



Acting on Youth Justice Solutions: A problem solving culture



Northamptonshire deputy lieutenant Dominic Goble JP DL shares the actions taken in his area to improve the outcomes for young people that appear before the court

Having completed three years as the youth panel chair, Dominic Goble took on the role of bench chair for Northamptonshire. He stepped down as chair of the bench at the end of March 2020, having completed three years in office. It was taking the role of youth panel chair, which coincided with his retirement, which gave Dominic the opportunity to start these youth reforms in his area. Nowadays, he is a deputy chair of the youth panel as he continues to drive local progress. The other role which has been instrumental in influencing progress of late has been his recent appointment as a deputy lieutenant for the county.

How it started

Seven years ago, the Northamptonshire magistracy started looking at ways to better support the children and young people who appeared before their youth courts. Soon afterwards in 2014, Lord Carlile published his *Independent Parliamentarians' Inquiry into the Operation and Effectiveness of the Youth Court*,ⁱ and spoke to his report at the Northamptonshire Symposium on Youth Justice that same year. During the two years that followed we had the pleasure of working with Charlie Taylor, who at the request of the Lord Chancellor, was conducting a governmental review of the youth justice system.ⁱⁱ With the Centre for Justice Innovation, Sieff and Nuffield Foundations all supporting youth justice reform, the Northamptonshire magistracy was innovating and acting at the beginning of a time of change.

We are now launching our third iteration of problem solving thinking: Youth Court Solutions. Built around the ACEⁱⁱⁱ model (Adverse

Childhood Experiences), knowing any brush with the criminal justice system constitutes an ACE and knowing that approximately 70% of child victims go on to become offenders, Youth Court Solutions is designed to tackle these problems as early as possible, whenever a child or young person comes into contact with a courthouse.

But that is not where we started and the last seven years have been busy.

Judges and magistrates take a lot of care to ensure the sentences they pass are right and appropriate. They are designed to address the offending, though primarily constructed to prevent reoffending while having full regard of the welfare of the child. It therefore comes as no surprise that sentencers care about the sentences they pass and live in hope that they will make a real and lasting difference. This is true of all sentencing and is fundamentally at the heart of youth justice.

Inspiring, motivating and supporting young people

The Northamptonshire magistracy considered ways that they could inspire, motivate and support the children and young people working under a court order. Starting with letters of congratulation when orders were revoked early due to excellent progress, the idea of offering support throughout the duration of the court order was next. This gave rise to the new and innovative out of court **Youth Review Panel**; although unused legislation did sit on the statute books that would have allowed in-court reviews.^{iv} Specially trained magistrates attend the panels as guests of the Youth Offending

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Service, visiting the regular management review meetings. Although the magistrates attend as guests with no formal power, the opportunity for the child, young person and family members to meet the magistrates is seen by them as very significant. The magistrates offer motivation and support but also challenge where appropriate, all for a successful outcome.

In 2014, Lord Carlile's inquiry documented how the various agencies that are required to support a court order were too often working at odds with each other. Over the years, magistrates attending the youth review panels have observed this at first hand. If the reviews were being conducted in court maybe immediate action could have been taken to ensure all agencies properly supported the child or young person under the order of the court. Previous experience of such difficulties meant we had long since resurrected a little used piece of legislation.^v This ensured all agencies, who would be charged with a duty or responsibility by the court, were fully engaged in the sentencing and subsequent processes.

Proactive engagement with a broad range of professionals

The second iteration of building our problem solving environment was to consider how the court sentencing hearing could proactively engage the broad range of professionals so often needed to work together in really complex cases. When the possible complexities are proactively recognised a **Problem Solving Hearing** is listed and all professionals who will have a responsibility for delivering any element of the court order are requested to attend court. In court, each professional is engaged by the presiding justice to declare what they propose to do and how they intend to deliver. To support understanding the presiding justice will ensure there is clarity on behalf of all attending professionals, the child or young person and their family. The basis of this broad understanding will form the backbone of the court order under law.

Which brings us up to date and to the launch of our third iteration of our problem solving culture: **Youth Court Solutions**.

Addressing the broader problems

The vast majority of children and young people who offend are often living with other difficulties far outside their own control. Many have also been victims of crime or some other kind of abuse before finding themselves before the court for their own wrongdoing. From studies conducted by Northamptonshire Police we know that before a child enters the criminal justice system they have, on average, had seven encounters with some form of authority which might have diverted them but sadly didn't. Likewise, often the other children or young people involved as either victims, witnesses or even as the siblings of those concerned, are also living with tremendous difficulties negatively influencing their lives and seriously restricting their opportunities in life. Building on our post-court reviews and in-court problem solving hearings, we have turned our efforts to an at-court service to help tackle these underlying problems.

Youth Court Solutions, our at-court advice and support service, was launched in pilot form in autumn 2020 and will operate with the kind permission of HM Courts and Tribunals Service (HMCTS) from the offices in the public area of the Wellingborough courthouse. It is delivered by a range of local charities^{vi} and coordinated by the Crisalys Foundation^{vii} working in conjunction with the Youth Offending Service, police and, where necessary, the legal profession.

It will aim to ensure that all young visitors have their broader problems addressed, offering access to a wide range of services for clients, children and young people and their families. This may include:

- Help to identify and access local authority, statutory or third sector support services to address the issues which bring children and young people to court
- Introductions to learning and training opportunities to improve employment prospects
- Practical support with financial issues and accommodation
- Information on the working of the criminal justice system

Northamptonshire Youth Court Solutions enjoys the enthusiastic support of the Lieutenancy; the Shrievalty; the magistracy and senior judiciary; the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner; the police; HMCTS; the Centre for Justice Innovation; and many others.



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Youth Court Solutions is launched!

Launched on 12 January 2021, Youth Court Solutions, the at-court advice and support service, will work broadly to provide a supportive and stable environment for the child or young person and, as a consequence, an enhanced prospect for the child or young person of living a life free from the impact of crime, whether as a witness, victim or perpetrator, thereby also creating long-term savings for the whole justice system.

Every child deserves the chance of a happy future.

Footnotes

i <http://bit.ly/magistrate216>

ii <http://bit.ly/magistrate217>

iii <http://bit.ly/magistrate218>

iv <http://bit.ly/magistrate219> This takes us through the original legislative location for youth reviews; schedule 1, paragraph 35 of the 2008 Act. <http://bit.ly/magistrate2112> Since 1 December and the advent of the Sentencing Act 2020, that provision is now found at section 194 of the new Act.

v <http://bit.ly/magistrate2110>

<http://bit.ly/magistrate2111> When we resurrected this power an article was published in the June-July issue of MAGISTRATE, p8-9, which gives a description of the powers and how they should be used.

vi www.servicesix.co.uk

vii www.crisalys.org

For more information about Youth Court Solutions please contact Dominic at dominic.goble.jp@judiciary.net.