

Miscellaneous background information pointing to a need for advice and counselling services specifically targeted at young offenders and young people at risk of offending

- The provision of advice and counselling services to offenders is highly likely to reduce recidivism – see, e.g., SEU report *Reducing offending by ex-prisoners* for examples of advice services working with prisoners and ex-prisoners and NACAB Kent Probation Project for impact of advice on recidivism.
 - The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, in its concluding observations on the UK Government's compliance with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child in October 2002, recommended that the UK Government should improve access to "confidential and adolescent-sensitive advice and information" and take "all necessary measures to strengthen its mental health and counselling services, ensuring that these are accessible and sensitive to adolescents." It also expressed specific concerns about the lack of access to independent advocacy for children in custody and recommended that every child deprived of liberty should have access to independent advocacy services.
 - On 9th May 2003 Ivan Lewis, then Minister for Young People at the DfES, announced that his department was keen to improve the provision of information, advice and guidance for juvenile offenders.
 - A recent Youth Justice Board report released on 23/7/03 found that:
 - 11% of young offenders have contemplated committing suicide
 - 10% have deliberately hurt themselves
 - half said they felt miserable or sad
 - a quarter had difficulties eating or sleeping
 - 37% had received no help in finding accommodation
 - Youth Access' report *Rights to Access: meeting young people's needs for advice* (2002) presents evidence of young people's specific needs for legal advice and their frequent inability to obtain appropriate professional advice.
 - Youth Access' report *Breaking Down The Barriers: A Strategy in Development* (2002) presents evidence of the need to improve the quality and quantity of counselling provision for young people.
 - Existing projects targeted at young offenders rarely possess adequate technical expertise on legal rights and mental health issues.
 - Existing projects for prisoners and offenders of all ages, i.e. not targeting young people specifically, may not be sufficiently accessible to young people – research shows, e.g., that young people generally are very reluctant to make use of mainstream services, including CABs, solicitors and adult mental health services (see *Rights to Access* and *Breaking Down The Barriers*). They prefer to access young person-centred services that can deal with a range of issues under one roof.
 - Research shows that young people have low awareness of their rights in and of the workings of the criminal justice system – see, for example, the ongoing 'Young Defendants
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Pack' scoping study commissioned by the Youth Justice Board, or research by the Policy Research Bureau into young offenders' perceptions of their experiences in the criminal justice system (both reported on at a Home Office seminar in September 2002). Projects seeking to address this problem might benefit from forging close links with other rights-based services, such as social welfare advice services.

- In June a joint statement on youth justice was issued by Barnardo's, The Children's Society, Children's Rights Alliance for England, The Howard League, Nacro, NCB, NCH, NSPCC and the National Association of Youth Justice. The statement urged the Government to ensure that the welfare and best interests of children are at the heart of the youth justice system.

London

- The Mayor of London's *Towards a child-friendly London: The Mayor's Draft Children and Young People's Strategy*, published in April 2003, contains:
 - The proposal (3H.4) that 'The Mayor...will seek to ensure that local crime reduction strategies in London are more child-centred...'
 - The policy (3H.3) that 'The Mayor will seek to ensure that responses to youth offending are compatible with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child'
 - The proposal (3I.7) that 'The Mayor will work in partnership with other agencies to improve access to advocacy services for children and young people.' (NB: The London Assembly's response to the draft strategy states that 'there should be more emphasis on this')
 - The statement (in section 3G) that: 'Non-stigmatising and easily accessible counselling services by appropriately trained counsellors are also important'

*James Kenrick
Youth Access
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