

'I can see them being kids':

An Evaluation of the 'Referral Process' of Youth Advantage Outreach

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Thank you to Major Adrian Williams the manager of Youth Advantage Outreach (YAO) and all those who work with YAO to refer the young people and in many cases, chaperone them on the courses. I am grateful they gave their time and answered the many questions I had. Enjoy the mud guys!

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Executive summary

Youth Advantage Outreach is a collaborative venture by the Army in Scotland and Police Scotland. The purpose is to provide an adventurous and challenging course using Army experience which is targeted at youth who have come to the attention of police as a result of offending or risk-taking behaviour. Several five-day residential courses are offered each year, in different locations in Scotland for mixed-sex groups of up to 40 young people aged 14 to 17.

The Centre for Youth and Criminal Justice (CYCJ) was invited by the Scottish Government to undertake a study to examine perceptions of value of the experience among a sample of referrers. Interviews were conducted with 12 individuals and one group, who work either for YAO or with YAO. Key findings include:

- Overall the course is seen extremely positively by both referrers and the young people who attend, and there is a lot of anecdotal evidence suggesting very good outcomes for some young people who were going down a very negative path prior to taking part.
- Referrers found having no problems finding young people both willing and appropriate to attend courses.
- Local authorities have found their own means of referral, coordination of the cohorts and use of the course.
- There is a great deal of variation in the understanding and the application of course attendance criteria among referral co-ordinators, some issues raised in relation to communication, particularly as regards the potential flexibility of the content of the course and a suggestion that not all agencies are comfortable sharing information about the young people referred.

Suggestions for improvement

Based on the research we would make four suggestions for improvement for YAO to consider.

1. YAO would benefit from further clarity in terms of the criteria for inclusion and exclusion from referral.
2. There should be greater communication between YAO and the referrers, whether individual coordinators or Early Intervention Groups.
3. If the course is being targeted at different young people by the different referrers in local authorities then the question needs to be asked, do the requirements of each local authority match what is being offered by YAO or should more use be made of tailoring to ensure a better match?

4. Agreement should be reached between social services, the police and schools to ensure that all pertinent information is shared with either the referrer co-ordinator or YAO prior to acceptance on the course.

Chapter 1: Context and background to the course

1.1 Introduction

The Army has delivered a number of different youth engagement initiatives in Scotland, in partnership with the Police and other agencies, for more than 10 years. These initiatives variously known as: Operation Youth Advantage, Opportunity Knocks for Youth or Operation Lifeline, among others, have been aimed at providing diversionary activities for young people who have offended or are involved in antisocial behaviour. At the end of 2011 these various independent projects were brought together under a single partnership initiative known as Youth Advantage Outreach (YAO).

The course itself has changed over time as different activities and methods have been tried and tested, and has the ability to change according to the needs of any particular cohort. However, the core five day programme for 15 to 17 year olds consists of 16 key skills: adventurous exercises (subcontracted to Wow Scotland), first aid training provided by the British Red Cross, a simulated incident and a night exercise. The programme also covers issues such as cyber-bullying, knife crime and use is made of motivational speakers.

This report is designed to describe and examine how local authorities are using the course specifically by looking at how referrals are made, what understanding referrers and referral co-ordinators have of the course and their views of what the young people who attend gain from the experience.

1.2 YAO objectives

The Army, Police Service and local multi-agency partners, agree that YAO courses will endeavour to contribute to the following outcomes:

- a. To give young people becoming involved in offending behaviour an insight into alternative life choices.
- b. Improve life chances and contribute towards better outcomes for young people by using diversionary techniques.
- c. Develop individual, personal and interpersonal skills and confidence through team based activities.
- d. Create opportunities for young people to realise their potential, and the positive contributions they can make towards communities, allowing them to challenge antisocial behaviour and attitudes.
- e. Promote healthier living.
- f. Develop citizenship amongst young people.
- g. Implement the principles of GIRFEC by assisting young people who display offending behavior.

- h. Help the Army, other uniformed services and supporting agencies engage more effectively with young people.
- i. Provide young people with a safe and secure environment in which to learn and develop.
- j. Provide young people with an environment in which to reflect on issues which may affect them on an individual and collective basis.

1.3 In what way is YAO different?

Once young people have come to the attention of the courts there are formal diversions available for them. Both in the UK and internationally there is a great deal of literature on the efficacy of 'bootcamp' style interventions that are often used as an alternative to custody. One such intervention, The Airborne Initiative in Scotland, was shut down in 2004 for not providing value for money; however, the target group for that intervention were men of 18 plus who were diverted from prison, many of whom had serious drug and alcohol issues.

The findings of The Edinburgh Study of Youth Transitions and Crime provided evidence for the recent reforms to youth justice adopted by the Scottish Government. This included both the Early and Effective Intervention Programme for those young people under 16 years of age and the Whole Systems Approach for those under 18 years. These programmes reflect a shift from the use of punitive measures towards diversion from the criminal justice system. The intention is to keep young people out of the criminal justice system, as:

"Once a young person has come under the gaze of the system, the status of having a hearings record in itself appears to result in more intensive intervention in later years" (The Edinburgh Study of Youth Transitions and Crime, report to the ESRC on Sweeps 3 and 4, page 9)

There are many opportunities for young people who have an interest in the armed forces to have a taster, for example: The Cadets, Military Mentors and free courses introduce young people to the Army Reserve. There are also several courses that can give young people a wilderness experience, to enable them to work as a team with other young people and learn new skills. Youth Advantage Outreach combines both of these opportunities in a short five day course.

Alternative outward-bound type courses available to young people across Scotland make similar claims to build the confidence and improve the skills of the young people who attend, so in what ways does Youth Advantage Outreach differ from these? The first difference is the length of the course in comparison to other similar interventions. Alternative wilderness, team-building type courses such as Venture Trust or Venture Scotland or even Duke of Edinburgh Awards last several months of varying levels of intensities and require young people to maintain their attendance before they are, in effect, rewarded with overnight trips away. Another difference is the Army involvement: for many young people this aspect of the course may be the most appealing part. The Army may not want YAO to be seen in any way as a recruitment tool but the fact is for many young people the thought of a week-long taster course of Army life will be one of the main attractions.

1.4 Working with 'hard to reach' young people

The target group for YAO is the hard to reach, disengaged young person. This is a critical time in the lives of these young people where choices they make now can affect them for years to come, a time when they can experience positive role models or become role models themselves. When it comes to working with young people, setting goals and boundaries, having open dialogue and engaging with them in a fun way is key. These are all ways in which the majority of young people go on to successfully pass into adulthood, but for those young people who are drifting away from schools and positive peer groups and beginning to find their behaviour bringing them to the attention of the police and the criminal justice system, extra steps such as these interventions can have a massive impact on the direction their life is taking.

1.5 Numbers attending the course

The table below shows the courses that ran from 2013 to 2014 according to the Youth Advantage Outreach Annual report. The figures show that the drop-out rate during the course is incredibly low, particularly when you consider the target group, which suggests that the work being done on the course itself is engaging the young people. However, there is a not inconsiderable drop-out rate prior to the course starting which may point to some issue in the types of referrals being made. It is impossible to state this with any accuracy without knowing the reasons behind these young people not showing up on the day.

Table 1: Youth Advantage Outreach attendees 2013 to 2014.

Location	Capacity	Confirmed	Completed	Failed to attend	Request to leave
Inverness 7 – 11 Oct 13 24 – 28 Feb 14	40	38	34	4	0
	40	42	33	8	1
Edinburgh 15 -19 Apr 13 9 -13 Sep 13	24	24	22	2	0
	24	24	23	0	1
Tayside 24 – 28 Mar 14	30	32	25	7	0
Central 20 - 24 May 13 23-27 Sep 13	30	28	24	2	2
	30	21	17	0	4
Glasgow 10 – 14 March 14	30	34	34	0	Course terminated day 2
Totals	248	243	212	23	8
		98%	87%	9%	3%

Unfortunately, due to an incident with attendees which led to safety concerns on the first night, the Glasgow course in Spring 2014 was cancelled early. A post-course review was held and it was concluded that the location was not appropriate and there were also issues with the cohort attending that particular course. If another course was to be tried in this area then these findings would guide the decision making.

Chapter 2: Methodology

This study was designed to report perceptions of value of the YAO experience among a sample of referrers, and ethical approval for the study design was gained from the University of Strathclyde Ethics Committee.

Individuals who refer cohorts to YAO were identified by the YAO manager and then these individuals were asked to identify others from whom they initially receive the young person referrals.

Interviews were conducted by phone and notes were taken of responses, and phone interviews were also tape recorded for accuracy in quotations. The referrers and key members of YAO gave verbal consent for the interviews and the use of a recorder.

In total there were 12 individual respondents and one group interviewed across 6 local authorities. Interviewees included five referrers to YAO, six YAO coordinators, a researcher conducting the Fife YAO evaluation, the Dundee Early Intervention Group, the manager of YAO and a chaperone for YAO. These interviews were conducted throughout August and September 2014. The Youth Advantage Outreach Annual Report 2013-14 was also consulted to complement the interview data.

Chapter 3: The referral process

What was interesting was the differing ways in which each local area made decisions regarding referrals, from utilising already established multi-agency referral groups such as the Early Intervention team in one local authority, to individuals such as community outreach police officers who act as a central coordinating point between referrers. In one local authority, during the last year there has been a move away from a central coordinator role to one where a Youth Offending Management Group would act as a conduit to referrals.

3.1 Coordination

The Army, who provide the staffing and the expertise to run the YAO course, do not dictate the methods by which local authorities select young people to take part. As a result there is some variation. There are two types of referral processes that have formed over time. In one local authority a referral group works together in an interagency fashion to make decisions about the supports and interventions young people need, with YAO as one of the options available to them. The other, more common, format is a central coordinator through whom referrals are made, these co-ordinators involve other agencies in information sharing and decision making to a greater or lesser extent. In all cases, however, the final selected group is shared with YAO via this coordinator and it is very rare that the Army intervene and refuse a place to an individual. Indeed, only two such cases came to my attention throughout this evaluation.

Each cohort can vary considerably, however. In some areas, particularly where multi-agency referral groups make the decisions, the majority of the young people referred appear to be young people who have offended who are known to at least one of the sitting members of the group, and potentially a higher tariff cohort would result. Where a central coordinator

takes on the role, it would appear instead that the majority of young people come from school referrals.

3.2 Interagency working

Again the quality and quantity of interagency working depended on the type of referral process. Clearly in areas where a group worked together to select potential attendees there is a great deal of discussion regarding the young person, their history, their needs and interests; however, in one local authority where the young people in the main came from school referrals there was less apparent need for interagency information sharing. Where young people to be referred were looked-after or who had a social worker already in place then information might be asked of them but in general only the information required by the application form was known by the referral co-ordinator. It was felt in this local authority that everything relevant to the young person's attendance on the course would be known by the schools involved in the referral.

This was not always borne out in reality, with one respondent identifying a case where she thought the referral was not a good one due to the current circumstances of the young person.

"Sometimes we don't get the full background of the young person, [one local authority] have referred some young people with issues, one boy just shouldn't have been there at all, his mum was just sectioned the week before and his dad was in and out of prison, he was just a really, really angry boy, more information like that needs to be shared. Sometimes workers don't want to put down on paper that the young person has learning disabilities, maybe they worry that they won't get a place. What it means is every course has a surprise, something that has not been told to us by workers" (Chaperone)

Another respondent raised the concern that the shared information from schools would often be informal, saying that in her experience 'education are not keen on sharing information if they think it will be recorded, perhaps because they don't want to be seen to have an opinion or get them [the young person] into trouble'.

The manager of YAO personally speaks to all of the young people prior to the start of the course. During this he refers to the application form completed by the young person where they have expressed what they hope to achieve from the course.

The relationship between the manager of YAO and the co-ordinators/referrers is intended to be one of openness and sharing, as he has stated where young people have particular requirements or vulnerabilities, the Army staff should know about these in advance. This view was echoed by most of the referrers also, particularly with regard to recent bereavements or where a young person was looked-after; however, one coordinator was not as comfortable with this aspect, pointing out that they are bound by data protection laws, another said it would be on a 'need to know basis' only.

The relatively high non-attendance rate prior to the start of some of the courses also suggests there may indeed be some issues with the types of referrals being made. However, it is also important to note that young people in this target group who often live chaotic lives can have their circumstances change very quickly. As one respondent described 'when places are offered it's a fluid process, things can always change, things happen that might mean they can't come'.

3.3 Understanding of the course

There was overall a very clear view of what the course itself would consist of, both in practical terms and also in terms of potential outcomes for the young people in attending. This was perhaps as a result of the close involvement experienced by some of the coordinators. Of the 12 individuals I spoke to four of them stated they have attended as adult chaperones or were intending to and two would be very keen to in the future. One coordinator felt that one of the reasons her courses were so successful was because she attends as an adult chaperone and this provides consistency for the young people. The course itself was described variously as: like the cadets but residential, outward bound but with the Army and as a course for team building and confidence building.

Coordinators talk of taking their role very seriously. As one respondent stated 'I look at the big pictures and try to get a good group' and 'it can cause a problem if there are too many young people from the same area'. Another concurred with this thinking saying: 'I try to get a good cross-section of the schools, so they are not all from one school and sticking together'.

Some of the respondents mentioned that young people can self-refer and have asked the school to make their referral when they have a real interest in the course. Others talked of having to break the news of the early morning starts, no cigarettes, alcohol or access to Wi-Fi. Referrers also perceived an anxiety in many of the young people at staying away from home, meeting new people and being away from their peer group.

A great deal of work is done by the referrers with both the young people and their families to prepare them for the course. This includes the practicalities of ensuring they have the right clothing for the course, to reassuring families about the other members of the group. One referrer spoke of spending time looking at the 'kit list' provided by the course with the young person and suggesting alternatives where necessary. Another spoke of reassuring one family who were worried the course would be full of 'bad boys'. On one of the courses the padlocks required by the young people were provided for them by referrers.

One respondent highlighted that it is sometimes the parents who can be hard to engage and so time can be spent ensuring that the requisite forms are completely filled in by them.

3.4 Course criteria

Historically the Army have worked with the police closely on the courses. It would be the police who referred young people exhibiting antisocial behaviour and committing offences and who they felt would benefit; however, although the police are still always involved to some extent in the referral process, in some areas their role is simply to provide a background check on the young people, to ensure that young people with a history of certain types of offences are noted and enable the referral coordinator(s) to make a more informed choice regarding including them in the cohort.

Although the application form does exclude certain young people from attending YAO, in the main most referrers took this as a guideline rather than a hard and fast rule.

"It's based on individual needs, a bit of a risk assessment. Also think about the whole group and the make-up of the group, are there going to be issues within the group" (Referrer)

“We would have worked with them beforehand and we know if they can function in a group setting” (Referrer)

In this case the respondent was not aware that the criteria as laid out states that young people with ADHD were not able to attend the course.

Where offending behaviour was concerned, again this was open to some interpretation on the part of the referrers and co-ordinators.

“There is some wiggle room with the violent offences, if the offence was over six months or so ago and you have been working with them then perhaps” (Previous referrer)

“The Army do not want young people with ADHD, asthma, sexual offences or those who go missing, but this is a bit of a grey area and I will include the child based on their own merit” (Referrer)

A respondent from one local authority stated she had strongly disagreed with the exclusion of young people with ADHD and argued for their inclusion. The manager of YAO explained that the ADHD exclusion was on the consent form but that if potential referrers or coordinators contacted him he would have some discretion around including young people with that diagnosis. Although he would not want an entire cohort made up of young people who had been diagnosed with ADHD, that like most of the criteria it would come down to the young person, the group, and their needs.

In two local authorities a history of sexual offences was identified as a reason not to refer a young person, while in another it was stated by the respondent that where offences had included violence against the police then the young person would not be able to attend. In one case fire-raising was identified as an obstacle, and in yet another, knife crime was identified as the rule.

It appears that the various criteria for inclusion and exclusion from referral would benefit from some clarity if inappropriate referrals are to be avoided and equally if young people are not being referred because of a lack of understanding as to what particular previous offences would not be accepted by the course organisers.

However, it is also worth mentioning that of those who took part in the evaluation, there was mention of only two cases where a young person was potentially referred but after consulting with YAO the referral was not made, and in one of those cases the young person was experiencing some mental ill health and it was deemed not the right time for them but they might be able to attend at another time. In the other it was a young person who had attended the course previously on three occasions and had applied to attend for a fourth.
In all cases respondents felt comfortable with the criteria and their interpretation of it.

3.5 Repeat referrals

In some local authorities referrers were more than happy to re-refer young people who had already had a place on a course. In some cases this was young people who had failed to complete and so wanted to try again but in other cases it would seem that the young person enjoyed their experience and wanted to repeat it. One respondent talked of a young man who had attended three times already and had been keen to attend for a fourth. Another

said that it came down to the view of the school who had referred the pupil saying that if the school saw a positive impact and a second go might make a difference, then that would be 'great'.

"Sometimes it can be months down the line and then it clicks for them" (Referrer)

3.6 The Army staff

The Army team consists of the YAO manager who is a Major and is supported by a Sergeant, a Corporal, two Lance Corporals and two Privates. They are the Recruiting Group Outreach Team and all of them have PVG clearance.

In general, opinions of the Army staff running the course were positive with respondents pointing out that the young people respond well to the rules that are laid out.

"...the young people actually look forward to the rules and regulations, they need the structure and thrive on it" (Coordinator)

Another stated 'the Army personnel are great, firm but fair'. Another said it was 'really well organised'.

The YAO manager has made clear that there are strict regulations regarding how young people can be treated on a course like this although within those regulations they can be flexible depending on the group. Although some chaperones encourage the Army personnel to demand the young people be ordered to carry out press-ups as a form of discipline the Army personnel themselves will err on the side of caution.

One referrer mentioned that on one particular course the response of the Army staff was different, with fewer adherences to the rules, and as a result the course had not been as positive. This resulted in their local authority choosing not to make use of the next available course.

"...it felt like it was just Army boys parachuted in and didn't seem to want to be there, I think they had a bad experience previously and had been told not to discipline the young people, not to demand 10 push-ups, that sort of thing, and that was missed" (Referrer)

This respondent went on to say that there used to be more contact between themselves and YAO and this communication had lessened recently, perhaps leading to the poorer course experience by that cohort.

Chapter 4: Views of the course

4.1 The course itself

"It's great for them to see the cops are real people [...] it's great for the kids to see that, they respond to it" (Chaperone)

The positives experienced by the young people who did well on the course are captured in the anecdotal stories recalled by referrers and co-ordinators and from seeing the young

people again afterwards. One referrer who had picked up the young person at the end of the course described the more than an hour long journey home as full of stories and enthusiasm and predicted when she saw her again a fortnight later chances are she would still be talking about it - in this case the young person had already expressed a desire to attend the course again. Another respondent who chaperoned young people on the course spoke of her pleasure at seeing that 'by Wednesday they are working like a team', going on to say 'on Monday they are chewing gum and by Friday they are all hugging'. A later comment by the same respondent gave title to this report when she talked of being able to see these teenagers, some of them troubled and vulnerable, acting like kids again.

"Achievement is a big thing, they get a certificate of effort, some are very excluded from society. They can get ideas about their future, break the cycle, they are taught to think more about their behaviour, to think twice" (Referrer)

The course organisers recognise that success, and more importantly, evidence of success, does not come often to the young people targeted by the course and so celebration of achievement is built into the course with every young person who completes it being given a certificate to document this, and other awards and recognitions for individuals and teams throughout the course. This is also something recognised by the referrers with one pointing out that 'achievement is a big thing [...] some are very excluded from society'.

"Often they don't believe in themselves before they go, one boy couldn't understand why he had got an award because he wasn't the best at anything, but he had been really good at everything so" (Referrer)

One of the themes that came up again and again was the importance of mixing with other young people and also spending time with adults, some of whom they might have cause to be wary of, such as the police.

"The importance of young people mixing with people who are different to them" (Referrer)

"We get to know the pupils in a different setting and they get to know us, it builds a rapport" (Referrer)

One respondent told the story of one lad who had attended the course and subsequently joined the Army. He had gone to Iraq and ended up injured; when he was discharged the respondent had met him for a coffee and despite his injuries he had described attending the course and then the Army as 'the best thing [he] had ever done'. The friends he had when he was younger were dead as a result of drug use and a car crash.

"A 15 year old with negative destinations... can give them focus and potentially an Army career. It teaches them how to listen, how to follow instructions. They can find a voice through this, can speak out" (Coordinator)

4.2 Long-term impact

Some referrers spoke of their concerns regarding the long term impact of the course and how the positive immediate outcomes experienced while on the course could be maintained post-course attendance. With one saying 'it's not a quick fix' and another pointing out 'It's not a fix for everything, these pupils are going back to the same home life'. One respondent felt

that a post-course follow up would be a positive thing for the young people, that potentially this could be something done online, ‘to continue what they learned’.

“... know of one young person who still gets up early a year on” (Referrer)

More than one respondent made mention of the importance of the new peer mentor system, where young people who have completed the course can return and take on more responsibility, and how this is acting as an encouragement to young people who have had a good experience on the course and want to attend again.

A previous co-ordinator also made the point that sometimes the young people would be more open to working with them after they had attended the course.

4.3 The target group

Two of the respondents spoke of the importance of this particular age group (15 to 17 years) being targeted. Both of them suggested the younger the better when it comes to this course, with one stating she tends to give places on the course to the younger applicants to avoid them being ‘entrenched’ and another suggested there should be something available along similar lines for younger children too. The young people who are referred range from those who have an interest in the Army or in outdoor activities to those who are being encouraged from antisocial behaviour after coming to the attention of the police or social services and also those young people who are felt to need extra help. As one respondent said ‘Not all of those on the course are offenders, some have a chaotic home life and need confidence building, I look at the appropriateness and try to get a good balance, I don’t want to be seen as rewarding those who are offending’.

“It’s more diversionary than high tariff offenders and it is also seen as an incentive” (Referrer)

As one respondent stated ‘it’s for kids in the bottom 1% [...] the kids in the bottom 1% aren’t always academic, they need something to help them develop’.

Another point made was that ‘in some cases it might be about respite and less about the course’, going on to elaborate ‘but if I can take a child away from an alcoholic mother living in Women’s Aid for a week, and let them be a child for a week then that’s a success story’.

“... they are all going on the course for different reasons” (Referrer)

4.4 Is it an ‘outward bound experience’ or an Army recruitment tool?

Despite YAO being managed and run by the Recruiting Group of the Army it is made very clear in their paperwork that it is not intended as a recruiting tool for young people and is instead Community Engagement.

“Previously [...] it was much more of a recruiting tool [...] I thought it was a shame that they didn’t take certain people” (Chaperone)

From responses it would seem that to most referrers it is both of these things and they don't appear to be contradictory. One respondent felt that the criteria of attendance, perhaps coincidentally, mirror those that would be utilised by the Army when accepting recruits in that they would not accept those with ADHD or asthma. However, as in the majority of local authorities this appears to be seen more as a guide than set in stone and that the Army accepts these young people on courses once referred, it suggests perhaps there is an understanding that for some young people it is an opportunity to learn and experience something very new to them rather than simply a way to encourage young people to join the Army at seventeen.

With the community outreach aspect of the Army being linked historically with recruitment there does appear to be some residual thinking that it is a taste of Army life potentially leading to recruitment, and it is only in the last three years that the re-branding and redesign of the programme has removed this aspect. Linked with the fairly broad target group of young people who are either offending or involved in antisocial behaviour, this has resulted in varying interpretations by different local authorities. For example, in one course the young people may have all been referred through the school or have self-referred due to their interest in the army or in outdoor activities, and in another almost all the referrals could have come from the police and social work. However, the co-ordinators who finalise the group to be referred placed a great deal of importance and energy on the mix of young people and are mindful of the potential positive or negative outcomes the particular grouping can have.

Chapter 5: Moving on, what next for Youth Advantage Outreach?

“...the changes are for the kids and the community and families” (Previous referrer)

There is a great deal of anecdotal evidence from each person spoken to throughout this evaluation, with examples of young people whose behaviour or outcomes improved since they attended YAO. In addition, three of the local authorities were measuring some sort of outcome data. In one case the local co-ordinator had been recording the views of the young people reflecting on their time on the course, initially around two to three weeks after they had returned and then again more informally by phone a few weeks later. In another, there were plans for a more formal evaluation of their use of YAO which would include measuring both 'soft' and 'hard' outcomes. And in another, there were plans to get the same group of young people together after their return and spend an evening talking about it, potentially with some photos of their time away. This latter plan was suggested as a method of maintaining and continuing what the young person had gained from the course as opposed to a formal measure of outcomes for the young people.

5.1 Is this course answering a need?

“a vision of something else in their future” (Previous referrer)

The Manager of YAO acknowledges that different geographical areas have different social problems and this is why the course is designed to be flexible enough to meet those needs, if they are expressed to him. He sees the course as having a generic base that works across many groups but it's not set in stone, there are periods of time built in where the local

authority could ask for particular work to be done. However, most of the respondents to this research were not aware that they could ask for this level of tailoring, and those that did said actually they had not felt the need to.

As previously mentioned one local authority is currently evaluating their use of YAO which will also involve looking at the outcomes of the young people referred from their area, this is something that will hopefully prove very useful and informative both for themselves and YAO more widely, when it is complete.

However, there are no further formal follow ups carried out or planned by the other local authorities and when questioned respondents suggested this would be due to the prohibitive cost of doing so. In many cases, however, there is informal follow up, particularly in the case of young people who were already offending and this is reported in the anecdotal stories that almost every coordinator or referrer told, many of which have been included in this report. The young people often become friends with one another after the course is finished and maintain those friendships online using social media such as Facebook. Several have also befriended the motivational speaker in the same manner.

As one respondent said when he was asked if he had anything further to say about Youth Advantage Outreach, 'keep funding it'.

5.2 Suggestions for improvement

1. YAO would benefit from further clarity in terms of the criteria for inclusion and exclusion from referral.
2. There should be greater communication between YAO and the referrers, whether individual coordinators or Early Intervention Groups.
3. If the course is being targeted at different young people by the different referrers in local authorities then the question needs to be asked, do the requirements of each local authority match what is being offered by YAO or should more use be made of tailoring to ensure a better match?
4. Agreement should be reached between social services, the police and schools to ensure that all pertinent information is shared with either the referrer co-ordinator or YAO prior to acceptance on the course.

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