most of them in adult prisons, despite a wealth of evidence that many will be suffering from mental health problems and that they are commonly subjected to crime, abuse, degrading conditions and other violations of their human rights whilst in prison.<sup>24</sup>

*continued on next page*

Connexions Service – which was formulated by the Government following a report<sup>9</sup> emanating from the Social Exclusion Unit and which aims to re-engage into mainstream society the most disaffected and disadvantaged young people through breaking down barriers to learning – has had, in its early days, a surprising lack of emphasis on either young people's rights or rights-based advice. Yet legal problems, such as the refusal by authorities of applications for re-housing or welfare benefits, and the inability to exercise one's rights to help resolve them, often represent the most significant barriers to learning of all for many young people and can create or exacerbate social exclusion. Indeed, the Lord Chancellor's Department, in its White Paper for the Community Legal Service, stated that:

*'Social exclusion would increase, and the rule of law itself would be threatened, if less well off people ... were effectively excluded from justice.'*<sup>10</sup>

The impact of the Community Legal Service and the Connexions Service on young people's access to advice will be examined in Chapter 8.

Whilst the effectiveness of different solutions to social exclusion may be debated endlessly, what is not in dispute is the seriousness of young people's current exclusion from the mainstream of British society and the urgent need to tackle it. The facts presented in the box entitled 'Evidence of social exclusion of young people in the UK' demonstrate the extent of the problem. Given such evidence, it should come as no surprise that young people may have higher levels of need for advice than other age groups and that the range of advice they require is broader than either rights-based or personal advice work alone can provide without the other.

<sup>9</sup> Social Exclusion Unit, (1999), *Bridging The Gap: new opportunities for 16–18 year olds not in education, employment or training*.

<sup>10</sup> Lord Chancellor's Department, (1998), *Modernising Justice*, White Paper on the Community Legal Service.

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### The Family and Social Care

- One in 14 children in the UK has suffered serious physical abuse in childhood and one in 16 serious sexual abuse, most often from their parents.<sup>25</sup>
- There were 58,100 children and young people in local authority care in England in 2000.<sup>26</sup>
- ‘Looked after’ children and young people and care leavers are known to be particularly vulnerable to experiencing school exclusion, sexual exploitation, poverty, mental health problems, substance abuse problems, low levels of educational attainment and other factors that precipitate social exclusion.

### Sexual Health

- Levels of sexual ill health in the UK have risen substantially in recent years with teenagers and young adults more likely to suffer than other age groups.<sup>27</sup>
- 40,000 girls under 18 become pregnant in the UK each year.<sup>28</sup>
- The Social Exclusion Unit has identified ‘ignorance’ (of contraception, relationships and what it means to be a parent) as one of three major factors causing England’s teenage birth-rates to be the highest in Western Europe.<sup>29</sup>

### Mental Health

- One fifth of children and young people aged under 20 are estimated to be experiencing psychological problems at any one time.<sup>30</sup>
- Young people aged 16–25 who are making the transition from childhood to adulthood and from children’s to adults’ mental health services may be at particular risk of mental ill health.<sup>31</sup>
- Young people account for a considerably higher proportion of all suicides than 20 years ago and levels of depression are increasing with a younger average age of onset.<sup>32</sup>

### Drug and alcohol misuse

- Drug and alcohol dependence is higher amongst 16–24 year olds than other age groups in the population.<sup>33</sup>
- The UK has more 15–16 year old drug users than any other EU country.<sup>34</sup>
- Teenagers in Britain are matched in Europe only by their counterparts in Ireland and Denmark for the amount of alcohol they consume and the prevalence of alcohol-related problems they experience.<sup>35</sup>

### Immigration

- Unaccompanied asylum-seeking children are 7 times less likely to receive refugee status than someone aged 25–29.<sup>36</sup>
- A total of 3,996 unaccompanied asylum-seeking children were being supported in London under the provisions of the Children Act in December 1999.<sup>37</sup>

11 FEANTSA, (1998), *Youth Homelessness in the European Union*.

12 Eurostat 1998.

13 Children’s Society, (1999), *Still Running: Children on the Streets*.

14 Government Statistical Service, (June 2000), *Households Below Average Income 1999/2000*, as cited in *Tax and benefits briefing paper*, Child Poverty Action Group, 2002.

15 Department for Social Security, (1999), *Households Below Average Income*.

16 DfEE, 1999, op.cit.

17 J. Coleman, (1999), *Key Data on Adolescence*, Trust for the Study of Adolescence.

18 DfEE statistics, (1999).

19 Youth Cohort Study, (1995), *Truancy and Youth Transitions*.

20 Office for National Statistics, (1997), *Adult Literacy in Britain*.

21 Home Office, (1998), *The 1998 British Crime Survey*.

22 Home Office, (1999), *Statistical Bulletin: Cautions, court proceedings and sentencing*.

23 Home Office, (January 2001), *Prison Population Brief, England and Wales*.

24 See, for example, S. Hood, (2001) *The State of London’s Children Report*, Office of the Children’s Rights Commissioner for London, which collates some of the evidence.

25 P. Cawson et al, (2000), NSPCC, *Child Maltreatment in the UK: A Study of the Prevalence of Child Abuse and Neglect*.

26 Department of Health, (2000), *Statistical Bulletin: Children looked after in England 1999/2000*.

27 Department of Health, (2001), *National Strategy for Sexual Health and HIV: Consultation*.

28 Office for National Statistics, (1999), *Conception Statistics*.

29 Social Exclusion Unit, (1999), *Teenage Pregnancy*.

30 Department of Health, (1999), *Saving Lives: Our Healthier Nation*.

31 The Mental Health Foundation, (2001), *Turned Upside Down: Developing community-based crisis services for 16–25 year-olds experiencing a mental health crisis*.

32 J. Bynner, E. Ferri and P. Shepherd, (1997), *Twenty-something in the 1990s*, as cited in Social Exclusion Unit’s *PAT 12 Report*, 2000.

33 Office for National Statistics, (1994), *Survey of Psychiatric Morbidity in Adults*.

34 EMCDDA, (1998), *Annual report on the state of the drugs problem in the European Union*.

35 *Ibid*

36 Amnesty International, (1999), *Most Vulnerable of all: The Treatment of Unaccompanied Refugee Children in the UK*.

37 Hood op. cit.



### 3.3 Summary

There is a wide range of pressures that can impact on a young person and lead to a need for support. Some pressures are associated with the process of adolescent transition and are likely to affect all young people to a greater or lesser extent. These can range from emotional insecurity arising from a developing adult identity to practical concerns over moving into one's own home for the first time. The degree of support required will vary tremendously from individual to individual. In addition, there is a significant minority of young people that experiences far greater difficulties related to their social exclusion. Such difficulties might be associated with poverty, family problems, cultural factors or disadvantaged neighbourhoods. These young people are particularly vulnerable to experiencing problems at school or work, developing mental health problems or problems with drugs and alcohol, finding themselves in housing need, becoming victims of crime or abuse, and becoming involved with the criminal justice system. Such problems might be expected to lead to significant levels of need for both rights-based and personal advice. The following chapter will examine evidence of the actual range and extent of young people's advice needs.

## 4 Young people's advice needs

Professor Hazel Genn, in one of the most wide-ranging and influential surveys yet conducted into the experiences of ordinary citizens in finding solutions to their legal problems, found that:

*'Younger people were more likely to have experienced [justiciable/legal] problems than their older counterparts ... younger respondents were less likely to obtain advice.'*<sup>38</sup>

Genn's findings encapsulate the unacceptable marginalisation of young people from the mainstream of advice provision in the UK. However, in a reflection of the inferior legal status often accorded to 'children', her research was confined to assessing the incidence of legal problems amongst people aged 18 and over. It fails, therefore, either to throw light on the significant legal advice needs of children and young people aged under 18 or to assess the extent of young people's need for advice, and their advice-seeking behaviour, in relation to non-legal matters.

Whilst little national data is available on the extent of young people's needs for advice and their likelihood of obtaining it, Genn's findings are supported by local studies, advice agencies' service statistics and anecdotal evidence. This and the following chapter will

draw on such evidence in an attempt to further illustrate the issues.

### 4.1 Range of need

Young people's needs for advice are diverse and reflect the underlying causes identified in the previous chapter. The type and range of legal issues with which young people present do not follow the same patterns as for adults. A study in Scotland highlighted the gap between young people's needs and legal services provided by solicitors:

*'What was clear ... was that the law was increasingly affecting many aspects of their lives. However they had different legal problems because they had a different legal status from adults. Their needs were more diverse than simply family law, juvenile justice and child protection.'* (Gallagher, 1999)

The legal position of young people is indeed different from that of adults in many key areas of policy. In some instances, such as the national minimum wage and housing benefit provision, their rights and entitlements are inferior to those of adults or are unclear or contradict each other. In other cases, young people are entirely excluded from protection from the law. This confusing legal context can give rise to complex legal situations experienced by individuals and to a corresponding need for legal expertise in services tailored to young people's specific problems.

Figure 1 is an attempt to demonstrate the range of legal and non-legal issues with which young people typically present at Youth Access member agencies and whether advice or counselling is likely to be the most appropriate intervention. It should be noted that the graph is intended to provide a basic guide only, as any attempt to categorise a given issue as always being of a legal nature or requiring an advice intervention, for example, will be foiled by exceptions. Further, there is a need for additional interventions, such as the provision of information and personal support, across the range of subjects represented.

Unfortunately, there is currently no reliable national data available relating to the relative incidence of need amongst young people for advice on specific subjects, although Youth Access hopes to encourage, through the development of its new YouthSTAT statistical classification system,<sup>39</sup> more consistent data collection by advice agencies targeting young people.

Often it can be hard to disentangle the emotional, practical, personal and legal issues affecting a young

38 H. Genn with National Centre for Social Research, (1999), *Paths to Justice: what people do and think about going to law.*

39 J. Kenrick, (2000), *YouthSTAT: statistical monitoring for youth information, advice and counselling services*, Youth Access.

person. Genn's research, whilst focused on the general public's legal difficulties, confirmed that problems generally tend to come in clusters, whereby the existence of one problem, if not dealt with in a timely fashion, can lead to a 'cascade effect':

*'certain types of situations can have a cascade effect ... those who seek advice ostensibly about a single issue may have a bundle of underlying problems or difficulties that require unpacking before any viable resolution can be achieved ... The financial vulnerability, emotional impact, and other consequences that can flow from many kinds of justiciable problem have implications for the type of advice and assistance that is needed ...'* (Genn, 1999)

Just as legal problems can have an emotional impact, so issues often worked with in the context of counselling,

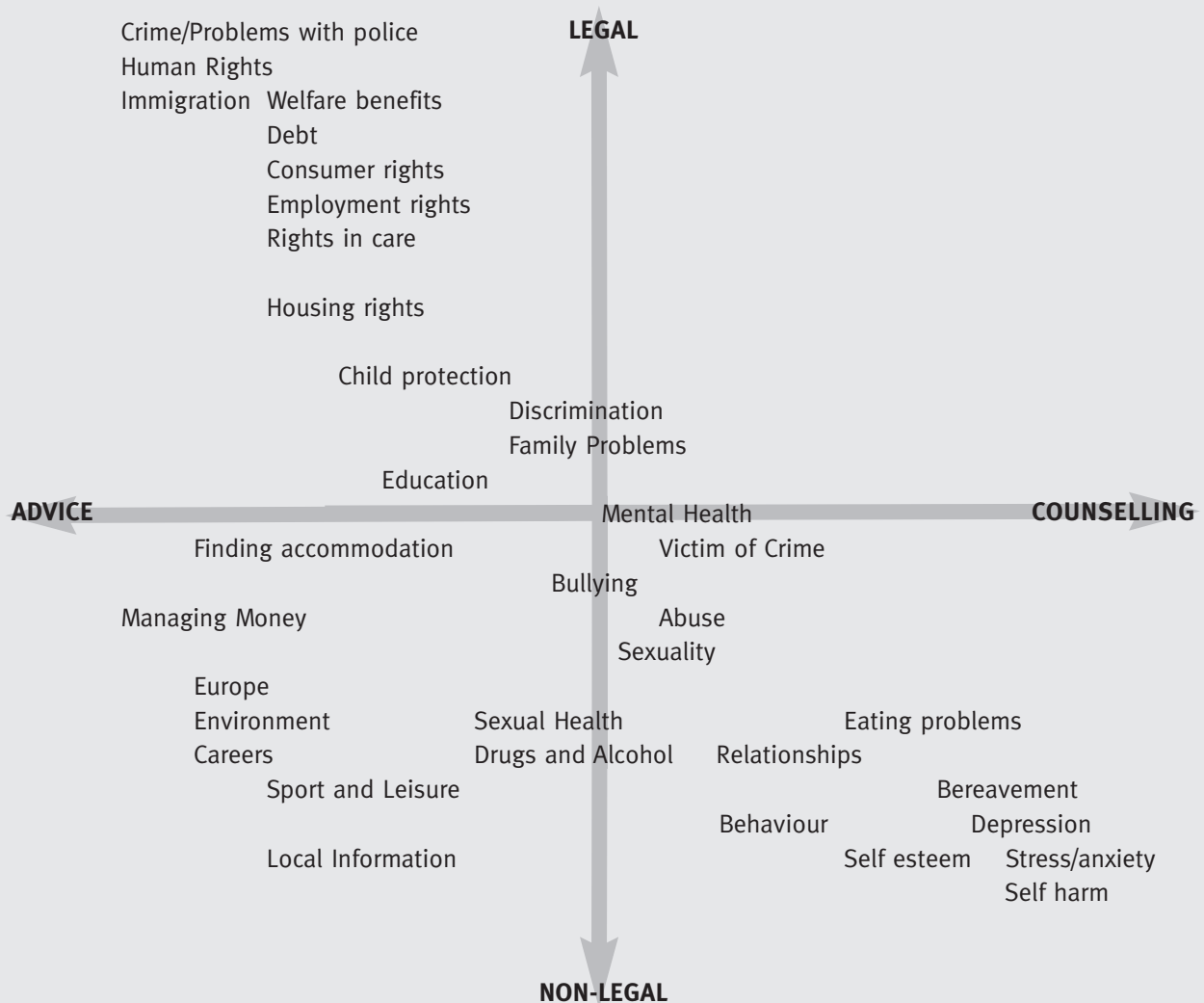
such as bereavement or depression, can also lead to a practical or legal problem requiring advice. Hence, there is often an urgent need to tackle a range of issues simultaneously. Research commissioned by the National Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux into young people's use of CABx confirmed a need for services that can help with emotional as well as legal issues:

*'The young people seemed to be asking for counselling support as much as factual information and were concerned that they might be referred on to someone else by the Bureau.'* (NACAB, 1995)

This complex interrelationship of issues and needs has clear implications for those planning help services for young people. Chapter 6 discusses the relative success of different models of advice delivery in meeting this blend of emotional, practical, legal and personal needs.

**Figure 1: The range of young people's needs for advice and counselling**

Graph plots common presenting issues/enquiries according to the likelihood of the presence of a legal aspect and the most likely appropriate intervention



## 4.2 Extent of need

Genn found that 52% of 18–24 year olds surveyed, higher than any other age group and more than twice as many as certain age groups, had experienced at least one justiciable problem during the previous five years.<sup>40</sup>

Recent needs assessments carried out by Community Legal Service Partnerships<sup>41</sup> have suggested the presence of high levels of need for legal advice amongst young people, but have been insufficiently comprehensive to provide firm conclusions on the precise extent of that need.

In addition to the need for legal advice, it can be asserted, despite the lack of data, that it is likely that young people have very significant levels of need for personal advice on matters such as drugs and alcohol, sexual health and relationships. Certainly, Youth Access' member agencies report these as major areas of work – in contrast to the work of mainstream advice agencies – suggesting that young people tend to have greater needs for advice on such subjects than other age groups.

Local feasibility studies commissioned to assess the need for new generalist advice services for young people invariably indicate a significant unmet need. For example, a feasibility study carried out in 1998 to determine the need for a new youth information and advice service in Kilburn found that as many as 78% of young people surveyed had either experienced or helped friends with difficulties that required advice.<sup>42</sup>

## 4.3 Needs of specific groups

It is important to remember that young people are not a homogenous group. Age, gender and ethnic background, for example, are factors likely to affect patterns of need.

There is evidence suggesting that the incidence of need for rights-based advice on matters such as housing and benefits may increase amongst young people aged 18 and over, but remains significant for 13–17 year olds. The Kilburn study found that

*'the needs amongst 18+, the types and acuteness of problems being encountered, and their own recognition of their need, are all more than in the younger age group.'* (Gold, 1998)

Similarly, a study in Wandsworth found that over 16 year olds were significantly more likely than under 16s to want advice on benefits, finance and other legal matters.<sup>43</sup> Given the fact that many legal rights and entitlements are only acquired at age 16 or 18, an increase in need for rights-based advice at these ages might be expected. However, both the Wandsworth study and the National Youth Agency's statistics on the use of

Information Shops suggest that the incidence of need for personal advice on matters such as sexual health, drugs and alcohol is greatest amongst younger age groups.<sup>44</sup> Indeed, Youth Access' membership is working increasingly with 10–13 year-olds on these subjects.

There is some evidence to suggest that girls are more likely than boys to want and seek advice on issues such as schoolwork, relationships and sexual health, whilst boys are more likely to want and seek advice on issues such as benefits, debt, housing and drugs.<sup>45</sup> However, there is no data available to test whether or not these patterns of thought and behaviour relate directly to actual levels of need.

Given statistics showing levels of racism and the disproportionate incidence of bullying, school exclusions, unemployment, mental health problems and involvement with the criminal justice system amongst the young Afro-Caribbean population, it can be asserted with some confidence that the need for legal advice on discrimination, education, benefits, mental health and crime will tend to be higher in areas with relatively large Afro-Caribbean populations. Similarly, areas with high numbers of unaccompanied asylum-seekers are likely to experience relatively high need for immigration advice.

Other client groups with specific needs and which experience generally high levels of need for advice, which will need to be borne in mind by service planners, include:

- looked after young people
- care leavers
- young people with disabilities
- young people with learning difficulties
- children in refugee and asylum-seeking families
- young carers
- young mothers
- young people in custody
- unemployed young people
- homeless young people, runaways and other young people in housing need
- young people with mental health problems
- children of travellers
- children with special educational needs

<sup>40</sup> Genn op. cit.

<sup>41</sup> See, for example, Strategic Plans produced by Darlington CLSP (2001) and Medway CLSP (2001).

<sup>42</sup> M. Gold, (1998), *Asking for it: Kilburn Youth Information and Advice Project feasibility study*, Camden CAB.

<sup>43</sup> Policy Unit, Wandsworth Connexions, (2001), *Survey of 13–19 year olds*.

<sup>44</sup> See, for example, National Youth Agency's statistics on use of Information Shops.

<sup>45</sup> See, for example, Wandsworth Connexions survey (2001) and annual reports submitted to Youth Access by its members.

#### 4.4 Summary

Young people's needs are complex and diverse, encompassing the need for support on legal, practical, personal and emotional matters. Certain sub-groups of young people, such as care leavers and young people with mental health problems, have particularly high and specific needs for advice which must be taken into account by service planners.

Despite a lack of conclusive national evidence, it can be asserted with some confidence that the level of need amongst young people overall for rights-based advice (i.e. on matters such as housing, benefits, employment rights and crime) is high compared to other age groups and may increase significantly in relation to certain categories of law from the age of 16 in line with enhanced rights and entitlements. The type and range of legal issues affecting young people should not be assumed to follow the established patterns for adults.

In addition, young people often require information and advice on matters such as bullying, drugs and alcohol, relationships, sexual health and careers, and emotional support and counselling in relation to matters such as depression, abuse and low self-esteem. Such need may arise for some children and young people as early as age 10. Due to the difficulty of disentangling the legal, practical, personal and emotional issues from one another, there can often be an urgent need to tackle a range of issues simultaneously.

## 5 Young people's advice-seeking behaviour

There has been a perception in some quarters that advice services established to cater for the general population are equally available to young people as to any other client group if only they chose to make use of them. Young people's unique patterns of advice-seeking behaviour have never, to our knowledge, been studied in depth by legal advice policy makers or funders. This chapter will aim to piece together a fuller picture of young people's advice-seeking behaviour by examining evidence of the likelihood of young people in need seeking and obtaining advice, young people's awareness of their rights and of advice services and some of the psychological barriers confronting young people in accessing those services.

#### 5.1 Likelihood of young people obtaining advice

Professor Genn found that 18–24 year olds who had experienced legal problems were considerably less likely than other age groups to have obtained advice about those problems. Most startlingly, people aged 45–54 were found to be three times more likely than 18–24 year olds to have obtained advice.<sup>46</sup> Of concern is the fact that Genn's findings have been confirmed by a string of other studies, some of which indicate that the disparity may be even more pronounced than she found.

Early research by Community Legal Service Partnerships has confirmed this phenomenon:

*'The difficulty of ensuring young people access legal advice has been identified as a priority issue. There is a perception that such people are not obtaining advice on a broad range of legal problems. There is an urgent need to improve access.'* (Darlington CLSP, 2001)

Gallagher found that only one young person out of 213 12–18 year olds surveyed in Scotland had ever approached a CAB, and eight a solicitor, about anything at all.<sup>47</sup> She also found that young people were far more likely to seek advice on issues concerning their health, particularly in relation to drugs, alcohol and sexual health, than they were to seek advice on social welfare law issues, such as benefits, housing and employment. Similarly, Gold found that less than 10% of young people surveyed in North London that had experienced a problem concerning employment, housing or benefits had visited a CAB, solicitor or other mainstream advice provider for help.<sup>48</sup> These findings contrast with Genn's finding that 68% of the general public as a whole had taken legal advice at least once in the past.<sup>49</sup>

In addition, those young people who do obtain advice are prone to delay seeking help, often rendering their problems considerably more difficult to resolve, and to abandon their case without pursuing it to a satisfactory conclusion.

Understanding and addressing the reasons why young people fail to obtain timely advice is vital, for the impact of such a failure on the individuals concerned can contribute to, exacerbate or perpetuate social exclusion and can lead to the 'cascade effect' identified by Genn.

In analysing the behaviour of the general public, Genn identified a number of reasons why some people

<sup>46</sup> Genn op. cit.

<sup>47</sup> Gallagher op. cit.

<sup>48</sup> Gold op. cit.

<sup>49</sup> Genn op. cit.

failed to seek advice. The most common reasons included: a feeling that nothing could be done about the problem or that it was too much trouble to get advice; the inaccessibility of good quality advice; previous negative experience of legal advisers or legal processes; a sense of powerlessness to overcome some problems; and alienation from the legal system. Some of these reasons are echoed in the results from a recent survey of nearly a thousand 13–19 year old secondary school pupils in Wandsworth. Those who expressed a worry about an issue but did not seek advice were asked why:

*'The single largest group said they knew the problem would sort itself out but a larger number expressed some degree of unawareness/uncertainty about the advice available. 22% said they didn't know where to go and 31% said they did not think anyone could help.'* (Wandsworth Connexions, 2001)

The remainder of this chapter will examine the roots of young people's advice-seeking behaviour in more detail and examine the psychological barriers that confront young people when they need advice.

## 5.2 Awareness of rights

Levels of awareness amongst children and young people of the fact they have rights, let alone the detail of those rights, appear to be relatively low. A recent study in London found that only 38% of children and young people who were asked if they knew they had rights said 'yes'.<sup>50</sup> Gallagher, meanwhile, found that although the Scottish children and young people in her study tended to know that they had rights, *'the majority had only a vague idea of what those rights were'*.<sup>51</sup> Clearly, if an individual is unable to place their problems within the context of their possession of a set of rights, then they will be unlikely to progress to the next step of seeking help. A lack of knowledge of how to exercise rights and of help services available merely compounds the inability to obtain a solution.

Yet the phenomenon of low awareness of the possession of rights appears not to be linked to any lack of interest in the concept of rights on the part of children and young people themselves. On the contrary, a needs assessment conducted by Save the Children found that children and young people in focus groups *'wanted to know more about rights and how to use them'*.<sup>52</sup> Similarly, a study by the Office of the Children's Rights Commissioner for London found that many children and young people either possessed strong views about rights or were delighted to discover they had them at all.<sup>53</sup>

A general low level of awareness of rights amongst

children and young people is more likely to be explained by the fact that, before the recent incorporation of citizenship education into the national curriculum, there was no coherent or consistent structure for teaching pupils and students about their rights and responsibilities. Indeed, it could be argued that society has been reluctant to afford rights to a group it suspects of being unable to exercise them responsibly. It is hoped that the incorporation into UK law, by the Human Rights Act 1998, of the European Convention on Human Rights offers the prospect of a shift towards a more rights-based culture which will encourage young citizens to gain early knowledge of their rights and how to exercise them as a foundation for taking a more active role in society.

However, Gallagher's findings contain a warning that such progress may prove hard in relation to some groups. Underlying the *'lively interest'* in their rights displayed by most young people, she found a cynicism amongst those with the greatest needs for advice:

*'The majority were enthusiastic, keen to know more about their rights and wanted to have access to information on their rights and the law, so that they could exercise their rights with greater confidence. However, some who had specific legal needs, such as those who were involved in the children's hearing system, tended to be apathetic and cynical.'* (Gallagher, 1999)

## 5.3 Awareness of advice services

There is substantial evidence suggesting that young people's awareness of the existence of local advice services that could help them is low. For example, Medway Community Legal Service Partnership noted that:

*'many young people appear to be unaware of the services which are available to them ... much work needs to be done with this client group to raise awareness.'* (Medway CLSP, 2001)

Levels of awareness of services will clearly be affected by local factors, but may also depend on the nature of the problem and the age of the young person. A study in North London found that, whilst awareness of services able to advise on training and careers was relatively high, use and awareness of rights-based

50 *Sort It Out! Revisited*, Sue Sharpe, Office of Children's Rights Commissioner for London, Feb. 2002.

51 Gallagher op. cit.

52 N. Chapman, M. Cross, R. McFarlane, I. Maclagan, (1999), *Oxfordshire Children's Rights Needs Assessment Report*, Save the Children.

53 Sharpe op. cit.

advice services was much lower.<sup>54</sup> Awareness of where to obtain help was found to be lowest of all in relation to education, immigration and disability issues. Significantly, younger age groups were found to have lower recognition of their need for advice and to be substantially less likely to know where to obtain it than over 18s.

It also seems likely that levels of awareness of services may be lowest of all amongst those young people that are most in need of advice. For example, a Children's Society report cited the lack of information available to young people on where to seek out confidential advice, both before and after they run away, as a significant contributory factor to the problem of young runaways.<sup>55</sup>

It is suggested that raising awareness of services that can help young people should be a priority for policy makers, planners and providers of advice services. Careful thought, taking account of local factors, is needed to devise successful methodologies for 'marketing' services to this client group. Citizenship education delivered by teachers as part of the PSHE curriculum, community education delivered by advice workers, strategic use of new technologies and targeted publicity certainly all have roles to play.

However, it should be noted that simply raising awareness of the existence of services may be insufficient and should be supplemented by firming up the understanding of children and young people about precisely what advice services do. There is some evidence that young people tend to know very little about the work of agencies like Citizens Advice Bureaux and Law Centres and that their frequently negative perceptions of such agencies are partly reassessed once they have gained first hand knowledge – Chapter 6 explores this issue further.

#### **5.4 Psychological barriers**

The reasons for young people failing to obtain advice undoubtedly go beyond simple lack of awareness. One study concluded that the problem is exacerbated by the fact that those young people who do know what services are available may not use them because they do not believe they can help them.<sup>56</sup> The reasons for such a belief or attitude are complex, but include a number of psychological barriers to seeking or obtaining advice that appear to be significant. Some of these barriers can be overcome by advice agencies' adoption of age-sensitive service characteristics (see Chapter 7), but it is first necessary to gain a clear understanding of their causes and nature.

#### **5.4.1 Powerlessness and disaffection**

Many young people needing advice will be suffering from a lack of confidence or self-esteem. They may not be used to being listened to and taken seriously. This may lead them to believe that their problems do not warrant help or will be trivialised by adult professionals. Alternatively, it may imbue them with a sense of powerlessness about their problems. Such feelings of worthlessness, helplessness and powerlessness were typical characteristics of Genn's 'lumpers', representing the 5% of the general public she identified as failing to take any action to deal with their legal problems.<sup>57</sup> In our (untested) view, it is extremely likely that a far more significant proportion of young people might fall into this category, since their very dependency and lack of autonomy in many areas of their lives can feed a sense of powerlessness.

Another characteristic of people failing to obtain advice identified by Genn was alienation from the legal system. The general disaffection of Britain's youth and their lack of engagement in social affairs and politics has been well documented. It can be evidenced in, for example, the exceptionally low 39% turnout at the 2001 General Election amongst under 25 year olds registered to vote.<sup>58</sup> Such disaffection is also to be found in relation to the legal system. Recent research conducted by the Consumers' Association found that, when compared to other socially excluded groups, '*young people had the worst experiences and the worst opinion of the legal system.*'<sup>59</sup> Their report put this down to:

*'the cynicism and the complete lack of trust in the legal system ... The level of disenfranchisement was such that the young people in this sample just scorned the idea that legal safeguards could exist for their protection.'* (Consumers' Association, 2000)

Similarly, Gallagher found that those who had encountered the legal system and processes in Scotland neither understood them nor felt they were child or young person friendly. Most felt peripheral to and alienated from the whole process, but felt they had no alternative other than to accept what was provided:

*'Many [children and young people] ... viewed the law negatively – as a system to be used against them rather than for their benefit.'* (Gallagher, 1999)

54 Gold op. cit.

55 Children's Society op. cit.

56 Wandsworth Connexions op. cit.

57 Genn op. cit.

58 Government figures released after 2001 General Election, as reported in *The Guardian*.

59 Consumers' Association, (2000), *The Community Legal Service: Access for all?*

It is hardly surprising, in this context, that few young people are motivated to pursue their rights with the aid of an adviser or a solicitor. The result is apathy and an ineffectiveness in making demands, either individually or collectively, for support to meet their needs, a phenomenon that appears to be most acute in relation to disadvantaged groups of young people, such as those in the care system.

Young people's perceptions of their unequal treatment by the legal system are likely to continue whilst 'legalised discrimination'<sup>60</sup> continues in national policy making.

It is suggested that there is a need for Government, perhaps guided by the Children and Young People's Unit or a Children's Rights Commissioner, to review the effects of current legislation, such as social security regulations restricting the benefit entitlement of under 25 year olds, including its contribution to young people's social exclusion.

#### **5.4.2 Trust, respect, confidentiality and control**

A pre-requisite for any service wanting to carry out effective work with young people is mutual trust. However, there is a perception amongst many young people that society does not respect them. They may be used to being treated as a problem – and, sometimes, discriminated against – by legislators, employers, officials, parents and shopkeepers alike. They may have learnt not to expect to be listened to by adults. In this environment, it is perhaps rational for a vulnerable young person not to expect equal treatment or a sympathetic ear at an advice centre run by and primarily for adults. There appears to be a need to tackle negative stereotyping of young people so that they are perceived as, and can be empowered to become, competent citizens rather than victims or villains.

Key to building relationships of trust with young people are assurances about confidentiality:

*'Whether they could be offered confidentiality significantly influenced who they would approach for advice.'* (Gallagher, 1999)

Many young people hold strong concerns about their parents, teachers or friends finding out that they have sought help, particularly if their enquiry concerns a problem at home or school. They may fear the stigma attached to seeking help or may fear acute embarrassment if the nature of a sensitive problem, concerning abuse or bullying for example, is discovered by their peers. Many young people fear being labelled or bullied because of seeking help. They do not want to be identified as having a problem or being ill. It appears that there may be a particular risk of a stigma being attached to seeking help for mental health

difficulties, although this may be most acute in relation to receiving counselling<sup>61</sup> rather than seeking advice.

Many young people are reluctant to automatically trust a service and may wish to test it out, perhaps by starting off with a relatively minor or trivial enquiry before pursuing the more sensitive enquiries that may have caused them to seek help in the first place. NACAB's research found that:

*'... to use the Service with confidence, they would need a way of checking out confidentiality and trust issues with the adviser. It was suggested that this checking could be done by going to the Bureau with another type of query and gauging the kind of response they got and how they felt about the adviser.'* (NACAB, 1995)

The attitudes and skills of staff are vital in this process. Users will be looking for signs that advisers will listen to them, understand them and take their problems seriously. Demonstrating respect, confidentiality and independence are all prerequisites if trust is to be built.

A further psychological barrier can be a fear of loss of control over what will happen once personal information has been imparted to an adviser. Many young people have little trust in adults' ability to respect their confidentiality and may fear records being made or passed on without their knowledge or against their wishes. Often they may be feeling confused by events in their lives or oppressed by adults when they seek advice and may need to feel they have some kind of self-determination. Being told what is best for them or having someone doing things for them without adequate explanation and consultation can exacerbate this sense of lack of control and further alienate some young people.

#### **5.5 Summary**

The previous chapter concluded that young people experience high levels of need for advice. The evidence uncovered during the research for this chapter suggests that, in addition, young people frequently do not obtain the advice they need. There appear to be particular barriers to obtaining legal advice. The findings of Genn and others point to young people being significantly less likely than other age groups to have obtained

60 C. Howarth and C. Street, (2000), *Sidelined: Young adults' access to services*, New Policy Institute. (Howarth and Street used the term 'legalised discrimination' to describe the unequal and lesser rights and entitlements accorded by UK law to young people)

61 See, for example, C. Wilson, (2001), *Breaking Down The Barriers: Key evaluation findings on young people's mental health needs*, Youth Access.

advice about their legal problems. Some young people do not take any action to seek advice because they feel, for a variety of reasons, that it would not be worth it. Others try to obtain advice, but their action is either delayed, half-hearted, abandoned or thwarted.

There appear to be many reasons for young people's inability to obtain the advice they need. For some, it may be due to their own lack of confidence or self-esteem, to a feeling that their problems do not warrant help or that no one can help. For others, it may be due to their lack of awareness of their possession of rights or of how to exercise them, of the existence of appropriate services or of precisely what those services do. In other cases, a failure to seek or obtain advice may be related to a lack of trust in adult professionals to treat them with respect and their personal information confidentially or to a lack of trust in society and in the legal system. Of considerable concern is the evidence suggesting that those with the greatest needs, often the most socially excluded, may be amongst those least likely to obtain the advice they need.

## 6 Where do young people go for advice?

Previous chapters have identified that young people experience high levels of need for advice, but are less likely than other groups to obtain professional advice. That begs the question: to whom do young people turn for help when they have a problem? This chapter aims to: identify the sources of advice most trusted by young people; examine young people's use of professional services; and discuss the merits and limitations of different forms and models of advice provision.

### 6.1 Characteristics young people seek in an adviser

One of the oft-cited benefits of the CLS Quality Mark is to provide a recognisable badge of quality that instills confidence in clients and potential clients that they will obtain a quality service. But is a badge of quality really likely to make any difference to how a young person selects their source of help when they need advice? The available evidence suggests that organisational and technical competence barely features on the list of factors influencing young people's choice of advice provider, perhaps reflecting an expectation that adults 'know' and are competent.

Feaviour's research confirmed the received wisdom in the youth information, advice and counselling field that the key characteristics young people seek in any source

of support include confidentiality, friendliness, trustworthiness, safety and a non-judgemental culture.<sup>62</sup>

In Gallagher's study, a researcher asked children and young people what personal qualities they thought the ideal legal adviser should have:

*'Virtually all of the children and young people identified characteristics such as: patience, understanding, a sympathetic manner, being approachable, having good listening skills and being easy to talk to.'* (Gallagher, 1999)

When young people were asked to identify factors making the source of advice more approachable, they mentioned trust, knowledge, confidentiality, having the problem treated seriously, not having a solution imposed, having positive action taken and a lack of jargon.<sup>63</sup>

Similarly, research conducted by Crime Concern<sup>64</sup> found that:

*'Young people ... identified the need to have access to advice and information which would be sensitive and appropriate. In particular, such advice and help should not be judgemental about a young person's lifestyle but objective, practical and supportive.'* (Pettersson, 1994)

NACAB, too, concluded that:

*'Young people are subject to so many forms of authority – school, parents, professionals, police – that they wanted to be able to get advice from someone who did not have any authority over them and who would not be judgemental.'* (NACAB, 1995)

Although young people tend not to cite familiarity as a factor they consciously look for in a source of advice, it appears that it may be the one thing that instills confidence that all the other characteristics they seek will be found. Hence, Gallagher found that:

*'the overwhelming majority would approach people or organisations which were known to them.'* (Gallagher, 1999)

This reliance on familiarity leads many young people to approach non-expert sources of help, often individuals, in preference to professional advice agencies.

### 6.2 Informal sources of advice

In surveys, young people most commonly identify family, friends, teachers, youth workers and family doctors as the people they are most likely to go to for

62 Feaviour op. cit.

63 Gallagher op. cit.

64 G. Pettersson, (1994), *A Report on Consultation with Young People in Warwickshire*, Crime Concern.



advice on a range of issues.<sup>65</sup> Parents and friends appear to be the most important sources of all. One study found that 43% of young people surveyed said they got all the help and advice they needed from their parents.<sup>66</sup> There is some evidence that girls are most likely to seek advice from friends, whilst boys are more likely to turn to parents.<sup>67</sup>

Despite their frequent reliance on informal sources of advice, many young people recognise the limitations of such help. There are some very personal issues, such as sex, drugs and the breakdown of peer and family relationships, which children and young people often feel uncomfortable discussing with their parents.<sup>68</sup> They sometimes express mistrust of friends because they fear they might tell someone else or laugh at them. They worry that teachers will not keep the information they impart to them private and confidential. Some children and young people may also be aware that such individuals are likely to have limited knowledge and expertise on some more technical matters, such as complex legal issues.

There is much evidence to suggest that youth workers are an important source of advice, particularly for the more disadvantaged and disaffected young people who are most likely to come into contact with statutory and voluntary youth services. Research for Darlington CLSP found that:

*‘the overwhelming majority [of young people] said they would seek advice from their detached youth workers across all subject areas.’* (Darlington CLSP, 2001)

Gallagher found that youth workers came third behind friends and parents as the most trusted source of advice. She reported that children and young people found youth workers approachable, non-judgemental and *‘on the same wavelength’* and trusted them to keep confidentiality.<sup>69</sup>

Whilst most youth workers, teachers, parents and other non-expert sources do not possess the specific knowledge, notably on legal matters, to provide a competent in-depth advice service, they will inevitably continue to be approached by young people for advice and should be considered, therefore, by professional advice providers and policy makers as vital conduits for any information targeted at young people.

### **6.3 Youth Information, Advice, Counselling and Support Services**

#### **6.3.1 What are they and what do they do?**

Youth Access estimates that there are around 600 youth information, advice, counselling and support (YIACS) services operating in the UK. The first such service is believed to have opened in Brent in 1961. The

subsequent rapid development of the sector reflected policy concerns within Government that the breakdown of traditional support structures led to a need for young people to have somewhere they could turn to and trust.

YIACS offer early intervention and prevention responses to a wide range of young people through a variety of service models, including the ‘one stop shop’. Although Youth Access’ membership comprises services which offer different combinations of information, advice, counselling and support, the most effective services have been found to be those where young people can access the full range of helping interventions. Typically, agencies have at their core a drop-in service offering comprehensive information covering everything from housing benefit to local leisure opportunities. From the drop-in service, referrals are made, where appropriate, to more specialised in-house services, such as general advice, therapeutic counselling, advocacy, sexual health services, drug and alcohol services, accommodation projects, young carers projects, young refugee projects and careers guidance. Youth Access advocates quality over range of provision where resources are limited. Nevertheless, agencies typically take an unusually broad and holistic approach to their work, within which advice may be only one element.

The diversity of YIACS cannot be overstated, however. Whilst the majority of YIACS operate in the voluntary sector, many are part of or managed by the local statutory Youth Service. They may be very large organisations with up to 100 staff and volunteers or extremely small projects with only one paid member of staff. Some YIACS specialise in particular subject areas, such as drugs, sexual health or employment and training. Others are established to work with specific groups of young people, such as looked after young people, care leavers, young men, young people in housing need or specific ethnic groups.

Membership information reveals that around 75% of YIACS provide advice in addition to information services. Due to the wide range of issues with which young people present, YIACS invariably provide a combination of rights-based and personal advice. Enquiries regarding housing, sexual health, family and relationships, drugs and alcohol and welfare benefits are most common currently.<sup>70</sup>

65 See, for example, NACAB op. cit. (1995), Feaviour op. cit., Gallagher op. cit. and various local needs assessments.

66 Wandsworth Connexions op. cit.

67 *Ibid*

68 See Gallagher op. cit. and NACAB op. cit. (1995).

69 Gallagher op. cit.

70 Based on evidence from Youth Access’ membership surveys (unpublished) and members’ annual reports.

### Characteristics of YIACS

Youth Access' network of members agrees to abide by nationally agreed values and principles which ensure a service's credibility with young people.<sup>71</sup>

There are a number of important characteristics and aims which YIACS share with mainstream advice providers, including being independent, impartial, confidential, accountable, professional and free at the point of access/delivery. The following represent some of the service characteristics which are more specific to YIACS:

- Specialist services for young people – no adult clients
- Wide range of help to cater for holistic needs of young people
- Provision is flexible to ensure responsiveness and availability
- Care is taken to ensure the psychological as well as physical access to the service
- Informal setting to build confidence and respect
- Level of and respect for right to confidentiality difficult to provide in mainstream services
- Voluntary participation and self-referral by users
- User involvement – young people involved in design and delivery of service
- Emphasis on empowerment – clients empowered to make own choices and decisions; control of case kept with client rather than adviser

*'Making information, advice and counselling accessible is at the very core of such work. Agencies have been designed to encourage this ... Clearly confidentiality, informality, independence, a generalist approach and a positive image work toward accessibility and are important to young people.'* (Feavious, 1994)

### 6.3.2 Usage by young people

There is plenty of evidence to support the contention that YIACS generally are effective in reaching and engaging the most disaffected and excluded young people. Gallagher, for example, found that local youth organisations that provided information and advice were by far the most popular source of advice for children and young people where they were given a choice, even beating parents.<sup>72</sup> Indeed, youth-specific information and advice services tend to attract young people in large numbers. Many have their roots in youth work and so possess the service characteristics

required to attract hard to reach groups of young people. Further, trained youth information and advice workers possess the skills and knowledge required to carry out effective one to one advice work or groupwork with this client group.

### 6.3.3 Planning, quality and infrastructure

YIACS are no longer at the margins of youth provision, yet there is continuing evidence of uncoordinated planning and inadequate funding of services affecting the pattern and quality of provision and denying access to significant numbers of young people.

*'Inadequate and patchy services, a lack of resources and partnership working, resulted in young people not being able to access the services they need.'* (Wilson, 2001)

*'The Steering Group agrees with the needs assessment findings that the provision of advice and information to young people in Medway is fragmented ... poorly resourced ... lacking in quality control ... '* (Medway CLSP, 2001)

Although a great many YIACS provide highly competent advice services, with a few offering specialist casework services and representation at tribunals, the quality of advice work undertaken by YIACS can indeed vary. Some of the reasons for this are rooted in the history of the development of the sector. The majority of YIACS trace their origins back to youth work rather than the advice sector. They have traditionally been marginalised from the mainstream of advice provision. The youth advice sector and mainstream advice providers have typically had distant relationships, which have led to poor mutual understanding. YIACS sometimes lack the resources and expertise that would enable them to focus more strongly on the legal aspects of their work, allowing personal advice work to dominate in some agencies over rights-based approaches.

Youth Access' Advice Development Project aims to redress this imbalance by providing the youth advice sector with the resources that will foster the marrying of the best principles of rights-based advice work with the best principles of youth work to produce highly effective holistic advice services for young people. Models of delivery which have been found to be successful, such as the outstanding examples highlighted in this section, need to be promoted,

<sup>71</sup> These are contained in *Youth Access Quality Standards for Youth Information Advice Counselling and Support Services* manual, Youth Access, (1999).

<sup>72</sup> Gallagher op. cit.

### **Successful models of delivery: 1**

#### **Youth Information, Advice and Counselling Service working in partnership with specialist providers**

Eaststreet is a successful youth information, advice and counselling service for young people aged under 25 in Barking and Dagenham. Established in 1997 following a feasibility study that showed it was difficult for young people to obtain the help and support they needed, Eaststreet is based on Youth Access' core values and principles.

Eaststreet provides a range of complementary services under one roof through a series of partnerships with other agencies. At its core is The Information Shop, which provides general information, advice and support on any issue affecting young people, including benefits, housing, education and employment, relationships, sexual health, bullying, drugs and alcohol, careers and leisure. Internet access, job search facilities and CV preparation support are all provided. The Information Shop provides a 'way in' to more specialist services, which include legal advice provided by local solicitors. Eaststreet's 'TLZ' counselling service is seen as an essential complement to its information and advice services, as it enables the agency to meet the emotional and mental health needs of its users around issues such as depression,

abuse, sexuality, eating disorders, bereavement and bullying, which cannot often be dealt with adequately through advice work interventions.

Other specialist services provided include:

- A sexual health clinic provided by the local NHS Trust
- A Refugee Support Project providing information, advice and advocacy for young refugees and asylum-seekers, run by a Family Support Unit
- A drug information and support service run by a local specialist drug project
- Careers advice provided by the local Careers Service
- A multi-media project, funded by the Neighbourhood Support Fund (NSF)
- Basic Skills Tuition provided by the local college

Keys to Eaststreet's success include: its partnership approach to the delivery of specialist services; its client-centred, holistic approach to working with young people; its wide range of services provided under one roof; its high levels of confidentiality, accessibility, informality and flexibility; and the involvement of young people in the running of the service.

replicated and developed. However, the current infrastructure available to support such work remains woefully inadequate, with a sole worker responsible for national youth advice development – this theme will be explored in more detail at 8.1.1.

## **6.4 Mainstream advice services**

### **6.4.1 What are they and what do they do?**

'Mainstream advice services' is a term that can be used to describe principally rights-based advice services established to cater for the general adult population. (Please refer to Chapter 2 for a definition of rights-based advice work). Examples include Citizens Advice Bureaux, Law Centres, independent advice agencies, advice services specialising in specific areas of law (e.g. housing advice centres or welfare rights units) and private sector solicitors firms. They are mainstream in so far as they are seen as providing core advice provision and their fundamental nature and role are generally recognised by funders of advice, by policy makers and, to a lesser extent, by the general adult population that comprises their core client group. Their

services are typically at the heart of the Community Legal Service in England and Wales.

The mainstream advice sector has built up considerable expertise in certain areas of social welfare law, such as welfare benefits, housing, employment, debt, immigration and consumer rights. Many agencies provide a casework service in certain categories of law and some are working at a specialist level, often offering representation at court or tribunal hearings. The extension of Legal Aid contracting has increased the not for profit sector's role in specialist level work and has encouraged it to become increasingly involved in the delivery of advice in emerging categories of law such as education, mental health and community care. Those private practice solicitors firms with CLS Fund contracts may specialise in similar areas of law, but may also or alternatively cover categories such as crime, family law and personal injury.

### **6.4.2 Usage by young people**

There is a considerable body of evidence indicating that young people rarely access mainstream advice services. One study in Sussex found that only one young person out of 110 surveyed about where they would go if they

### **Successful models of delivery: 2**

#### **Youth Information, Advice and Counselling Service with Young People's Law Centre attached**

Youth Action UK provides a wide range of services, including information, advice and counselling and a variety of traditional youth work activities, for young people aged 13 to 25 in the Bromley and Crystal Palace areas. Its Streetwise Young Person's Advice Service (SYPAS) provides general information, advice and assistance on any problem young people may present with, including housing, benefits, sexual health, relationships, employment, education, consumer, debt, bullying, drugs and alcohol. In common with Eaststreet and with many other YIACS, a range of specialist services are provided by other agencies that come to SYPAS to deliver specialist sessions. These include a youth counselling service, a sexual health clinic, substance misuse counselling and a careers advice service.

Following the identification of a huge gap in local specialist level legal advice provision for young people, Youth Action 2000 has established Streetwise Community Law Centre (SCLC) to work alongside and supplement its existing services. SCLC is thought to be the first dedicated young people's Law Centre in the UK.

SCLC's Young Person's Lawyer, supported by an advice worker from SYPAS, a youth worker and a Connexions Personal Adviser, provides advice, assistance, advocacy and legal representation on matters requiring specialist legal help. Areas of work include: appealing against benefit decisions; defending possession proceedings; pursuing cases of unfair dismissal; challenging school exclusions;

upholding young people's human rights; advocating on behalf of looked after young people taking cases through formal complaints procedures; and supporting young people caught up in the criminal justice system. Uniquely, SCLC is a member of both the Law Centres Federation and Youth Access.

Keys to the success of SCLC include:

- its close working relationship with SYPAS, which can deal with less complex issues and make appropriate referrals without the usual failure rate experienced when referring young people to solicitors and specialist legal advice services;
- its proximity to other specialist services, such as the youth counselling service;
- its ability to operate as an integral part of both the Community Legal Service and the Connexions Service;
- its potential to attract funding from a variety of sources to make it sustainable.

SCLC plans to expand its services in the future to provide outreach services, second tier services (including casework support to other local advice agencies), work experience and training opportunities for young law students and a more extensive email advice service.

Youth Access and the Law Centres Federation are working together to develop plans for a potential national network of young people's Law Centres and are happy to discuss these plans with interested YIACS, Law Centres and funders.

needed advice on benefits or housing mentioned a mainstream advice agency.<sup>73</sup> Gallagher and Gold also found that young people rarely used mainstream services and had little desire to do so.

An examination of the client profiles of mainstream agencies confirms that many are failing to reach or work with significant numbers of young people. The tentative findings of Community Legal Service Partnerships have confirmed this view. A report for Bristol Community Legal Service Partnership<sup>74</sup> stated:

*'... our findings are alarming. A number of providers reported that they rarely dealt with young, single people, and stated that they wondered where they got their advice.'* (Bristol CLSP, 2000)

Similarly, a needs assessment carried out by Darlington Community Legal Service Partnership, which focused on young people, found that:

*'no respondents said they would go to the CAB and only a small proportion said they would go to a solicitor, largely for divorce or personal injury matters.'* (Darlington CLSP, 2001)

#### **6.4.3 Current capacity to serve young people**

Mainstream providers tend to have less expertise, and

<sup>73</sup> Lewes District Information Shop for Young People, (1996), *Lewes District Project: feasibility study*.

<sup>74</sup> N. Carlton, M. Taylor and M. Stewart, (2000), *Information, Advice and Representation in Bristol*, a report for the Bristol Community Legal Service Partnership.

indeed rarely offer a service, in areas of personal advice work such as health and relationships. Further, due to an understandable desire to serve the general population, they sometimes struggle to attract or meet the needs of certain specific client groups. Most significantly, in the context of this publication, they tend to have a strong adult focus to their provision of services. As an unintentional consequence, many advice agencies and solicitors fail to cater for the specific needs of young people.

Where young people do seek advice from mainstream providers, the style and culture of services and staff's lack of skills and knowledge relevant to working with this client group are frequently not conducive to gaining sufficient trust with clients in order to effectively progress their cases. Mainstream providers can have a credibility problem and may be seen by young people as part of the very establishment and legal process from which they feel so alienated.

The Consumers' Association, in a policy report on the Community Legal Service,<sup>75</sup> went as far as to state that:

*'Adult services such as the CABx are unsuited to the needs of young people.'* (Consumers' Association, 2000)

Whilst this statement could be challenged, it is clear that most mainstream services are not equipped to meet the needs of this client group adequately. The precise reasons for this are complex and probably relate as much to the perceptions and patterns of behaviour of young people as to the inadequacies of mainstream services. Young people clearly want to access services that they perceive to be 'for them', that provide an informal but highly confidential setting, that can cater for their range of needs in a holistic way, where they can be treated with respect by staff that understand them, and which are open at times that fit in with their fast-changing lives. Most mainstream services are simply not focused on meeting these specific demands.

#### 6.4.4 Solicitors

Gallagher found that children and young people in Scotland were generally wary of approaching solicitors for advice and tended to use them only when they had little option, for example in relation to criminal matters:

*'very little of what they had to say was positive. They were perceived as being too formal, remote and not concerned with the problems with which many children and young people have to deal, the opposite qualities to those identified in people such as youth workers.'* (Gallagher, 1999)

The children and young people surveyed by Gallagher also found solicitors judgemental, old fashioned and unapproachable and said that solicitors' use of legal

jargon and their lack of explanations alienated them. Gallagher found a gap between the legal knowledge of solicitors and the kinds of information, advice and representation that children and young people had identified as being important and relevant to them and recommended that solicitors' skills and knowledge gaps could be addressed through practical training. Gallagher concluded that solicitors' traditional ways of working had limited effect in meeting the needs of young people:

*'While it might be appropriate for children and young people to consult with solicitors in certain situations, findings suggested that, in addition, there was a need for a specialised legal service dedicated to meeting their legal needs.'* (Gallagher, 1999)

#### 6.4.5 Citizens Advice Bureaux

*(Note: This section is headed 'Citizens Advice Bureaux' to reflect the availability of evidence referring specifically to CABx. There was no comparable evidence available to the author relating to other mainstream advice services, such as Law Centres and FIAC agencies, although it is unclear to what extent the term 'CAB' is seen by young people surveyed in research studies to represent all mainstream not for profit advice services. It is suggested, therefore, that some of the findings quoted and analysis may apply, to some extent, to other types of mainstream provider.)*

Research conducted for the National Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux<sup>76</sup> for internal use identified young people as one of the most common groups of non-users of CABx:

*'young people have many needs for information and advice but are often reluctant to use mainstream advice agencies such as the CAB'* (NACAB, 1995)

Gallagher found that CABx were one of the most unpopular sources of advice of all for children and young people in Scotland. As many as 96 out of 213 children and young people surveyed (i.e. 45%) said they would *not* approach a CAB for advice, with only 50 (23%) saying they would approach a CAB. When asked to identify for themselves the places they would *like* to go for advice, only 2% mentioned a CAB.<sup>77</sup>

Gallagher concluded that:

*'Overall, the comments of the children and young people revealed that they did not perceive the CAB as being for them.'* (Gallagher, 1999)

<sup>75</sup> Consumers' Association op. cit.

<sup>76</sup> NACAB, op. cit., 1995.

<sup>77</sup> Gallagher op. cit.

### **Successful models of delivery: 3** **CAB outreach service with partnership approach**

Leeds Citizens Advice Bureau established a Young People's Advice Project in September 1998, targeting rights-based advice at 9–25 year olds. Funding of £25,000 per annum over three years was provided by Leeds' Regeneration Partnership Unit, responsible for distributing Single Regeneration Budget Round III funds, and enabled the employment of a dedicated project worker. Earlier research had indicated that young people were under-represented amongst client statistics in local mainstream advice services and that local young people wanted more targeted information and advice provision. The CAB found that the most effective approach in order to reach significant numbers of young people was the delivery of outreach services at carefully chosen venues young people were already attending.

Effective joint working with other organisations was key to the success of the project. More than 100 organisations working with young people in Leeds were contacted. Regular advice sessions were established in a range of venues, including a Further Education College, a housing support centre for young people, a hostel for asylum-seekers, a Bangladeshi Community Centre and a Youth Enquiry Service Cybercafe. Outreach advice was not, in

itself, a new concept to Leeds CAB, but a number of important changes to normal CAB practices were required to make the project work. These included: greater versatility in modes of delivery; targeted publicity (*'The CAB logo in the high street and word of mouth does not reach far enough, soon enough for young people'*);<sup>78</sup> advising groups of young people as well as individuals; and using text messaging to remind clients of appointments. A client-centred approach to advice work, in which clients were more involved in the advice process, *'meant a significant step outside parameters set down in advice training and normal bureau work'*.<sup>79</sup> The single largest area of work was Welfare Benefits. Housing rights, consumer rights, utilities debts and employment rights were the other main areas of enquiry.

An evaluation of the first three years of the project found that:

- young people benefit from a dedicated service tailored to their needs;
- innovative appointment and drop-in based outreach approaches can be successful;
- the service needs to work alongside a range of partners and especially other support services for young people.

There is one survey which contradicts the evidence about CABx mentioned previously. A report written by MORI, commissioned by NACAB, suggests that as many as 21% of all users of CABx were aged 16–24.<sup>80</sup> This finding is very substantially out of line with other research and with the client profile statistics collated by individual CABx, but cannot be dismissed because of the relatively large sample involved. It should be noted that many of the local studies quoted in this publication have surveyed predominantly under 18 year olds. It may be that the 18–24 age group is considerably more likely to use CABx than younger age groups, and this could be linked to both the previously identified phenomenon of the incidence of need for rights-based advice increasing as young people pass the ages of 16 and 18 (see 4.3) and to the greater recognition of the need for advice and the greater awareness of services available possessed by older age groups (see Chapter 5).

Gallagher, moreover, found that those young people that had been to a CAB had had fairly positive

experiences,<sup>81</sup> reinforcing the theory that it is young people's perceptions about the service they will receive rather than any actual poor service which forms the greatest barrier to access. Nevertheless, it should be noted that MORI also found that 16–24 year olds had the lowest levels of satisfaction out of all age groups with the services they received from CABx.<sup>82</sup>

Overall, it must be concluded that CABx rarely meet the needs of young people, but this is, perhaps, unsurprising and not necessarily a poor reflection on CABx. The classic CAB model has not been designed with any one client group in mind. As Gold concluded,

78 Leeds Citizens Advice Bureau Young People's Advice Project, (September 2001), *Advising Young People: What have we learnt?*

79 *Ibid*

80 MORI, (August 1999), *People's Panel: Report for NACAB: The Image of NACAB and Electronic Government.*

81 Gallagher op. cit.

82 MORI op. cit.

### **Successful models of delivery: 4 CAB and Youth Service partnership**

Wymondham CAB in Norfolk agreed a partnership in 1999 with the local Youth Service, who were looking to expand their advice provision. A project was established, in which one CAB worker and one youth worker collaborated to deliver advice to young people out of a dedicated building and via street-work. As well as providing typical CAB-type advice, preventative work aimed at reducing levels of crime and disorder and work challenging young people's negative perceptions

about society and the democratic process was undertaken. The proportion of young people seen by the CAB has risen from 'a barely noticeable amount' to over 8% of the total client group. The bureau's work with young people has enabled it to participate in the Millennium Volunteers scheme and to succeed in a bid to the Community Legal Service Partnership Innovation Budget for funding for a new internet-based advice and information service for young people.

in her feasibility study carried out on behalf of the local CAB service into establishing new advice provision for young people, the CAB:

*'is unable to meet the needs of young people within its current model of service delivery'* (Gold, 1998)

The CAB model does not appear to fit with the qualities and characteristics identified earlier in this Chapter as being those which young people seek in a source of advice.

#### **6.4.6 What is an appropriate role for mainstream services?**

Mainstream advice services undoubtedly have much expertise that needs to be harnessed if young people's needs for rights-based advice, particularly at the more specialist levels, are to be met. There are three obvious ways of doing this. First, it is not unreasonable to expect mainstream services to attempt to improve the current level of accessibility of their generalist services to young people by reviewing their service characteristics.

Second, there is scope for some mainstream agencies to establish specific projects to work with young people through a partnership approach with local YIACS and other youth organisations. As demonstrated by the examples provided in this chapter of successful models of delivery, an increasing number of agencies are doing just that, encouraged by the current focus of mainstream advice funders on excluded client groups. Indeed, funders have had a tendency to direct the vast majority of funding for youth-specific services towards 'innovative' projects led by mainstream advice agencies, with which they may feel more familiar, rather than towards agencies with a track record of providing services to young people.<sup>83</sup>

Third, and perhaps most importantly, mainstream agencies should be building close working relationships

with YIACS and other agencies working with young people in order to improve their mutual understanding, co-operation, skills sharing and referral relationships.

Yet it may be unrealistic to expect most mainstream providers to adapt to meet all of the specific needs of young people, particularly those aged under 18, without greater resources, and without jeopardising the success of the services they provide to their core adult client group.

### **6.5 Connexions Service Personal Advisers**

#### **6.5.1 What are they and what do they do?**

The Connexions Service is being introduced by the Department for Education and Skills to provide '*integrated information, advice, guidance, support and personal development opportunities*'<sup>84</sup> for all 13–19 year olds in England with the key aim of breaking down barriers to learning. Central to the Connexions Service will be a network of Personal Advisers, who will provide a single point of contact for each young person. Personal Advisers will be based in a variety of settings, including schools, Connexions One Stop Shops and voluntary organisations.

For most young people, it is envisaged that '*careers-based information, advice and guidance on an*

<sup>83</sup> See, for example the predominance of CAB-led projects targeting young people, rather than youth agency-led projects expanding legal advice provision, amongst successful bids to the first round of the CLS Partnership Innovation Budget (PIB) in 2001/02. It should be noted, however, that the proposed criteria for the second round of PIB focus to a far greater extent on developing the role of smaller community groups and other agencies which can act as intermediaries between clients and more specialist legal advice providers.

<sup>84</sup> Connexions Service National Unit, (2001), *Working Together: Connexions and youth homelessness agencies*, DfES.

*occasional basis*<sup>85</sup> will mainly be required. However, the Service recognises that some young people may need more intensive help and advice on other issues, such as relationships, finding a home, claiming benefits, overcoming substance dependency and mental health problems. Where an issue goes beyond the competence of a Personal Adviser to deal with it, it is intended that the Personal Adviser will broker access to appropriate specialist services.

Precisely what level of information and advice in different subject areas individual Personal Advisers will undertake will vary according to their individual competence in relation to a range of issues, which in turn will depend on factors such as their previous experience and training.<sup>86</sup> Personal Advisers are currently being drawn from a variety of existing professions, including teaching, social work and youth work, and from the voluntary sector. However, research has shown that by far the greatest number is being recruited from the careers guidance sector, whose funding has been subsumed into Connexions.<sup>87</sup> In addition, a number of existing voluntary and statutory sector workers, such as homelessness workers, drugs workers and care leavers' advisers will be employed by or seconded to the Connexions Service to perform Personal Adviser roles or will deliver the role while remaining within their existing professional context. Interestingly, some Connexions Partnerships are focusing more than others on employing specialist Personal Advisers to provide specialist advice in subjects such as careers, drugs, benefits or housing.

It is already clear that in many areas a substantial proportion of Personal Advisers' work is focusing on the provision of careers advice. The precise role of the generic Personal Adviser in the identification of other issues and the provision of other types of advice remains unclear, not least in relation to legal issues and rights-based advice work.

### **6.5.2 Usage, strengths and weaknesses**

It is too early to assess the levels of usage by young people of Connexions Personal Advisers or the extent to which they are likely to meet the full range of young people's needs for advice. It is also as yet unclear to what extent Connexions PAs will be trusted by young people as an independent source of advice, given that Connexions is a statutory service. There must be some doubts that the Management Information System and the Tracking System which Connexions Partnerships will be using to monitor users will instill the levels of trust and confidentiality which have been demonstrated to be so important in enabling access to services for young people.

Much may depend on the ability of the Connexions

Service to define, both for itself and for its potential users, precisely what service users can expect to receive. Given the mix of legal, practical, personal and emotional issues that create barriers to learning, the success of the Connexions Service may partly rest on the ability of Personal Advisers to widen their focus from the provision of careers guidance. As Crime Concern noted back in 1994:

*'Problems that may be to do with their housing, employment opportunities, health, personal and emotional life can often be the trigger which can affect a young person's attendance and performance at school, college, work or on a training course.'* (Petterson, 1994)

Individual Personal Advisers will not, of course, be expected to be experts on the full range of issues they may have to deal with. Nevertheless, concerns have been raised about the consistency with which the issues requiring specialist interventions can be identified, particularly with regard to the identification of legal issues, and timely referrals made. Moorhead's research into legal advice referrals has shown that individuals and organisations can be reluctant to refer clients for a range of reasons, including that referral can be perceived as failure by the adviser, who may have an unrealistic notion of their competence, or may fail to take place due to a lack of knowledge about or confidence in other providers.<sup>88</sup>

If Personal Advisers are able to identify a range of issues, appropriately define and identify the limits of their competence in areas such as the provision of legal advice, and to make timely referrals to specialist services, then they can make an extremely important contribution to the improvement of young people's access to advice. Apart from anything else, the fact that every young person (13 to 19) will be allocated a Personal Adviser should mean that many young people will have a ready professional route to the advice world.

What does appear certain is that, whatever the success of Connexions, it is unlikely to meet the full range of young people's advice needs without forging

85 Connexions Service National Unit, (2001), *The Connexions framework for assessment, planning, implementation and review: Guidance for Personal Advisers – Consultation Draft*, DfES.

86 Training delivered by Youth Access on 'The role of the Personal Adviser in the provision of legal advice' has highlighted the lack of guidance provided to PAs.

87 40% of Personal Advisers and 61% of Connexions managers working in the Connexions pilots had been recruited from the Careers Service, according to *Lessons Learned from the Connexions Pilots*, P. Dickinson, GHK Economics and Management Ltd, Research Report 308 for Department for Education and Skills, 2001.

88 Richard Moorhead, (March 2000), *Pioneers in Practice: The Community Legal Service Pioneer Project*, Institute of Advanced Legal Studies.



**Successful models of delivery: 5.**  
**Connexions and Community Legal Service working in partnership**

Many youth information, advice and counselling services across England are working to join up the local work of Connexions and the CLS. Often they represent the only services which obviously straddle both initiatives, so can play a key role. At a national level, Youth Access has been encouraging and facilitating links between the Legal Services Commission and the Connexions Service National Unit. The following are just some of the local attempts at the kind of joined up working that Youth Access believes to be so important:

- In late 2001 Tees Valley Connexions Service secured a grant from the CLS Partnership Innovation Budget to fund a legal advice worker based within the Middlesbrough Connexions pilot. The purpose of the post will be to raise awareness of legal issues amongst Connexions staff, provide a diagnostic generalist advice service to young people and make referrals to specialist providers when appropriate. The service also plans to provide on-line legal information and advice to young people.
- The Merseyside Regional Office of the Legal Services Commission has been forging links with the local Connexions Service through a series of seminars focusing on young people's access to the Community Legal Service. The first seminar, which was organised in conjunction with Youth Access, brought together over 25 groups

working with young people to raise their awareness of the CLS. The Connexions Service was invited to a second event in January 2002 which explored the potential links that could be made between the two initiatives. Ideas were sought in workshops for projects to improve youth advice work in the region that could be taken forward jointly by the CLS and the Connexions Service.

- The Legal Services Commission's Regional Planning and Partnership Team is represented on the Boards of two Connexions Partnerships in the North East.<sup>89</sup> There are also instances of representatives from Connexions participating in CLS Partnerships.<sup>90</sup>
- Lancashire Connexions has applied for a CLS Quality Mark, whilst other Connexions Partnerships have informed us that they are investigating the potential role that the Quality Mark could play in their quality strategies.
- Rotherham CLS Partnership has established a Young People's Task Group to ensure that activities and actions identified in the CLSP Strategy and Action Plan are carried out to improve access to legal advice for young people. Connexions staff have joined the group to ensure that the dual strategies of the two initiatives are developed in a co-ordinated fashion.

strong relationships with the Community Legal Service and the health advice sector and involving both mainstream advice services and YIACS.

## **6.6 Other professional sources of help**

In addition to the mainstream advice services and YIACS outlined earlier in this chapter, there is a wide range of other professional sources of help which may constitute the first and, in some cases, only source of contact young people will have with a professional adviser. These include:

- **Advocacy services.** Independent advocacy is an important method of providing information and advice to children and young people. Advocacy services have generally been established for children and young people who are in care, have left care or are disabled. They usually offer *'information, advice,*

*advocacy, representation and support'*<sup>91</sup> and are often used to help children and young people through statutory complaints procedures, child protection procedures and legal processes. However, despite the obvious link to the other providers identified in this publication, advocacy services are very much rooted in the children's rights sector and sometimes work in isolation from the advice and youth sectors.

- **Black and minority ethnic community groups,** which may provide some information or advice alongside a

89 Northumberland Connexions Board and Darlington Connexions Interim Management Board.

90 For example, there is a Connexions representative on the Cheshire CLSP 'Executive' and a Connexions Personal Adviser sits on the Barnsley CLSP steering group.

91 Department of Health, (February 2002), *National Standards For Agencies Providing Advocacy For Children And Young People In England* (Consultation Draft).

range of other services.

- **Organisations serving other specific client groups**, such as women, gay men, lesbians, people with disabilities, people with mental health problems, refugees and asylum seekers, lone parents, students etc.
- **Health advice services**, including sexual health clinics and drug and alcohol advisory services.
- **Helplines**, such as ChildLine, Shelter Nightline, National Drugs Helpline, TALKadoption, the Samaritans etc.
- **Web-sites** providing online information, such as the National Youth Agency's youthinformation.com

## 6.7 Summary

In choosing their preferred sources of advice, young people tend to seek very particular characteristics. Confidentiality, friendliness, trust-worthiness and a non-judgemental approach are amongst the most important of these, although it could be argued that familiarity of the source of advice is the most significant characteristic of all. As a result, young people often prefer to rely on informal sources of help, including their parents and friends, and on non-expert professionals, such as youth workers, rather than approach specialist advice providers.

The evidence available suggests that current advice provision is inadequate to meet the high levels of need identified in the previous chapter. The pattern and quality of provision in all advice sectors is uneven, with few, if any, geographical areas already possessing the comprehensive network of generalist and specialist services that can meet all the advice needs of the local population and that is the vision of the Community Legal Service. The mainstream advice sector possesses considerable expertise in social welfare law whilst the youth advice sector offers the service characteristics that can attract the most disaffected young people. Yet neither is currently capable of fully meeting individual young people's needs for advice.

The mainstream advice sector appears to be little used by young people. Generally, it lacks the flexible, informal, holistic approach young people favour as well as the youth work skills and specific legal knowledge required. Solicitors are frequently perceived by young people to be judgemental, old-fashioned and unapproachable, whilst CABx are seen as 'not for us'. Both may be viewed as part of the very establishment from which the more disaffected young people may feel alienated.

Youth information, advice and counselling services, for their part, tend, where they exist, to be heavily used by young people, who may be attracted by the age-

specific range of services under one roof, the employment of youth work skills and the empowering nature of the advice work provided. However, they often lack the expertise on legal matters, particularly at the casework and specialist levels, to progress more complex cases.

In theory, the two sectors, supplemented by a range of other providers, including Connexions Personal Advisers and youth advocacy services, have the combined skills and knowledge, if not yet the resources, to meet young people's needs for advice. The historical and ethical differences between the sectors currently prevent effective joint working in some areas. It is suggested that it is imperative that closer working relationships should be forged between all the services described in this chapter to ensure the sharing of expertise and, crucially, appropriate referrals at the point at which the limit of agencies' competence has been reached.

# 7 Developing age-appropriate services

A number of key principles are generally accepted to be important for any advice service to adopt. These include that services should be:

- Free
- Independent
- Impartial
- Confidential
- Accountable
- Professional

This chapter will outline some of the more specific characteristics, policies and procedures advice services may need to adopt to improve the access they afford to young people. The selection of issues discussed reflects the Key Characteristics, Core Principles and Quality Standards established by Youth Access and agreed by our membership.<sup>92</sup>

## 7.1 Specialist service for young people

As has been discussed earlier, adult-oriented services, such as CABx, struggle to attract young people. The very presence of adults in CAB waiting rooms has often

<sup>92</sup> See *Youth Access' Quality Standards for YIACS* and B. Rayment, (1998), *Getting Started: a guide to setting up a youth information, advice and counselling service*, Youth Access.

been cited by young people themselves as a key barrier to access. Young people are far more likely to access a service that has been established for the specific purpose of serving their own age group. In the words of young people surveyed by Feaviour (1994):

*'Our problems are different to other age groups. People want different things depending on their age. If you are in the 30 to 50 year old group then you will want a different service from 14 to 25 year olds.'* (Female aged 18)

*'Young people need a service that is completely for them.'* (Male aged 19)

However, even some youth-specific provision suffers from a degree of exclusivity, whereby one group dominates at the expense of others. 'Young adults', for example, may be unhappy if they perceive the service to be frequented by lots of 'children' and vice versa. Services need to be equally welcoming for all age groups targeted as well as ensuring equal opportunity of access regardless of race, gender, disability, sexuality or religion.

It is essential to bear in mind that the adoption of many of the other desirable service characteristics outlined below will be of little value, and indeed might be unfeasible, without a commitment to developing a specialist service for young people.

## **7.2 Person-centred holistic approach**

Agencies that are able to provide a wide range of services under one roof to meet the holistic needs of young people tend to be most successful in attracting those young people requiring advice. A model combining the key services of information, advice, counselling and personal support is one that has been tried and trusted over many years across Europe.<sup>93</sup> A study<sup>94</sup> that consulted with young people to test this model produced the conclusion that:

*'The whole package, information, advice, guidance, befriending and counselling is crucial.'* (Feaviour, 1994)

One reason for this is that individuals will not always have identified the key issue which needs addressing nor that advice is the intervention they require. The precise need may only become clear to both client and agency following exploration or assessment through another intervention. YIACS report large numbers of internal referrals to their advice services from other services, including counselling, education and training projects and drug and alcohol services. The existence of such other services under one roof also facilitates referrals made by advice workers and close joint working.

Many YIACS have found that the classic 'problem-centred' model adopted by many mainstream advice services, in which there is a tendency to promote the adviser into the role of the expert problem-solver who knows what is best for the client, is relatively unhelpful in the context of the provision of advice to young people. A person-centred approach, which places at least equal value on the use of process skills as on the possession and application of knowledge, is generally advocated. The client is, thus, supported in making decisions and choices for herself/himself rather than being provided with a pre-determined solution that fits the adviser's view of the best way forward. Such an approach, it is argued, empowers clients by enabling them to retain control over their own case. However, adopting a less prescriptive method of working with clients is unlikely to prove easy for many mainstream advice services, particularly where they are working to the current strict Legal Aid contracting requirements.<sup>95</sup>

## **7.3 Flexibility**

It is important that not only the range of provision, but also the basis upon which it is offered is flexible to ensure responsiveness and availability. Flexible opening hours and methods of delivery that enable potential users to choose their preferred mode of enquiry can significantly enhance accessibility.

**Opening hours:** It is common for mainstream advice agencies to open mainly during the day, with perhaps one or two evening sessions, often established to meet the needs of adults in employment. Many young people, however, are at school, college or work during the day and are frustrated by their inability to obtain help at other times. Some YIACS have found that the most popular opening times with young people are in the late afternoon or evening and at weekends, although significant numbers do choose to access services during the day as well. By definition, the longer the opening hours, the greater the access offered, although funders must recognise the resource implications for providers. Even many YIACS that have identified a need to open outside normal office hours have been unable to do so due to a lack of resources.

<sup>93</sup> ERYICA (European Youth Information and Counselling Agency) is a European-wide network of YIACS with members in over 25 countries.

<sup>94</sup> Feaviour op. cit.

<sup>95</sup> It is worth noting here that, whilst the creation of client-specific Legal Aid contracts, in addition to the existing category of law-specific contracts, would be a highly desirable development, as it would enable more young people to be helped by specialist legal advice providers, it would need to be accompanied by an understanding of the prevailing philosophy within the youth advice sector.

**Mode of enquiry:** Agencies that restrict the methods by which the general public is able to make enquiries will inevitably also limit access to young people. Problems getting through to agencies by telephone, long queues at drop-in sessions, the offer of appointments two or three weeks ahead with no interim advice and ‘rules’ set by agencies on how to contact them are likely to deter those with least trust in adult services or uncertainty about the merits of their case from persisting in their attempts to make enquiries. Flexibility is, again, the key to successful provision for young people and should enable potential users to test out a service having made their choice from a range of modes of access. Ideally, these modes of access would include:

- Telephone access. This is the most likely mode of first contact and so must be managed carefully. It is essential that staff who take calls are trained in the skills required to respond to young people who may be in distress. Thought should be given to the difficulty some young people will have in accessing a private telephone, to their possible fear of the call appearing on their parents’ itemised bill and the cost of accessing even freephone numbers from a mobile phone. Answering machine messages should positively encourage further contact and direct callers to 24-hour help-lines.
- Flexible open door sessions, allowing users to browse, come and go as they please, and make face-to-face enquiries as and when they feel ready to do so.
- The offer of early appointments. Appointments can give individuals security that an appropriate worker will be available to devote their time to them. However, young people may only seek help at a very particular moment when the need is acute. Their will to tackle problems can dissipate relatively quickly where there are delays, contributing to young people’s reputation for failing to keep appointments.
- Email access. Whilst it should not be assumed that all young people are computer literate, some will choose email as their preferred mode of contact where this is available.
- Access to web-sites offering accurate, up-to-date information targeted at young people.

#### **7.4 Informality**

Young people have consistently stressed informality as a key characteristic of any service they are likely to trust and to perceive as offering respect. In adult-oriented advice services, informality is often seen as inappropriate and to operate against the interests of professionalism. However, whilst professionalism of

staff will instil confidence, formality can deter young people from fully trusting a service.

*‘It is about enabling comfort and confidence. It is also about respect ... Implicit in the notion of informality is a challenge to the formal process of relationships, attempting to minimise bureaucracy and reduce the balance of power.’ (Feaviour, 1994)*

In order to develop an appropriately informal atmosphere, many YIACS have used the skills and views of young people to guide them. The provision of tea and coffee in a bright, cheerful setting can set an appropriate tone that puts users at ease and enables them to progress to making use of the agency’s specialist services. The importance of informality in the delivery of services to young people means that it should not be seen as impairing the level of professionalism, but rather as enabling access to professional services.

#### **7.5 Age-sensitive confidentiality procedures**

Agencies wishing to respond to young people’s very significant concerns about confidentiality (see 5.4.2) need to operate systems that ensure a level of respect for young people’s right to confidentiality that is difficult to provide in mainstream advice agencies. As well as adopting measures common across the entire advice sector, such as providing private, sound-proof interview rooms and keeping case files securely locked in filing cabinets, YIACS have responded to concerns about confidentiality in the following ways:

- Ensuring the entrance to the premises is discreet, away from authorities and adults, and that users do not have to queue outside.
- Developing age-sensitive confidentiality policies and practices, displaying them prominently around the building and on publicity, and communicating them to users at first contact with the agency and at appropriate stages subsequently.
- Taking care to reassure users when taking notes.
- Anonymising case records, using codes to identify individuals.
- Developing protocols with other agencies clarifying when and how information about clients should be shared. This has become particularly important since the introduction of the Connexions Service’s management information and tracking systems, which are seen by many as a threat to the maintenance of appropriate levels of confidentiality.

For further guidance, please refer to *Confidential – developing confidentiality policies in youth counselling and advisory services* (Youth Access, 1994).

## 7.6 User involvement

Many mainstream advice agencies have traditionally found it convenient to keep their users at an arm's length, away from any possible interference with the management of the service. User involvement has often, therefore, been limited to user surveys and feedback. By contrast, YIACS have embedded the concept of user involvement within their core principles. It is perceived as key to ensuring accountability to users, effectiveness and appropriateness of provision, user ownership of the service and credibility with target client groups, including the most hard-to-reach young people. It also helps to address the power imbalance between service provider and user and affords young people an element of control.

User involvement in youth advice services can take many forms, including:

- User consultation on needs.
- User feedback on existing provision.
- Ongoing input into the aims, principles, design and delivery of the service.
- Active participation in the decoration of premises.
- Opportunities for volunteering and training.
- Representation on the Management Committee and recruitment panels.
- Establishment of a user group to feed into the agency's decision-making process and quality development.

For further information, please refer to *Building User Involvement: a step-by-step guide to involving users in youth information, advice, counselling and support services* (Youth Access, 2001).

## 7.7 Credibility

Young people are unlikely to use a service that is not seen as credible. As long as solicitors are seen as too remote and CABx as catering for an older client group, for example, young people will be wary of using them, whether or not their perceptions match reality. The very fact that they are not youth-specific services count against them:

*'the images projected by those agencies do not give children and young people the message that they would be particularly welcome as, with the exception of youth organisations, they do not target young people.'* (Gallagher, 1999)

Attention must be paid to the attitudes projected by front-line staff, the decor of the centre, any music played in reception areas and the images portrayed in publicity material. Having staff that can interact with

young people in an informal atmosphere without using jargon, particularly while advice is being given, is critical. The involvement of young people in the work and management of the agency will heighten the sense of a service that is meeting the needs of young people as identified by young people.

## 7.8 Staff

Some young people will be used to attracting negative responses from adults, including fear, hostility or suspicion, and to being treated by society as a problem.

If they encounter an unwelcoming reception at the point of entry to a service, for example in the event of knocking on the door while the centre is closed, their disaffection is likely to be exacerbated. Staff need to display attitudes of respect, trust, friendliness, helpfulness and understanding, be trained in the skills required to work with young people and have appropriate knowledge of the law and other issues as they relate to young people.

## 7.9 Location and premises

Young people rarely travel long distances to seek advice. Transport difficulties, particularly caused by inadequate public transport, have been identified in research<sup>96</sup> as one of the most significant barriers to access to YIACS. Many young people do not have ready access to private transport. Some will be too young or poor to own a car, for example, whilst others will be reluctant to ask their parents or another adult for a lift as they will want to keep the fact or nature of their visit confidential. It is recommended, therefore, that any advice service should be easily accessible by reliable public transport or else brought to young people via outreach or mobile services.

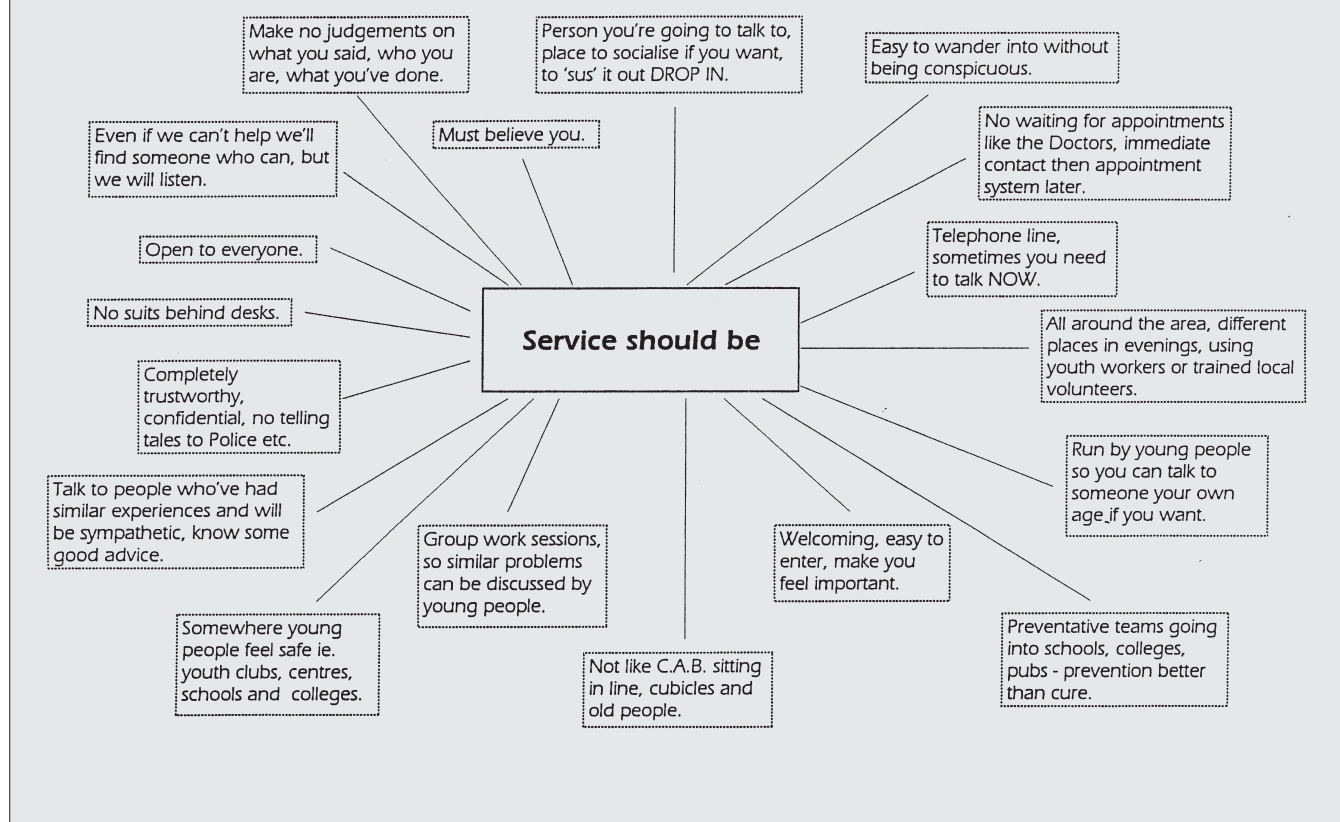
The location of services is a paramount consideration. Even within accessible areas, there are locations that will put some young people off, for example opposite a police station or within main council offices. Ideally, services should be:

- Visible, even prominent (e.g. shop front), but discreet.
- Where young people spend time (e.g. on a high street, in a shopping centre or on the estates where they live, to which a mobile service may provide access).
- In a safe location, where young people will not feel threatened.

<sup>96</sup> See Wilson op. cit.

**Figure 2: Service characteristics demanded by young people themselves**

(Source: Feaviour, Youth Access, 1994)



- Near other services young people need or already access.
- Away from adults and authorities in a location which ‘belongs’ to young people.

The appearance of an advice service’s premises, their physical accessibility and the facilities provided within them will all affect their level of use by young people. An over-formal exterior or the presence of an entry phone can be intimidating for many young people. Ideally, premises should have the following features:

- An exterior that appears to offer an informal, welcoming, safe and confidential environment within.
- Attractive window displays containing positive images of young people.
- An entrance that is physically accessible from the street, including the provision of wheelchair access.
- Interior decor that is bright and cheerful, informal and comfortable, but smart and professional, preferably designed by or in consultation with young people themselves.
- An atmosphere that is safe and confidential, backed

up by appropriate facilities, such as private interview rooms and prominent displays of confidentiality and Equal Opportunities policies.

- Facilities for specific client groups, such as toys and baby changing facilities for young parents and adapted toilets and special aids for people with disabilities.

### **7.10 Referral procedures and relationships**

The well-recognised problem of the ‘advice maze’, which the Community Legal Service is intended to address, has represented a particularly confusing barrier to access for young people unfamiliar with even the basic structures of welfare provision.

The poor relationships in many areas between services for young people and mainstream advice services has contributed to the problem. In many cases, referrals from YIACS and other youth providers to more specialist providers do not take place at the point at which the limit of the referring agency’s competence has been reached. Sometimes the reasons for this are sound. The agency may have built up a relationship of trust with an individual client over a long period of time

and may have little trust in the ability of the specialist service to create the same conditions required for effective work. The client, for her/his part, may oppose being referred on for similar reasons. Experience may have taught that the opening times, the formal appointment structure, the more intimidating physical and psychological environment or the lack of basic skills or knowledge required to work with young people will not be conducive to a successful referral. In other cases, the agency's failure to refer may be based more on ignorance of the specialist services available or on a misplaced feeling that it should or can itself help the client further.

In order to improve referrals so as to ensure that young people receive timely help from an appropriately qualified source, close working relationships need to be forged between different types of providers. In particular, stronger links need to be made in many areas between YIACS, mainstream legal advice providers and Connexions Personal Advisers. Ideally, referral protocols should be developed between individual agencies to determine the principles of referrals. Such protocols should include:

- details of the information to be given to the client to ensure they understand the reasons for the referral and reach the agency they are being referred to;
- agreements on the sharing of information between agencies;
- arrangements for obtaining user feedback on the referral.

### **7.11 Summary**

This chapter has attempted to identify some of the service characteristics advice agencies require in order to provide access to and meet the needs of young people. First and foremost, it is suggested that specific services must be established targeting young people. Services attempting to serve the general public are likely to struggle to reconcile many of the other specific characteristics required with their provision to other client groups.

A person-centred, holistic approach which aims to empower young people to make their own decisions and choices is advocated over problem-centred models employed by many mainstream advice agencies. Flexibility, in terms of the range of provision, the hours of service and potential modes of enquiry, will help to meet young people's needs for advice on a range of issues, delivered at times and in ways that suit their lifestyles and concerns. Informality, accompanied by professionalism, and age-sensitive confidentiality policies and procedures will facilitate gaining the trust

of young people in the service. Genuine, rather than tokenistic, consultation with young people and opportunities for user participation in the design, management and delivery of a service is vital in ensuring the credibility and appropriateness of services and their ability to meet the changing needs of target client groups. The age-appropriateness of services will also be affected by factors such as the skills and training of staff, referral procedures and the location and design of premises.

These recommended service characteristics reflect, to a large extent, the principles upon which many youth information, advice and counselling services have been based and which are consolidated in the quality standards Youth Access has developed for the sector.<sup>97</sup>

## **8 The effect of Government policy and planning**

Gaining a firmer understanding of young people's needs for advice might be of limited value without the existence of a political climate conducive to enabling services to develop to meet those needs. This chapter will examine the influence of Government policy on the development of youth advice work.

### **8.1 The Context**

Before looking at the effect of the UK Government's current policies, it is worth placing them in the context of the historical position of youth advice work, the policies of the European Commission and the widespread demands for an improved network of youth information, advice and counselling services.

#### **8.1.1 The marginalisation of youth advice services: a brief history**

During the 1970s and 1980s a succession of Government Departments, including the Department of Health and Social Security (1976), the Department of Health (1977)<sup>98</sup> and the Department for Education and Science (1989),<sup>99</sup> recognised the importance of developing the provision of information, advice and counselling services for young people. Meanwhile, the

<sup>97</sup> *Youth Access Quality Standards op. cit.*

<sup>98</sup> Department of Health, (1977), *Prevention and Health.*

<sup>99</sup> Department of Education and Science, (1989), *Youth Counselling Services*, report by HM Inspectors.

World Health Organisation called in 1978 for youth advisory services to be accepted as an essential part of the overall mental and community health network,<sup>100</sup> and in 1982 the Thompson Report, in reviewing the statutory Youth Service, concluded that:

*'an assured place should be given to information, advice and counselling within the local planning of youth provision.'*<sup>101</sup>

Regrettably, throughout most of the 1980s and 1990s there was little action from Government to develop coherent or specific national policies that would have ensured the development of a co-ordinated network of quality advice services for young people. An ad hoc pattern of provision has resulted, with some areas of the UK having fairly well-established and well-funded provision whilst other areas have little or nothing. Funding has not always followed need, and it appears that it is often the most deprived areas with greatest need that suffer from the poorest provision. Youth information, advice and counselling services have sometimes sprung up in response to need and then disappeared again due to a lack of funding.

*'All too often YIACS are dependent on short-term, project funding, often leading to persistent and ongoing funding crises and creating a sense of fragility and uncertainty experienced by many organisations in the voluntary sector.'* (Rayment, 2001)

The history of uncertain and often short-term funding has contributed to the ad hoc quality, as well as pattern, of advice provision for young people. Specific funding for capacity building and quality development has tended to be particularly difficult for both local agencies and national infrastructure bodies to secure. YIACS, being at the margins of both youth and advice provision, have traditionally remained vulnerable to funding cuts regardless of the standard of their services. Meanwhile, they have been unable to access the range of second tier support they require. The Government's fragmented approach to core funding of national infrastructure bodies meant that NACAB received over 60 times more funding for each CAB in 2000/2001 than Youth Access received for each YIAC agency.<sup>102</sup> Hence, youth advice agencies currently have no access to the kind of second tier services available to CABx. In particular, they lack a national youth advice training programme, a comprehensive information system for youth advisers, specialist casework support, social policy co-ordination and ICT development support.

### **8.1.2 The demand for an improved network of services**

Aside from Youth Access' ongoing work to make the case for young people's right to access to information, advice

and counselling, a number of other national bodies, representing the voluntary sector, statutory youth services and young people themselves have recently called on Government for more and better services.

- The Children's Rights Alliance for England's 'key demands',<sup>103</sup> published in advance of the 2001 General Election to show politicians what needs to be done to fully implement the principles and standards of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, includes a call for:

*'All children and young people to have a legal right to independent information, advice and advocacy to ensure their wishes and needs are seriously considered in all decision-making processes both within and outside of central and local government.'* (CRAE, 2001)

- The National Youth Agency's Youth Service Pledge,<sup>104</sup> aiming to set priorities for the future development of youth work, calls for:

*'A comprehensive generic, confidential information, advisory and counselling service, easily accessible to all 11–25 year olds.'* (NYA, 2001)

- The UK Youth Parliament, during its very first session after its recent establishment, produced a statement of intent,<sup>105</sup> which included a demand for:

*'An extensive network of support, advice and counselling to be set up for all young people.'* (UK Youth Parliament, 2001)

### **8.1.3 European policy**

At the European Union Nice Summit in December 2000, it was agreed that all member states, including the UK, should be required to submit National Action Plans on Social Inclusion. It was agreed that the plans should, amongst other things, describe how each state is working to prevent social exclusion and to facilitate access by all to resources, rights, goods and services. Some have argued that the UK Government's response

100 World Health Organisation, (1978), *Summary Report*, Working Group on Objectives of Youth Advisory Services.

101 Review Group on the Youth Service in England, (1982), *The Thompson Report: Experience and Participation*.

102 NACAB received core funding from the DTI of around £16 million in 2000/2001 and supports around 700 member CABx. Youth Access received core funding from the DfEE of £80,000 in 2000/2001 and supports 227 member agencies.

103 Children's Rights Alliance for England, (2001), *Children's rights: from rhetoric to reality*.

104 National Youth Agency, (2001), *A Youth Service Pledge*.

105 UK Youth Parliament, (2001), *Draft Manifesto – Statement of Intent*.



gives the issue of access to rights a lower profile than is the case in the plans of some of the other EU members.<sup>106</sup>

In late 2001 the European Commission published its White Paper on youth policy.<sup>107</sup> At the core of the White Paper is a call for a ‘*mass information exercise*’, requiring a co-ordinated approach across Europe and considerable resources, to ensure that young people receive more and better information about a range of issues, including about their rights. Key proposals that emerged from the EC’s consultation, carried out in advance of the publication of the White Paper, included the development of user-friendly information and counselling services geared to the needs of young people and the development of preventive approaches to address the causes of the social exclusion of young people at a very early stage by focusing on individual needs through a more person-centred approach.<sup>108</sup> It recommends that European Governments give young people access to resources, rights and services to ensure they have decent and healthy housing, appropriate healthcare and access to justice. Significantly, each EU member state will be required to account for their progress towards achieving the policy aims contained in the White Paper.

## **8.2 Current UK Government policy**

There are many encouraging signs that current Government policy will lead to the long-term improvements in young people’s access to information and advice called for by the EC, by young people and by those working with them. It has made the social inclusion of young people one of its policy priorities. It has created both the new post of Minister for Young People and a new cross-departmental Children and Young People’s Unit to co-ordinate the formulation of policy and delivery of services. Young people feature prominently in a swathe of new initiatives aimed at tackling social exclusion and promoting regeneration and ‘neighbourhood renewal’. Significantly, the provision of information and advice features in several of these initiatives, notably the Community Legal Service and the Connexions Service. The following pages examine some of the initiatives in more detail and summarise their overall effect.

### **8.2.1 The Community Legal Service**

The CLS was launched by the Legal Services Commission in 2000 with the aim of improving access for the general public to quality information, advice and legal services in England and Wales. The CLS is underpinned at local level by Community Legal Service Partnerships (CLSPs), which are tasked with establishing referral networks, carrying

out assessments of local need for advice and mapping current supply of services in order to inform strategic plans that set priorities for future planning and funding. Advice providers wishing to be full members of the CLS are required to attain the Quality Mark, the quality standard for the CLS.

CLS providers are dominated, in most areas, by mainstream advice services. However, the Legal Services Commission and many CLSPs appear committed to improving access to advice for excluded client groups. There is already substantial evidence of the potential benefits of the CLS for young people. Young people have been treated as a priority client group by many CLSPs and the involvement of youth information and advice providers has been sought. Already several new legal advice services specifically targeting young people have been funded through the CLS.<sup>109</sup> In many areas, mainstream providers and youth providers have begun to forge much closer relationships than in the past, fostering better mutual understanding, improved referrals and partnership working. Youth advice agencies that have worked towards the Quality Mark have acknowledged the benefits they have gained from the process, including real improvements in the quality of service provided to clients, their own increased confidence in the value of their services and their enhanced ability to lever funding from a range of sources.

However, there are currently many limitations to the effectiveness of the CLS in bringing about the dramatic improvements in young people’s access to advice that are required. For example, many CLSPs have struggled to secure the engagement of youth providers. The traditional marginalisation of youth advice services and the name ‘Community *Legal Service*’ have not been helpful in making non-mainstream advice agencies, who frequently do not even recognise themselves as legal advice providers, feel they can come together with more specialist legal providers as equal partners. Indeed, the vast number of other initiatives relating to young people, the diversity of YIACS services and the overwhelming significance of the Connexions Service, have led many youth advice providers to place the CLS relatively low on their list of priorities. Further, the resources available to CLSPs are inadequate to enable

106 Maxine Holdsworth, for example, put forward this argument in a workshop delivered at the Law Centre Federation’s 2001 Conference.

107 European Commission, (2001), *A New Impetus for European Youth*.

108 The consultation proposals are contained in an annex to the White Paper.

109 See, for example, the Darlington Blitz Bus or schemes funded out of the first round of the Partnership Innovation Budget.

either the assessment of need or the filling of gaps in provision to be consistent and comprehensive. Each CLSP has to set its own priorities based on local evidence and perceptions. It would be unrealistic, at least in the short term, to expect young people to feature in the priorities of all CLSPs covering areas where youth advice provision needs strengthening. Nevertheless, whilst the CLS may not be the complete answer on its own, if joined effectively to some of the other initiatives, it has the potential to play a major role in improving the supply, effectiveness and quality of legal advice provision available to young people in England and Wales.

### 8.2.2 The Connexions Service

The Connexions Service, launched in 2001 by the then Department for Education and Employment, aims to help all young people aged 13–19 in England remain successfully engaged in full-time education or in appropriate work-based training through the provision of ‘information, advice and guidance’. This help is to be provided primarily through Personal Advisers (PAs) – see 6.5 for a discussion of the role of PAs in the provision of advice to young people. 47 Connexions Partnerships, established with statutorily constituted boards on a sub-regional basis and supported by a number of Local Management Committees, will be responsible for planning and delivering the Connexions Service.

Given the broad remit of Connexions Partnerships to ensure the provision of a comprehensive youth support service and the very substantial funding provided by the Government to underpin the Service,<sup>110</sup> Connexions could be viewed as even more significant than the CLS as far as youth advice provision is concerned. Whilst the CLS has an explicit focus on legal advice, Connexions has the potential to develop services to meet the holistic advice needs of young people, including contributing to the development of legal advice provision. Indeed, the Social Exclusion Unit’s *Bridging The Gap*<sup>111</sup> paper, which heralded the Connexions Strategy, cited two YIACS as examples of good practice and it is already clear that YIACS services are seen within many Connexions Partnerships as an integral part of the core Connexions Service. However, the Connexions Service must overcome significant teething problems if it is to deliver what it promises.

This publication has already highlighted the need for the Connexions Service to ensure that PAs are not overly focused on the provision of careers advice at the expense of other types of advice work. There is some scepticism on the part of the statutory youth sector and the voluntary sector that a truly holistic service will be achieved whilst, as they perceive it, the Careers Service

holds the majority of the money and power within most Partnerships. Unfortunately, such scepticism is symptomatic of the strained relationships that exist in many Partnerships between the three sectors. Youth Access’ members, representing both the statutory and voluntary sectors, have been complaining that their experience and skills in providing advice to hard to reach young people are being relied upon with few reciprocal benefits.<sup>112</sup> Some YIACS are under substantial pressure to be taken over by their local Partnerships and re-branded as Connexions One Stop Shops, endangering some of their existing services as well as their underlying values and principles, such as their independence and confidentiality. Many fear young people will be the losers and there is anecdotal evidence that in some areas some Personal Advisers have already lost the trust of their target groups. A further concern is that Connexions, in demanding the vast majority of Youth Service spending is focused on the 13–19 age group, will draw vital funding away from the needy 20–25 age group, leaving them further marginalised from service provision than ever.

These are serious problems and threaten to undermine the Government’s Connexions Strategy. However, if the Connexions Service manages to overcome them, then its potential to meet many of the generalist advice needs of 13–19 year olds in England and to provide a gateway to specialist advice services may be substantial. In this event, there will be a need for a fresh injection or redirection of funds towards both youth advice agencies and mainstream advice agencies to ensure that the extra demand from young people can be met.

### 8.2.3 Transforming Youth Work

In 2001 the DfES issued a consultation document<sup>113</sup> setting out its vision for the future of youth work. The DfES recognises that it cannot deliver its Connexions Strategy successfully without modernised, vibrant, high quality youth services. A focus on developing the Personal Adviser roles performed by youth workers and integrating youth services into Connexions may provide added impetus to the development of effective information and advice services provided by or through statutory Youth Services. Indeed the role of information, advice and counselling work has been mentioned favourably in a number of Transforming Youth Work

110 £420 million in 2002/2003.

111 Social Exclusion Unit, 1999, op. cit.

112 Source of evidence: unpublished survey of Youth Access members’ experiences of Connexions, Spring 2002.

113 Department for Education and Skills, (2001), *Transforming Youth Work: Developing youth work for young people*.

documents.<sup>114</sup> Significantly, a Transforming Youth Work Development Fund (of £22 million in 2002/3) has been established aimed at raising the quality and quantity of youth work and includes a focus on improving training, quality assurance and monitoring and evaluation.

#### **8.2.4 Quality Protects**

Quality Protects is a Department of Health initiative, launched in September 1998, aimed at improving the management and delivery of children's social services in England. Additional funding of £885 million over five years has been earmarked for the programme, which focuses on children and young people who are looked after by local authorities, are in the child protection system or are disabled. The Government has recently claimed, plausibly, that Quality Protects has led to 'an increase in independent advocacy and children's rights services'.<sup>115</sup> However, these services, which are described in Chapter 6, are rarely linked in to the referral networks established by Community Legal Service Partnerships, rendering their capacity to progress more complex legal cases somewhat haphazard.

A key element of the Quality Protects programme has been the implementation, with effect from October 2001, of the Children (Leaving Care) Act, accompanied by ring-fenced funding aimed at assessing and meeting the needs of 16 and 17 year olds who are in care or care leavers. Local authorities now have an obligation to provide all eligible young people with personal and practical support, co-ordinated by a 'young person's advisor', to help them map a path to independence and have a duty to keep in touch with care leavers until they are at least 21. Particular emphasis will be placed on helping the young person into education, training or employment, but there appears to be scope for a wider advice role to be adopted by young person's advisors.

#### **8.2.5 Family Advice and Information Networks**

Plans to pilot Family Advice and Information Networks (FAINs) were announced by the Lord Chancellor in 2001. The aim of FAINs is to enable parents and children to access a range of existing services, including legal advice, relationship counselling, family mediation and specialist children and young people's services, through a single point of reference. Whilst they are likely to be most relevant to young people caught up in family disputes, they may serve to contribute to more general improvements in the identification and meeting of young people's needs for information and advice.

#### **8.2.6 Other Government initiatives**

Other relevant initiatives, which providers, planners and funders of youth advice work should be aware of, include:

- The New Deal for Young People
- The Youth Justice Board grants programme<sup>116</sup>
- The Government's strategies for teenage pregnancy, youth homelessness, drugs and young runaways.
- The Children's Fund
- The Neighbourhood Renewal Strategy
- The National Strategy for Sexual Health and HIV
- Health Action Zones
- Education Action Zones
- Crime Reduction Partnerships
- Consumer Support Networks
- The Regulation of Immigration Advice
- Children and Young People's Partnerships (proposed)

### **8.3 The importance of a 'joined up' approach**

There is a concern that the potential role of advice in tackling the causes and symptoms of young people's social exclusion, which were identified in Chapter 3, is poorly understood, and therefore not adequately exploited, by those planning many area-based initiatives. Whilst the provision of advice may not be one of the highest priorities for many schemes, it is an intervention which cuts across all of them. Where advice services have been developed, it is frequently without reference to the work and impact of other schemes. Given the amount of resources being directed towards all the initiatives identified in 8.2.6, it is surely incumbent on the relevant authorities to ensure that the planning of any information and advice services emanating from them should be strategic.

#### **8.3.1 Research into needs**

One of the reasons for the current ad hoc pattern of provision of advice services for young people is the lack of any nationally agreed and consistently applied method of assessing the extent of their need for advice. Many YIACS have been established following local feasibility studies or research into the general needs of young people, both of which invariably point to a need for improved provision. Yet these do not take place on

<sup>114</sup> For example, the TYW consultation document both highlights youth information services as examples of good practice identified in recent Ofsted inspections of Youth Services and quotes the National Youth Agency's pledge and the UK Youth Parliament's manifesto demands for information, advice and counselling services. *Working Together – Connexions and the Statutory Youth Service*, DfES, (2002), also mentions information, advice and counselling services.

<sup>115</sup> John Denham MP, Minister for Young People, (February 2002), *Government's Response to the UK Youth Parliament's 2001 Manifesto*, Children and Young People's Unit.

<sup>116</sup> This has already funded several schemes aimed at reducing offending by young people through the provision of information, advice and counselling, most commonly focused on drug and alcohol issues.

a consistent basis and it is impossible to assert with any certainty to what extent the current geographical pattern of provision matches need.

The key tasks of both Community Legal Service Partnerships (CLSPs) and Connexions Partnerships include the undertaking of need assessment and supply mapping exercises. CLSPs are responsible for assessing the need for legal advice in their area. Early needs assessments have tended to focus on the general public's need for advice in specific categories of law. The Legal Services Commission has developed what it calls 'predictive needs models' for this purpose. Some CLSPs have attempted to examine the legal advice needs of specific client groups identified as priorities locally and it is likely that all CLSPs will follow suit eventually. Young people are one of the client groups that have been prioritised by CLSPs most commonly and have been the focus of some tentative local research. Whilst high levels of unmet need have invariably been identified in this way, the findings have not been conclusive. There are no predictive needs models for assessing the needs of specific client groups and the employment of more sophisticated methodologies, as attempted in Medway,<sup>117</sup> for example, requires substantial resources unavailable to most CLSPs.

Connexions Partnerships, meanwhile, are required to carry out comprehensive needs assessment and supply mapping exercises using the Mapping Tool developed by the Connexions Service National Unit. However, the Mapping Tool currently provides no specific focus on the need for or supply of either rights-based or personal advice, making useful conclusions in these areas difficult despite the wealth of data collected.

It is to be hoped that the resources available to Connexions Partnerships and Community Legal Service Partnerships for such work might, in time, be better co-ordinated to improve the quality of output of data on the specific subject of young people's advice needs. Harnessing the expertise of children's rights organisations, such as Save the Children, in consulting young people could be invaluable in ensuring the adoption of appropriate methodologies. Data generated from a range of other initiatives and sources could contribute to the evolution of clearer local and national understanding of the subject.

### 8.3.2 Quality

In addition to undertaking needs assessment and supply mapping exercises, a number of initiatives are accompanied by their own quality standards. Again, the most significant standards probably belong to the Community Legal Service, with its Quality Mark, and to the Connexions Service. It is also noted that the

Department of Health has recently published for consultation its draft national standards for agencies providing advocacy for children and young people.<sup>118</sup> Some funders are set to tie future funding to the attainment of a relevant quality standard. Such an emphasis on quality is clearly to be welcomed, for it should enable young people to access services of a higher quality than have hitherto been available to them. However, it is essential that the relationship between overlapping standards is clearly mapped, that funders do not become over-prescriptive about which standard must be attained and that adequate time and support is provided to enable agencies to comply. It is to be hoped that Youth Access' own Quality Standards<sup>119</sup> will be recognised in this process as the most appropriate standard for many youth-specific advice services.

### 8.3.3 Referral networks

Another significant task common to several initiatives is the establishment of referral networks. Once again, a joined up approach should help to pool resources and minimise duplication of effort, for example in relation to the development of referral protocols and information-sharing agreements. Given the current difficulties identified earlier in this chapter in engaging youth information and advice providers in their local CLSPs, due to their focus on Connexions, co-operation between Connexions Partnerships and CLSPs is likely to be particularly important.

## 8.4 Summary

Youth information, advice and counselling services have traditionally been marginalised from both mainstream advice provision and from mainstream youth provision. An absence of coherent Government policy throughout much of the 1980s and 1990s in relation to the provision of information and advice to young people served to exacerbate the underdevelopment and underfunding of this area of work. The resulting fragmented pattern and quality of provision provides a regrettably low base from which to build. Encouragingly, impetus for the development of a high quality network of information and advice services for young people is being provided by a diverse range of bodies, from the

117 Medway CLSP undertook a needs assessment focusing on young people in 2000/2001 which planned to incorporate service provider consultation, questionnaire surveys of young people and focus consultations with young people, although the process was not completed.

118 Department of Health, (2002), *National Standards For Agencies Providing Advocacy For Children And Young People In England (Consultation Draft)*.

119 *Youth Access Quality Standards* op. cit.

European Commission to the UK Youth Parliament. Further, current Government policy presents genuine cause for optimism that such a vision could be realised eventually.

A host of Government initiatives are promising radical improvements to young people's access to advice. However, there is a real danger that the combined effect of these initiatives could be diluted unless they can be effectively joined up to ensure collaboration and co-ordination on research, quality assurance, strategic planning and funding. There may well be benefits to be accrued from a single body, such as the Lord Chancellor's Department (in the case of rights-based advice) or the Children and Young People's Unit (in the case of a wider range of services for young people), taking on responsibility at a national level for cross-departmental, cross-initiative co-ordination. Community Legal Service Partnerships and proposed Children and Young People's Partnerships might perform a similar role at a more local level.

In the meantime, it is imperative that the two most significant initiatives identified, namely the Community Legal Service and the Connexions Service, 'join up' their activities effectively. There are positive signs that the Community Legal Service will encourage funders to fill gaps in provision where needs have been identified and providers to raise the quality of their services and co-operate more closely with each other. The Connexions Service has significant potential to stimulate demand for increased provision and to provide young people who would not otherwise have accessed professional advice with a gateway to appropriate services. However, in common with much Government policy related to tackling social exclusion, there is a regrettable absence of a clear approach to the role of rights and of facilitating access to rights. The full integration of the work of the CLS and Connexions will be vital if specific youth advice provision is to be seen as an essential element within the context of each initiative and the significant needs of young people for rights-based advice are to be identified. Meeting the resulting increased demand for advice would require significant capacity-building of voluntary sector and statutory sector advice services.

Regardless of the overall thrust of Government policy and the effect of specific policies, the continuing absence of a robust infrastructure to support youth advice work threatens to prevent long-term improvements in quality. Significant investment in regional and national infrastructure bodies will be needed to support local agencies in developing their quality assurance, information and ICT systems and improving their access to appropriate training resources and second tier specialist casework support.

## 9 Conclusion and recommendations

### 9.1 Conclusion

Despite a dearth of official research into the subject, all the available evidence confirms the view that young people as a whole experience a high level and wide range of need for advice arising from difficulties accompanying adolescent transition and, for a significant minority, social exclusion. However, the likelihood of young people obtaining professional advice about their problems, particularly legal problems, appears to be very low compared with other age groups. This pattern may be both a symptom and a result of young people's social exclusion and can only partly be explained by a lack of awareness of existing advice services. A range of barriers, including physical, psychological and service planning barriers, confront young people in accessing appropriate advice services, leading some to fail to obtain advice when they seek it and others, including many of those in greatest need, to take no action at all. Informal and familiar sources of advice, including parents and friends, are often preferred to expert professional providers, such as Citizens Advice Bureaux, whose services are not geared to their specific needs.

There is a need for a strong national network of integrated information, advice and counselling services able to combine the expertise and best principles of both rights-based advice work and youth work to help young people aged between 10 and 25 with often complex combinations of interrelated emotional, practical, personal and legal issues. Current Government policy offers some hope that real progress could be made towards this goal, but will require effective and comprehensive 'joining up' of developing initiatives such as the Community Legal Service and Connexions, as well as far greater investment in the capacity, quality and infrastructure of services, particularly in the voluntary sector, if young people are finally to gain access to the advice they need and deserve.

This publication has sought to highlight the unique nature of young people's needs for advice and the inadequacy of current advice provision to meet those needs. This final section makes a range of recommendations to all those who share an interest in improving young people's access to quality advice services. It is intended that these recommendations will form a policy blueprint to which Youth Access and young people themselves will be able to refer in future years when asking policy-makers, funders and providers to account for progress made.

## **9.2 Recommendations**

### **9.2.1 Recommendations to policy makers in central and local government**

- Continue to focus on tackling the root causes of social exclusion, so as to minimise future levels of need for advice and of disaffection amongst young people.
- Review all legislation and local policies, particularly those regarding social security benefit rates and housing allocation, that may adversely affect or discriminate against young people.
- Develop policy to exploit the potential role of citizenship education in raising awareness amongst children and young people, including via information targeted at parents and other informal sources of help, of their rights and how to exercise them.
- Create a permanent national Children's Rights Commissioner to provide an independent watchdog to monitor, promote and protect children's and young people's rights.
- Develop more robust cross-departmental mechanisms in central Government for 'joining up' policies and initiatives – particularly those relating to Regeneration, Neighbourhood Renewal and health or emanating from the Social Exclusion Unit – to ensure that their effect on young people, the role of advice work and potential links with the Community Legal Service can be identified early.
- Local Authorities are reminded of and urged to turn into reality the National Youth Agency's Youth Service Pledge to provide '*A comprehensive generic, confidential information, advisory and counselling service, easily accessible to all 11–25 year olds*'.

### **9.2.2 Recommendations to the Lord Chancellor's Department, Legal Services Commission and Community Legal Service Partnerships (CLSPs)**

- Commission further research at a national level into: a) the specific advice needs of young people; b) young people's patterns of advice-seeking behaviour; c) the social and economic impact of providing or denying access to justice for young people.
- Link up with the Connexions Service to develop a sophisticated, reliable, but realistic methodology for assessing local levels of need for and supply of advice.
- Ensure effective joining up at local and national level between the CLS, Quality Protects, Family Advice and Information Networks and Connexions in relation to quality assurance, referral networks, supply mapping and funding.
- Formulate local strategies, drawing on Youth Access'

experience, for encouraging the engagement and full participation of youth information, advice and counselling services, youth advocacy services and children's rights workers in the CLS.

- Facilitate the establishment of regional youth information and advice providers' groups and local user groups of young people.
- Review the effects of CLS Fund contracting requirements on contract holders' ability to work effectively with young people.
- Consider letting more contracts to providers working with young people and the creation of new contract categories for work with specific client groups.

### **9.2.3 Recommendations to the Connexions Service National Unit and Connexions Partnerships**

- Clarify, as a matter of urgency, the Connexions Service's use of terminology such as 'information, advice and guidance' and the role of Personal Advisers in the delivery of rights-based and personal advice.
- Recognise the key role that independent advice agencies can play in the Connexions Service.
- Ensure that all information and advice provision, training, research and general strategy takes account of the role of rights-based/legal advice and of potential links with the Community Legal Service.
- Facilitate, in conjunction with the CLS, closer working relationships between the full range of agencies working with young people and mainstream advice services.
- Develop local advice referral networks and referral protocols with reference to those already established by CLSPs.
- Formulate national and local quality assurance strategies with reference to the existence of Youth Access' Quality Standards for YIACS and the CLS Quality Mark.
- Link up with the Legal Services Commission to develop a sophisticated, reliable, but realistic methodology for assessing local levels of need for and supply of advice.
- Consider, in conjunction with the Lord Chancellor's Department, funding the development of targeted public information for young people on their rights and the law.
- Consider developing, or funding the development of, a comprehensive information reference system for use by Personal Advisers and other youth advisers.

### **9.2.4 Recommendations to funders of advice services**

- Ensure that funding for youth information and advice work follows needs and gaps in provision identified by CLSPs, Connexions Partnerships and others.

- Recognise and address the chronic lack of stable resources, particularly core funding, available to voluntary sector youth advice agencies and to the infrastructure and second tier services to support them.
- Encourage innovation in the provision of advice to young people, e.g. schemes which aim to fill the historical gaps in legal advice provision at the casework and specialist help levels.
- Build into funding programmes incentives for agencies to work towards and achieve appropriate quality standards, including Youth Access' Quality Standards for YIACS.
- Recognise and seek to fill the following gaps in the training currently available:
  - i. to advice practitioners in YIACS and Connexions Personal Advisers: *The principles of advice work and the legal knowledge required to advise young people.*
  - ii. to advisers and solicitors working in mainstream advice services: *The skills, attitudes and legal knowledge required to advise young people.*

#### **9.2.5 Recommendations to mainstream advice providers**

- Assess the extent of use of your service by young people and whether it reflects predicted levels of need.
- Review your service characteristics and consider the feasibility and benefits of adapting your service to better meet the needs of young people.
- Forge closer links with a broad range of local agencies working with young people and develop referral arrangements and protocols where appropriate.
- Consider the potential for establishing joint work or projects with any local YIACS.
- Consider establishing specific advice sessions or outreach services for young people.
- Consider the potential for involving young people in the design, delivery and management of your service.
- Seek to address through training any gaps in the specific legal knowledge, skills and attitudes staff will need to work effectively with young people.
- Consider joining Youth Access' membership or subscribing to our mailings if you are already providing, or are planning to provide, specific services to young people.
- NACAB are urged to develop their AdviceGuide (online information system for the public) and Electronic Information System (for advisers) to better meet the information needs of young people and their advisers.

#### **9.2.6 Recommendations to youth information, advice, counselling and support services (YIACS)**

- Review your service characteristics regularly, with input from users, to ensure that access is maximised.
- Forge closer links and consider prospects of partnership working with mainstream advice providers, health advice providers, and other specialist services.
- Seek to develop your capacity to provide casework and specialist level legal advice and assistance, whether through extending your own existing services or through partnership working.
- Engage in CLSPs and Connexions Partnerships and the referral networks they provide.
- Develop strong local and/or regional networks of YIACS, supported by a regular forum for the discussion of social policy, best practice and funding issues, as a means of strengthening the sector.
- Maintain membership of a recognised national advice network, such as Youth Access or the Federation of Information and Advice Centres.
- Embed the principles of advice work into your training, policies and procedures, particularly where the culture of your service is currently dominated by the principles of youth work.
- Recognise the benefits to your organisation and to your users of continuous improvement, identify the most appropriate quality standard(s) and work towards it/them, drawing on the support available.
- Consider your potential role in raising awareness of rights through the delivery of community and citizenship education programmes and make links with agencies promoting children's rights.

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## Feedback

Feedback on any aspect of this publication is sought and should be addressed to:

James Kenrick,  
Advice Services Development Manager,  
Youth Access,  
1 & 2 Taylor's Yard,  
67 Alderbrook Road,  
London SW12 8AD.

Tel: 020 8772 9900 ext. 27

Email: [james@youthaccess.org.uk](mailto:james@youthaccess.org.uk)

## Youth Access

Youth Access is the national membership organisation for agencies and individuals involved in information, advice and counselling services for young people. We have over 230 member agencies drawn from the voluntary and statutory sectors.

Youth Access believes all young people have the right to make informed decisions through access to information, advice and counselling.

Youth Access promotes the development of high quality information, advice and counselling services for young people through:

- Promoting good practice, quality and standards in the delivery of services;
- Providing information, advice, training, consultancy and networking opportunities to established and developing agencies;
- Acting on behalf of the sector to raise the profile of youth information, advice and counselling services and influence policy.

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