



## ARSON CONTROL FORUM

Research Bulletin no.

6

### Interventions with Arsonists and Young Firesetters

#### Foreword

Most arson appears to be committed by a minority of prolific offenders, many of whom are under 18 and also commit other offences. It has this in common with other types of crime and anti-social behaviour. Intervention work with young firesetters has clear links with the Government's strategy for dealing with Prolific and other Priority Offenders and reflects the Forum's new priority for working with children and young people.

Most fire and rescue services already run some form of firesetting intervention scheme for children and adolescents. These schemes are either for young children who have an excessive interest in fire-play or are targeted at older adolescents whose firesetting behaviour is linked to other forms of anti-social behaviour such as vandalism. There are also a small number of youth justice interventions aimed at older adolescents and some prison-based interventions for older offenders.

This Research Bulletin explores the range of intervention schemes run by the Fire and Rescue Service, and also assesses those interventions run by other stakeholders. It provides valuable pointers to good practice and successful joint working.

Fire and Rescue Service personnel and others involved in this demanding work have shown tremendous commitment but there is still a great deal more that can be done. This is where I believe that the Fire and Rescue Service has a unique contribution to make and I attach a high priority to it.

Jim Fitzpatrick MP,  
Parliamentary Under Secretary of State  
Office of the Deputy Prime Minister



## Introduction

Many organisations have the opportunity to intervene with arsonists and young firesetters, including Fire and Rescue Services, Youth Offending Teams, Mental Health Services, and the Prison and Probation Services.

There is little information on effectiveness of this work or whether the approaches being used the most appropriate. Using surveys and case studies and literature review, this project, by the University of Leicester, critically compared current practice with the 'good practice' models described in the literature. A detailed final report has been published on the Web. This Research Bulletin summarises the report with a particular focus on good practice messages.

## Literature review

The majority of research in these areas has been conducted with young firesetters, rather than adult arsonists. The review highlighted that many characteristics of young firesetters and arsonists overlap with characteristics typical of general offender populations. For example, young people at risk of committing fire crime may have other problems, including substance abuse, greater levels of aggression, a history of parental/family functional problems and poor interpersonal skills. Obviously, an individual firesetter may only exhibit some of these problems but the range of problems does highlight the need for accurate assessment.

There is a lack of large-scale evaluation studies of intervention programmes with both young firesetter and adult arsonist populations. Within the literature that does exist, two approaches can be distinguished:

- Educational approaches that aim to inform individuals about the dangers of fire
- Psycho-social interventions that seek to change some aspect of the firesetter's attitudes and subsequent behaviour

## Survey of Current Practice

The second part of this report is concerned with the findings from a national survey of organisations involved in the delivery of interventions for arsonists and young firesetters, including fire and rescue services, probation services, youth justice and health services. This section summarises the current interventions run by the two main service providers, the Fire and Rescue Services and the Youth Offending Teams (YOTS).

## Current<sup>1</sup> Interventions

Thirty-five out of the 50 Fire and Rescue Services in England and Wales, and 50 out of 155 YOTS responded to the survey. The types of intervention and the main sources of referrals are summarised in the table below:

Fire and Rescue Services		Youth Offending Teams	
Total number of Interventions:	47	Total number of Interventions:	32
<b>Intervention type:</b>		<b>Intervention type:</b>	
Educational approach	33	Educational & Cognitive behavioural	32
Educational & cognitive behavioural	11	–	
Model developed by Andrew Muckley	3	–	
Mixture of all the above	1	–	
<b>Source of referrals:</b>		<b>Source of referrals:</b>	
Parents/guardians	22	Youth Offending Teams*	16
Youth Offending teams	20	Schools	3
Schools	19		
Social Services	19		
Police	14		
NHS organisations	8		
<i>Other referral agencies include child protection agencies, local education authorities, pupil referral units, secure units, probation services, connexions and the prison service.</i>		<i>Other referral agencies include health professionals, courts, social services, and local education authorities.</i>	

Fire and Rescue Service-led schemes are aimed at young people of both genders and all ethnic groups and take individuals aged between 2 and 20. Fire and Rescue Service-led schemes target two groups: a younger client group with an interest in fire (14 out of 47) or are active firesetters (5); as well as convicted offenders (12) or those at risk of offending, including, for two projects, young people excluded from school. The intensity of the interventions ranges from one individual session to a series of 10 sessions, each lasting between 45 minutes and 1.5 hours.

Staff working on Fire and Rescue Service-run projects have received training from a variety of sources – 20 interventions employ staff trained by the late Andrew Muckley, eight use staff with communications skills training, seven with a knowledge of child protection, six with qualifications in psychology and five have staff who are trained counsellors. Other training providers include the fire and rescue services, social services, and the Cognitive Centre Foundation. Evidence of effectiveness is claimed by 31 of the interventions with six having programme literature available.

Youth Offending Schemes focus not surprisingly on an older age group (aged 10-18) involved with arson and firesetting. Six of the 32 YOT schemes surveyed involve only one visit with the remainder consist of up to 13 sessions with each session lasting between one and six hours. More than half (17) of the interventions use staff with Fire Service training and two use Youth Offending Team staff. Evidence of effectiveness was said to be available for nine of the interventions and 13 had programme documentation available.

### Critical Review of Interventions

Case study visits were made to a Fire and Rescue Services, Youth Offending Teams and two hospital settings.

One method of assessing the interventions is to assess their qualities as set against the formal accreditation criteria of the Correctional Services Accreditation Panel (CSAP), which form the basis against which interventions in the Prison and Probation Service are judged in terms of their likely impact on offending. The CSAP accreditation criteria are:

- Programmes should have a **clear model of change** based on the research literature and provide a coherent basis for the targets and methods of the programme.
- Clear **criteria for selection** of participants in the programme, including both inclusion and exclusion criteria, along with the procedure and assessments used.

- Programmes should **target a range of measurable dynamic risk factors** related to re-offending. Dynamic risk factors are those that can be changed during the course of an intervention (e.g. anti-social attitudes, substance abuse).
- The **methods** used to facilitate change in dynamic risk factors, and thus offending behaviour, should be supported by evidence of efficacy with the target offender population.
- Programmes should be **skills-orientated**, providing offenders with skills and strategies to help them lead non-criminal lives.
- The **dosage** of treatment provided to offenders should be **matched to offenders** in terms of number and frequency of sessions. The sequencing of different components of treatments and programmes should also be planned to match offenders' treatment needs.
- Programmes should aim to engage and motivate offenders – procedures should be in place **to monitor attendance and completion rates** and reasons for non-completion.
- For criminal justice interventions, programmes should occur within a **coherent sentence planning process**, within one service and between prisons and the community (or between other specified settings).
- **Programme integrity should be monitored** to ensure that the intervention is being run as designed, including procedures to provide feedback to staff in a supportive environment to promote good practice.
- Programmes should be subjected to **on-going evaluation** examining their effectiveness in terms of changes to dynamic risk factors and re-offending.

The CSAP requires programmes to have a comprehensive series of manuals covering issues such as the theory underpinning the programme, details of each programme sessions, assessment and evaluation, staff training and selection, and offender selection.

The interventions at the eight sites visited in were all reviewed with respect to the CASP criteria. The full details of these reviews for each individual site are included in the full report.

### Good practice lessons from the research

By comparing the sample of current projects with the CSAP principles it is possible to highlight current strengths and weaknesses, and to offer good practice principles for future development. The issues that have emerged as being pertinent to good practice in development, implementation, and delivery of arson intervention programmes are summarized below:

#### One-to-one or group work interventions

Arson intervention programmes can be run as either one-to-one sessions or group work sessions. The practitioner skills required for these two types of intervention are very different, and separate training is required for each approach. When developing an intervention programme the same issues apply whichever approach is chosen. However it is vital to be aware of, and act upon, the relevant issues for each approach.

#### Development of the Intervention

- The intervention should have a demonstrably clear theoretical or evidence base derived from practical work with young firesetters and arsonists. This should be available as a written document for all staff.
- Staff who will be involved in the development, implementation, and evaluation of the intervention should be consulted throughout the planning and development stages.
- The initial stages of planning an intervention should include crosschecking with other agencies and other Fire and Rescue Services for effective intervention programmes already in existence. Other agencies and services may also have useful materials available such as informative videos or games.

#### Planning for implementation

- It is important to develop a coherent implementation plan at an early stage. The plan should cover major areas such as programme content, referral and targeting, intervention integrity, monitoring and evaluation, communication, staff selection and training, accommodation, and partnership issues.
- Any partnership arrangements with other agencies should be clearly outlined within the structural plan.

- A thorough evaluation of the time, workload, and resource implications should be made prior to undertaking the identified objectives.

*'It's very much down to what the history of the case is . . . You could go and visit somebody once and that's fine or you could be seeing someone for a year because of other things that come out' (FRS).*

#### Intervention content and dosage

- A programme manual should be developed to be used by all staff. This should include a detailed description of each programme session related to the targets for change and theory behind the programme.
- The intensity of the intervention will depend upon the target group. For example, very minor fire-related behaviours may only require one visit from a tutor while those displaying more severe behaviours may benefit from a full course of intervention. These issues must be considered throughout the development of the intervention.
- The programme style and sequencing of sessions can be varied to meet the needs of different participants, whilst ensuring any changes are in keeping with the aims of the intervention.

*'We normally work for two hours. But two hours can be a very long time, if you're doing intense work. So it might be cut down to 45 minutes or an hour.' (FRS).*

#### Intervention material

- Materials used in the intervention must be at least sufficient, clear, comprehensive, suitable, and relevant to the target audience and subject matter.
- Issues such as age, gender, ethnic group, religion, disability, and location, should be taken into consideration when choosing and developing materials.
- To encourage participant engagement and motivation a range of programme materials can be used such as videos, interactive games, role-plays, written work, and homework activities.

## Referral and Targeting

- Selection criteria for referrals should be developed, including inclusion and exclusion criteria. These guidelines may vary depending on the age of the target group. Any assessments for referral selection should be incorporated here.
- It is important that protocols are in place to ensure that tutors receive sufficient information on the participants before they attend the programme.

*'I insist that we get a risk assessment of the young person' (FRS).*

- Those making the referrals must be well enough informed about the programme, its aims, and target group, to be able to refer the correct people for participation.
- All staff involved in the programme should be aware of referral procedures and the processes in place to ensure these are applied correctly.
- Referrals may come from a wide range of sources, such as the Youth Offending Service, Schools, parents, social services and other agencies. Although referrals from some agencies (YOS in particular) may already have been assessed, these referrals should still be processed according to the selection criteria of the intervention.

*'Sometimes it (the referrals) comes from parents, schoolteachers, social services, Youth Offending Teams' (FRS).*

- To limit the number of inappropriate referrals, other agencies should, where possible, be made aware of the referral criteria.

## Measures to Ensure Intervention Integrity:

- It is vital that programme integrity is ensured so that the intervention has the maximum chance of success. The adherence to a programme manual, video taping sessions for review, and observation of sessions, are all ways of monitoring and enhancing intervention integrity.
- Information collected from the measures should be reviewed and a feedback mechanism put in place to provide constructive feedback to staff on their sessions.

- Sessions can be either videotaped or audio taped and these tapes regularly monitored to develop good practice.
- A clear and comprehensive programme manual may be developed to guide sessions. Staff should be encouraged to adhere to the manual to enhance programme integrity and aid evaluation of the programmes effectiveness.

## Monitoring and Evaluation:

- Robust monitoring and evaluation procedures are crucial to show the effectiveness of an intervention programme and also to justify funding and continued support for that intervention. Monitoring and evaluation procedures need to be clarified during the development stage of the intervention in order to collect reliable information from the start.

*'...part of the funding is to deliver certain outcomes' (FRS).*

- The use of formal needs assessment before and after the programme will enable clear monitoring and evaluation of the effectiveness of the intervention and wherever possible other types of evaluation or monitoring of the intervention, such as data about continues fire-setting and fire-related behaviours, should be collected.
- Attendance and non-completion should be monitored and reasons from non-attendance/non-completion recorded in order to highlight any consistent problems (timing of the sessions for example).
- Monitoring information needs to be routinely and consistently collected and a specific person should be responsible for collating and checking this information, and feedback given to the staff.

*'The Fire Service keeps the questionnaire that is given out after the sessions. We meet every six months formally and look at this information and review the progress' (YOS).*

**Communication:**

- Effective communication between all levels of staff involved with the programme is vital to ensure its smooth running. Specific means of communication need to be established and adhered to.

*'We have regular individual and team briefs' (Shropshire FRS).*

- Protocols must be developed to ensure all staff are kept informed about what is happening in relation to the programme, and that they have adequate access to other members of staff. Formal meetings involving all levels of involved staff will enhance communication.
- Effective systems of communication between agencies must also be developed. Clear guidelines should be given regarding appropriate contacts within partner organisations, and indeed other Fire and Rescue Services.

**Staff:**

- Staff levels will depend upon resources, the demand for the programme, and how the intervention is to be implemented, but there should be sufficient staff to deliver the programme effectively.

*'We need more women, as it isn't always appropriate to send two men' (Shropshire FRS).*

- Guidelines for staff recruitment should be developed, along with a clear job description to inform potential staff of what is involved. Thought must be given to what, if any, remuneration will be provided and this information should be included within the job description.

*'With staff selection it's finding people willing to give their time up' (Greater Manchester FRS).*

- Sufficient management, administrative, practical supervision, and emotional support are necessary for staff to work effectively within the intervention. Staff should be made aware of what support they can expect and where this can be found.

**Staff training:**

- All staff should be fully trained in the programme, as should those responsible for ensuring the integrity of the programme.
- Training should teach the specific skills required for either group work or one to one sessions.
- Formal training along with written reference material should be provided.
- The possibility of a probationary period for newly trained staff should be considered when developing the programme.

*'We aren't experts in behaviour, but we can educate on fire safety' (Greater Manchester FRS).*

- The further training needs of staff should be continually monitored and addressed and booster training sessions should be attended by staff throughout the delivery of the programme.
- Although other agencies may have their own forms of training, it is important that programme staff from partnership agencies also attend the training sessions for the programme.

**Administrative Staff:**

- Programme staff and co-ordinators should be given adequate administrative support to prepare for the programme sessions and to collect monitoring data.
- Administrative staff should be appropriately trained to support programme staff in the preparation and monitoring of programmes.

*'The admin support comes from the YOS although the fire service sort out the funding' (Leeds YOS).*

**Accommodation:**

- Appropriate accommodation for the programme sessions should be provided when necessary. Where additional materials are necessary to the running of a session, these should be readily available.
- The accommodation should be adequate for the purpose and always available when required.

- Issues such as the location of the accommodation, transport for participants and staff to the accommodation, and equipment required should be considered.

### Partnerships:

- Effective systems of communication between partner agencies should be developed. Clear guidelines should be given regarding appropriate contacts within partner organisations.

*'We work in conjunction with Youth Justice and have regular meetings so we're kept updated' (Greater Manchester FRS).*

- Where partnerships with other agencies are involved, all parties should have a clear understanding of what is expected of them in terms of input and output, and what level of communication is needed.
- Clear guidelines for roles and responsibilities should be set out in a Service Level Agreement between partner agencies. Such agreements should address responsibilities across all the involved agencies, including matters such as data sharing, data protection and confidentiality, health and safety, and child protection issues.
- Monitoring and evaluation methods should be agreed with partners to aid the collection of comparable information.
- Information about the programme should be passed quickly and regularly between agencies. Staff should be kept informed of both local and national developments with information sharing protocols between partner agencies a priority.

*'The programme developed because of these links [between the Fire Service and YOS] and otherwise might not have been developed' (Leeds YOS).*

The basic steps involved in the development and implementation of an effective intervention programme are summarised below:

- Cross check with other agencies
- Develop a model for change
- Evaluate resource implications

- Develop an intervention plan
- Write a detailed programme manual
- Produce selection criteria for referrals
- Employ procedures for monitoring, evaluation, and programme integrity
- Put communication protocols in place
- Design a job description
- Provide formal staff training
- Find appropriate accommodation
- Implement Service Level Agreements with partner agencies

### Further information

The full report contains a detailed literature review and the full critical survey of current work being undertaken: *'Evaluation of interventions with arsonists and young firesetters'* by Emma J Palmer, Laura S Caulfield and Clive Hollin, ODPM, March 2005, [www.arsoncontrolforum.gov.uk](http://www.arsoncontrolforum.gov.uk) click on publications.

The National Community Fire Safety Centres toolbox contains guidelines on working with juvenile firesetters, including advice on programme material, measurements of intervention effectiveness, and partnership with other agencies. [www.firesafetytoolbox.org.uk/ncfsc/hottopics/juvenilefiresetting/default.htm](http://www.firesafetytoolbox.org.uk/ncfsc/hottopics/juvenilefiresetting/default.htm)

The Youth Justice Board have produced a range of publications under the banner *'Key Elements of Effective Practice'*, covering a range of issues including assessment and planning of interventions. [www.youth-justice-board.gov.uk](http://www.youth-justice-board.gov.uk)

The Home Office Crime Reduction Centre has developed a 'Passport to Evaluation', offering general guidance on the evaluation of crime reduction programmes: [www.crimereduction.gov.uk/learningzone/passport\\_to\\_evaluation.htm](http://www.crimereduction.gov.uk/learningzone/passport_to_evaluation.htm)

For further information on effective work with offenders see [www.crimereduction.gov.uk/workingoffenders1.htm](http://www.crimereduction.gov.uk/workingoffenders1.htm) – this contains further details on the *What Works* CSAP principles.