National Children's Bureau

‘Having your say’ project

- Based on policy analysis, literature review and interviews in order to answer these questions:
- What are the expectations about young people’s participation within the youth justice system?
  - Individual case management
  - Policy and service development
- How are these expectations being translated into practice?
- What are the barriers/ enablers to effective participation with this group of young people?
- Is there a need for change? If so, what?

Expectations: law and policy

- Young offenders share universal right to be heard and have their views taken into account
- Specific youth justice policies don't emphasise this right
  - Offered opportunity to complete self-assessment within Asset
  - YOTs should seek feedback about services
  - Secure establishments should have consultation fora
  - Language is about 'engagement' not 'having a say' e.g. participation = taking part in positive activities
- 'Engagement is not an end in itself'
- Performance framework doesn't hold youth justice agencies to account for this aspect of practice

What happens in practice?

- Evidence that self-assessment form provides new information BUT
  - Some criticisms of format
  - Not used as widely as it could be
  - … and information not taken into account by YOTs
- Problems with young people's voice being heard in court
  - 'Tongue-tied' or discouraged by lawyers
  - Pre-sentence reports may or may not reflect their views – and may be no opportunity to challenge them
- Concept of involving young people in policy/ service development under-developed e.g. no equivalent of Children in Care councils

Young people's perspectives

- Contact with the youth justice system described as a passive experience
  - Little say in their order/ interventions
  - Not involved in writing pre-sentence report
  - …but with some positives
- Communication
  - Most young people felt they could talk to their YOT worker - but some constraints because 'they can go against you'
  - Mixed about other professionals
- Quality of the relationships vital
  - wanted to be listened to, not to hear the worker's own views

Young people's perspectives (2)

- Involvement in own assessment/ case planning
  - Valued the opportunity to do self-assessment *(What do YOU think?)*
  - But never saw it again or knew how it was used
  - Reasonable choice over appointment times/ venue – but less over the nature of the intervention
- Wider involvement in youth justice service
  - Would like a say in how the service should be developed
  - Very limited opportunities – other than in custody
  - Think being 'punished' precludes having a say.
- *'Ask me "Is there anything <u>you</u> want to say?" for starters!'*

What are the issues for adults?

- Shared perception about lack of strategic direction – but beginning to shift
- Political barriers – do young offenders ‘deserve’ a say?
- Cultural barriers – are staff committed to participation?
  - and do they all have the skills?
- Conceptual barriers
  - Is there a problem in expecting young people to share ‘incriminating’ information about their riskiness?
- Practical barriers – what are best methods?
  - Individual case-management
  - Policy and service development

Key messages

- Growing evidence that participation ‘works’
- … and both adults and young people would like to see it developed within youth justice services

- WHAT DO YOU THINK?
- Have we identified the key issues? Is anything missing?
- What would you like to see happen next? Who? How? Priority?

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