



Speech

Dame Glenys Stacey

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Effective Multi-Agency Working

Good afternoon. I hope you have had an enjoyable and informative morning. It is a pleasure to be here, and to have the chance to hear from you, learn from you, and speak with you.

Geeta and I seem to have been given quite a brief for this session – basically, how can we make those in the criminal justice system, the voluntary or third sector, and health, education and housing authorities work as one, or in a sufficiently seamless fashion? We will need your help.

To start the discussion, I would like to give three quite different examples I have seen of making a positive difference and providing an opportunity for people to change their lives for the better.

The first example is from County Durham, where the police have developed a scheme called Checkpoint, based on the West Midlands' Turning Point initiative, for those of you familiar with that. In short, those committing low and medium level criminal offences, at risk of imprisonment and assessed as at medium risk of committing further offences are given an option to avoid charge, Court and the consequences of a conviction. They may choose instead to participate in a four month programme based on a set of conditions agreed between the offender and the police.

Those conditions will generally involve restorative justice (save in cases of child protection), some reparation, GPS tagging (where it helps the offender to say no to others encouraging them to participate in further crime) and regular supervision meetings.

The indications for the scheme's success are promising, and it appears cost neutral for the police to deliver it (and that is not counting the costs saved for other agencies). A randomised control trial of Checkpoint is now underway, in conjunction with Cambridge University. Over the next ten months, some 800 or so offenders are likely to participate in the scheme. So, how does this seem to work?

- There is a strong incentive to participate: the avoidance of charge
- The number of conditions is manageable (not too many or too few, but perhaps five or six) and so the risk of 'up-tariff' is avoided
- The programme length is equally proportionate: not too short or long

- It is delivered locally, and has the backing and financial support of the Police and Crime Commissioner. The governance arrangements involve all the key players locally including the CRC, the NPS and the Courts
- Participants are most carefully selected using a sophisticated database and system to predict the risk of future re-offending, for example the individual's postcode, age on onset, presenting offence and so on. Participants are selected assiduously, with medium risk re-offending the target
- Probation Officers undertake the critical supervision role at the heart of the scheme and its success. As the police officer responsible for the scheme said to me, Probation Officers engage the individual in a completely different way and are able to extract contextual and emotional information, rather than simply the facts, and find ways to enable the individual decide to change.

Should this scheme prove successful in the randomised control trial, it has significant implications for the whole of the criminal justice system as well as for those individuals at medium risk of reoffending whose lives can turn around.

A second example I have seen of making a positive difference and turning lives around is in relation to desistance for 16 and 17 year olds. Today we published our report on the effectiveness of practice in Youth Offending Teams in supporting children and young people's routes away from offending. I do hope you take the chance to read it.

You will be familiar with desistance theory, but the relative impact of the various factors that can make a difference for this age group is not so clear in the research. We interviewed a good number of children and young people who had not reoffended for a period of 12 months or more after the end of their statutory supervision, to see what they thought worked for them. We also interviewed a similar number of those who had reoffended within 12 months of receiving a community or custodial sentence and their parents/carers and key workers, to find and contrast their experiences.

Not surprisingly, we found that as with adults, personalised approaches work best – those that take into account gender and ethnicity, for example. What is more we found that effective methods for children and young people are age-appropriate, and based on a good understanding of the individual's needs, history and circumstances, for example Looked After status.

Most notably – and I think this perhaps takes the research forwards a little - those young people successful in desisting from crime laid great store on a trusting, open and collaborative relationship with a YOT worker or other professional, seeing it as the biggest factor in their achievement.

Those young people persisting in crime who had experienced restorative justice had mixed views about it. In addition, some case managers were ambivalent about reparation work. Children and young people were sometimes slotted into existing projects that case managers thought unlikely to prove effective for the child or young person, and case managers reported far too much time spent 'pushing' children and young people through unpaid work, with enforcement action often a consequence.

Notably for these children and young people, unpaid work had been ineffective in promoting desistance despite the effort and cost involved in making it happen, whereas those who were successful in desisting crime generally had much more positive experiences of it. But the main point is this: the key relationship – whether it is with the case manager the nurse or whatever - it matters, and perhaps matters most.

One last example of making a positive difference I'd like to mention is the work of NPS staff servicing courts in Humberside. Under the new probation service arrangements there is a fault line between the NPS and CRCs, with NPS staff preparing court reports that both sentencers and CRCs rely on. About a third of these are oral reports (to meet the needs of speedy justice).

At the moment reports vary in quality, with written reports generally much better than reports presented orally. Sometimes checks are not made to find out whether there are concerns about child safeguarding or domestic abuse, or the results of such checks are not received in time. And sometimes those writing reports do not know enough about the work offered by the local CRC, making it difficult for them to propose interventions likely to address the offenders' problems.

Hats off then to the team in Hull, where the Court administration staff initiate children's services and domestic abuse checks at the earliest opportunity and indeed when we inspected we found that on the overnight lists of those appearing in court the next day, they had already been marked with tiers, risk status and relevant information needed for court duty. This included information about domestic abuse and breach.

We also observed discussions between the Court team and a range of people, including ushers, solicitors, and the CPS. The discussions included sharing information about individuals in the cells about whom the NPS had not been informed. Court staff were confident, known throughout the court and were knowledgeable and well regarded. They were approachable and they used their authority well, we thought.

There was a good level of information provided by children services and the police, and the Court staff were proactive. So we saw telephone contact with DRR workers about the suitability of a DRR proposal for Crown Court. We also saw good use made of previous information known about offenders, and staff were astute in picking up where there were potential issues, including mental health concerns.

In short, the staff had good processes, and had a really good understanding of them. They were well regarded and respected, they were thinking ahead, making the most of the good relationships they had established, and they were assiduous. They were well led.

So, three different examples of what works. In the County Durham and Humberside examples, people are using their initiative and persevering locally to join things up and make a difference. But in the other example looking at desistance for 16 and 17 year olds, joining up is no less important, but it is the consistency and support afforded by one professional putting trust and faith in the young person that matters most.

Thank you very much. Thank you for listening.

ENDS