

Breaking the Cycle

Jill McAfee, CYCJ

On 5 November 2015 CYCJ held the “Breaking the Cycle” conference to explore issues around working with young people and their families where multiple generations have been involved in anti-social and offending behaviour. This Information Sheet highlights some of the themes from the event.

Troubled Families

Dr Hoggett & Prof Frost’s [evaluation of the troubled families programme in south-west England \(2014\)](#) found that “troubled families” were initially identified as having issues with offending, anti-social behaviour, truancy and worklessness. However for the majority of families there were many other complex issues including isolation, PTSD, poor mental and physical health, disability, drug use, abuse, and an absent parent. The evaluation highlighted the things families found most helpful when they were in crisis:

- Practical help getting out to appointments, to the shops, etc.
- Identifying opportunities such as parenting groups, counselling, and time to focus on own needs
- Workers who were flexible, available, and willing to ‘go the extra mile’
- Distinction that the workers were not social workers and there to ‘police’ the family
- The importance of being listened to and building self-confidence.

Intergenerational transmission of criminal offending

Dr Katherine Auty’s [research on intergenerational transmission of criminal offending \(2015\)](#) supported the above findings and concluded that: convictions are highly concentrated in families; the father’s drug use increased the likelihood of transmission of criminal behaviour between the father and son; and problems with housing and harsh discipline increased the transmission between fathers and daughters.

Serious Organised Crime Gangs

The above research can be shown in practice in Scotland in relation to Serious and Organised Crime (SOC). There are currently 232 SOC gangs in Scotland. SOC involves more than one individual, control, planning, and resources and has the potential to cause significant harm. The primary benefit is financial gain. Some of the threats to Scotland are drugs, prostitution, human trafficking, private landlords, money laundering, private taxis, waste management, counterfeit goods, illicit trade, door step crime, protection rackets, public sector corruption, and intimidation.

When working with young people involved in offending behaviour, it is crucial practitioners explore the context of behaviour, not just the behaviour itself, to identify whether the young person is being exploited and manipulated by an individual/s.

The reasons behind the offending behaviour will assist in the planning of support for young people to desist from future offending. This is relevant for all gravity of crimes (EEI – high risk). It is an offence under the Criminal Justice & Licensing Scotland Act 2010 to be involved (s28), direct (s30) and fail to report (s31) serious and organised crime, making this issue everyone's responsibility.

Lived experience

Ryan provided some valuable insight from his own experience of being involved in offending, and how to 'break the cycle'. He believes the turning point for him was when he was sentenced to secure care following a violent offence. Being away from his family and peer group and the chaos of his life gave him the opportunity to address his substance misuse and think about what had been going on for him. The safety of secure care also allowed him to accept some of the supports on offer away from the negative influences of the community. Ryan advised that young people need to be able and willing to make different choices about their behaviour before support will be successful, however practitioners have a key role in encouraging this.

Programmes in Scotland to 'break the cycle'

Strengthening Families – the aim of the eight-week programme is to reduce drug and alcohol use in parents and young people, reduce behavioural problems in adolescence, increase resistance to peer pressure and strengthen the parent/child relationship. Feedback on the programme included comments such as "learned how to cope with stress & peer pressure", "learned how to set appropriate boundaries", "we stop and listen now instead of screaming", and "I've stopped blaming my child and look at my own behaviour". Fifty-three percent of young people and 86% of parents said the programme made a positive difference.

Multi Systemic Therapy – this is an intensive three-to-five month programme which is community-based and family driven. One of the programme's aims is to reduce out-of-home placements. The interventions are goal-orientated, problem focused and evidenced based. Risk factors and interventions are reviewed on a weekly basis to provide the necessary level of support and overcome barriers.

Functional Family Therapy – this is a short-term, structured, intensive family intervention model with a focus on the risk and protective factors that impact on the adolescent and his/her environment. It is aimed at 11-16 year olds at risk of accommodation or family breakdown. It is delivered in family home with all members of the family involved. There are three distinct phases (engagement, behaviour change, and generalisation) to the intervention and it is time limited (eight to 20 sessions). There is an emphasis on understanding the family, to allow them to understand and use the intervention to make positive changes.

w www.cycj.org.uk
e cycj@strath.ac.uk
t [@CYCJScotland](https://twitter.com/CYCJScotland)