



ARSON CONTROL FORUM

Research Bulletin no. **8**

Youth Training and Diversion Schemes

Foreword

Young people can be both victims and perpetrators of fire. They are particularly vulnerable to death and injury by fire, especially in deprived households. Children and young people are sadly also involved in much fire-related crime – including deliberate firesetting, hoax calls and attacks on firefighters.

Early and effective intervention, diversion and education can help reduce crime, improve life chances, develop better citizens and safer communities. The Fire and Rescue Service already undertakes a wide range of successful initiatives aimed at young people, especially disadvantaged young people and those at risk of exclusion. The Service therefore has an important role to play, building on its professional skills and experience, in working with children and young people.

This Research Bulletin provides an overview of the training and diversion schemes operated by the Fire and Rescue Service and identifies good practice in engaging with children and young people.

Youth training and diversion schemes are central to the Service's statutory duty to promote fire safety and also contribute to tackling disadvantage, reducing health inequalities and preventing crime. They have clear links with the Government's Respect Action Plan and the Strategy for dealing with Prolific and other Priority Offenders and reflect the Forum's new priority for working with children and young people.

I welcome this report and commend it to all those who have an interest in reducing deliberate fires.

JIM FITZPATRICK MP
Parliamentary Under Secretary of State
Office of the Deputy Prime Minister



Introduction

The Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004, which came into force on 1st October 2004, places a new duty on all Fire and Rescue Authorities in England to promote fire safety with the aim of preventing deaths and injuries in the home and reducing the impact of fire on the community as a whole.

In this context, the Fire and Rescue Service has a track record of strong commitment to working with young people and has devoted considerable time and resource to this task. Although guidance on working with young firesetters and child protection, as well as youth training and development is available to the Fire and Rescue Service, good quality evaluation of these schemes has been largely overlooked.

The current study, carried out by ECOTEC Research and Consulting Ltd, provides information about the targeting of interventions, the benefits to disadvantaged young people and young offenders, and good practice in engaging with these groups. Using a combination of interviews, a survey and case studies the researchers reported on the variety of schemes in existence and were able to assess good practice. The full report can be found at www.aroncontrolforum.gov. This Research Bulletin summarises the key findings, good practice and recommendations.

Background

The 1980s and 1990s saw an expansion of fire and rescue service involvement in youth training and diversionary work. Schemes set up to create a sense of belonging in the community, a better environment and to reduce antagonism towards fire crews were seen as successful. During this period there was also a reduction in deaths due to fire in the home and emerging evidence of the importance of preventative work, leading to a shift in the work of the Fire and Rescue Service towards 'community fire safety'. By 2003 a review of schemes found that nearly all fire and rescue services in England were involved in some form of diversionary work with young people.¹

Key concepts

The study found that the majority of schemes provided or supported by the Fire and Rescue Service had a diversionary focus, i.e. activities to steer young people away from 'risky' behaviour, such as firesetting, criminal behaviour, educational exclusion, drug and alcohol misuse.

The Children's Fund Guidance² identifies 'four levels of prevention' in working with children and young people, based on models developed by Hardiker et al.³:

- **Level One:** *Diversionary prevention* where strategies are usually targeted on whole populations, and aim to tackle problems before they emerge.
- **Level Two:** *Early prevention* where efforts are made to deal with problems that are already beginning to manifest themselves.
- **Level Three:** *Heavy-end prevention* dealing with multiple, complex and long-standing difficulties tailored to individual need.
- **Level Four:** *Restorative prevention* carried out with children and young people in public care, those permanently excluded from school or in young offender institutions or under supervision, and/or those receiving assistance within the child protection framework.

The majority of the work of the Fire and Rescue Service with young people can be classed as level one and two.

Main types of scheme

The study included schemes running at 33 of the 47 Fire and Rescue Services across the country (70%) and identified a total of 332 schemes, an average of 10 schemes per Service.

Five types of scheme were documented:

- Young Firefighters' Association.
- Princes Trust 'Team' Programme.
- Duke of Edinburgh Award.
- Youth association 'badge' schemes.
- Locally-specific schemes.

The researchers found that most local Fire and Rescue Services developed their own approach to youth engagement, often with contrasting funding and aims. However, the common theme to the majority of schemes was promoting community fire safety alongside the opportunity for personal development for young people. (More detail about each scheme can be found in the full report.)

1 ODPM (2003) *HMFSI/HMFSI for Scotland. The Fire and Rescue Service: Working with Young People in the Community*. London: ODPM.

2 Children and Young People's Unit (2000) *Children's Fund Guidance*. London: CYPUP.

3 Hardiker, P., Exton, K. and Barker, K. (1991) *Policies and Practices in Preventive Childcare*. Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Ltd.

The Fire and Rescue Service managed, delivered and was involved as a partner in a range of schemes targeting young people with differing needs:

- The more 'universal' schemes (Young Firefighters Association and Duke of Edinburgh Award) were the most widespread.
- Higher-end interventions such as Princes Trust 'Team', LIFE, Firebreak and Phoenix were typically shorter and focussed on disadvantaged young people.
- Local level schemes, in which the Fire and Rescue Service worked with partners to develop youth interventions, tended to be innovative in their approach, providing fresh ideas for the Fire and Rescue Service.

Partnership and management arrangements

The research found that Fire and Rescue Services had developed some successful links with partners, which helped to improve the expertise of Fire and Rescue Service staff and provided a multi-agency approach to meeting the needs of young people. However, increased partner involvement in the design and day-to-day running of the schemes could be strengthened.

Schemes assessed as more effective offered youth training with the Fire and Rescue Service as an integrated part of a wider programme of tailored activities and were characterised by strong partnership links with other agencies. These included training provided by Youth Offending Teams, Connexions and educational institutions.

In general, Fire and Rescue Services were able to keep scheme costs low, by providing a considerable proportion of Fire and Rescue Service youth training activity using volunteers and in-kind contributions (such as use of facilities and equipment). However, many schemes reported a move towards professionalism, employing staff, offering remuneration to former volunteers and improving opportunities for staff development which impacted on the costs of schemes. Schemes with a highly professional structure, those working with more challenging groups of young people and accessing harder to reach groups, were more likely to access wider sources of funding and draw in professional expertise from 'youth professions'.

Staffing and quality frameworks

Staffing arrangements and the line management of staff varied across different schemes:

- The reported number of core staff ranged from less than 20 vetted staff in over half of the Fire and Rescue Services to over 80 staff in 13%;
- Some staff were employed full time and others brought in on an ad-hoc basis throughout the year;
- Most staff were uniformed (ratio 13:1);
- Over half of all personnel were volunteers;
- The levels of training varied and tended to be dependent on the scheme with which the Fire and Rescue Service was involved.

The majority of schemes had suitable quality frameworks in place, with due attention to risk assessments, child protection, and Criminal Record Bureau checks for staff. However, a small minority were found to lack one or more of these arrangements, including no current child protection policy and certain schemes were assessed as being less developed than those of other youth related agencies. It was recommended that steps be taken to safeguard young people already engaged in training across the Service as a whole.

Monitoring and evaluation

Around a third of schemes did not undertake any performance monitoring, and two thirds reported no arrangements for evaluating effectiveness of schemes. The absence of data, which would provide evidence of the success of individual schemes, was likely to have hindered the progress of the Service in other areas (such as accessing funding). No consistent information was available to assess the impact of schemes.

The approach of the Fire and Rescue Service to equality and diversity monitoring was an area of concern for youth engagement work. Very few Fire and Rescue Services employed any measures to monitor and review the participation of young people from different Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) groups. There were few examples of schemes that engaged with BME representative organisations or tailored activities according to specific cultural needs. Benefits could be achieved by transferring good practice from the small number of schemes that have been more pro-active in this area.

'What works': Good Practice Methods and Approaches

Planning and implementing schemes

Partnerships were key to running successful schemes. However a number of other important factors were highlighted in the report:

- A core dedicated team to take forward youth diversion activities.
- Strategic planning and developing contacts with partners to link schemes together.
- A link worker within the community.
- Clear lines of responsibility with support system in place.
- A team with operational fire-fighters and non-operational staff to ensure a good mix of skills, knowledge and experience.
- Mixed gender team to reflect the needs of young people.
- An ongoing formalised training programme starting at induction and with a career development route.

Working with young people

The Fire and Rescue Service was assessed as successful in engaging with young people by providing the following:

- Support for young people to be themselves and being offered respect.
- A clear course structure with some element of choice and flexibility for young people.
- Taking young people out of their comfort zone by mixing groups.
- Adoption of a behaviour management system.
- Engagement of community link staff (outreach workers) who were already working with the target group of young people.

Methods of delivery

Key success factors were identified:

- The use of practical exercises and/or visual aids for engagement.
- Working in smaller groups to help keep sessions focussed.
- Fire and Rescue Service personnel assuming mentoring roles and treating young people as adults.
- Recognising and recording achievement, through records, portfolios and certificates.
- Certification/accreditation, rewarding both more and less motivated young people with different levels of award.

Scheme duration

Three types of scheme were identified and found to have benefits/disadvantages for different groups of young people:

- *Short term intensive support for young people in high-risk groups* (up to one week) included schemes better at addressing higher-end risk factors, such as school exclusion, although they provided less opportunity to meet individual needs.
- *Medium term interventions* (over a period of weeks, with a structured programme and an end objective) were successful in introducing young people to a structured programme of activity and were flexible enough to address individual needs. Staff were able to support young people and help them plan for when the course ended. The length of the scheme meant that some groups of young people were difficult to engage.
- *Longer term personal development programmes* (over months or years) offered sustained support, trust building, assessment of progress and opportunities for progression and accreditation. These schemes were not as successful in engaging a broad range of young people, because they were too challenging for some.

Supporting young people to achieve

The majority of support was provided by Fire and Rescue Service personnel. However a range of workers were involved, including seconded staff such as youth workers and learning support assistants. The following were highlighted as positive ways of working with young people:

- Informal and formal mentoring provided young people with ongoing support that they could access.
- Peer education involving older youths provided support for those who were younger, providing them with an opportunity to build their self esteem.

Findings and Recommendations

The researchers concluded that the current range of universal and targeted schemes was an asset to the Fire and Rescue Service, but that it lacked coherence. Recommendations included greater coordination and sharing of good practice to benefit the schemes and the young people taking part. In particular, the researchers gave priority to addressing the relationship between different types of scheme, which would help to identify how the benefits experienced by young people might be sustained through greater cross-referral and networking between schemes.

The researchers also suggested that there was a need to more clearly identify core competencies expected of personnel working on schemes, in line with other agencies that work with young people, and that more emphasis should be placed on equality and diversity issues, in line with research evidence⁴.

Overall, successful schemes had the following features:

- clear criteria for recruiting staff;
- line management in accordance with Fire and Rescue Service protocols;
- partnerships with other local services/projects (partners provided expertise and links to more difficult to reach groups); and
- opportunities for staff to progress.

Priorities for future development

The researchers identified a number of 'headline' priorities:

- (a) To set in place adequate safeguards, to protect young people engaged in youth training activities involving the Fire and Rescue Service; to include a Child Protection Policy, Risk Assessment and Criminal Record Bureau checks as standard;
- (b) To strengthen the existing partnership work for the schemes, by promoting the involvement of partners in design and delivery, and developing a more strategic approach for Fire and Rescue Services in linking with Children's Trusts and Local Area Agreements (LAAs);
- (c) To improve the performance management framework for youth training schemes, by placing a greater emphasis on evidence based practice; to include more widespread use of monitoring/evaluation and a place for youth training schemes within Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA);
- (d) To encourage more widespread links with other types of youth interventions, in order to provide an effective basis for referring young people to/from the Fire and Rescue Service and to ensure that any positive outcomes are maintained;
- (e) To promote a more active approach for the Fire and Rescue Service in working with BME communities, by consulting with BME representative organisations on opportunities and priorities for development;
- (f) To develop coherent guidelines on staff training and career progression for youth training schemes, including information on where and how to access training, and 'mainstreaming' the role of the Fire and Rescue Service Youth Development Officer;
- (g) To extend the forums that exist for the sharing of good practice in youth training, in order to promote equality of access to the main scheme types across England, and to consider how the less well known schemes might be disseminated more widely.

These priority areas will be addressed in a forthcoming good practice guide, which will be available in Spring 2006.

4 Sachdev, D. and Van Meeuwen, A. (Eds.) (2002) *Are we listening yet? Working with minority ethnic communities – some models of practice*. Ilford: Barnardo's.

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