

Multi-agency working

Sociology



Section 1 - Agency outline

Connexions is the young persons service which provides advice, information, guidance, support and personal development for all 13-19 year olds in Stockport. They state their mission statement as " Working with young people to enable a smoother transition from adolescence into adulthood through raising aspirations, listening and supporting, identifying gaps in services, advocating, and connecting up to services relevant to them. Involving young people in shaping and developing services including Connexions"

The service seems to be working well in the Stockport area, helping people with education and their EMA payments seem to occupy much of the Connexions staff time and resources, but provide a walk-in service to those who are unsure how to tackle the miles of red tape laid down in obtaining help from the local authority.

Stockport Youth Offending Team is made up of representatives from the police, Probation Service, social services, health, education, drugs and alcohol misuse and housing officers. Because the YOT incorporates representatives from a wide range of services, it can respond to the needs of young offenders in a comprehensive way. The YOT identifies the needs of each young offender by assessing them with a national assessment. It identifies the specific problems that make the young person offend as well as measuring the risk they pose to others. This enables the YOT to identify suitable programmes to address the needs of the young person with the intention of preventing further offending.

Their mission statement is simply "'Partnership to Prevent Offending by Young People' and has several key objectives such as;

- * Tackling delays, speeding up justice for all young offenders.
- * Confronting young offenders with the consequences of their offending and helping them to develop a sense of personal responsibility.
- * Intervention which tackles the risks associated with offending; personal, family, social, education and health.
- * Punishment proportionate to seriousness and persistence with a range of penalties open to the courts.
- * Encouraging reparation to victims by young offenders.
- * Reinforcing the responsibilities of parents.

Section 2 - Agency relationships

Relationships between different agencies have always had difficulties and so this is why the government has put great emphasis on integration of services.

The relationships between Connexions and the Youth Offending Team are varied.

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Education is seen as an integral part of their intervention and is facilitated through the Connexions personal advisers. YOT and Connexions have agreed data collection systems which define information and communication flows. At a local level they share relevant information when it is necessary to do so in order to aid integration and ensure that the well being of the young person is placed as a priority.

The " Every Child Matters" Initiative goes beyond schools and encourages integration at all levels for young people and their families. This includes schools, early year's services and disabilities as well as both YOT and Connexions.

Section 3 - Agency Policies

Child Protection and Connections

When an adviser is talking to a young person they must take into account Child Protection legislation. This can manifest itself in many situations such as discussing sexual activity, drugs, alcohol etc. In such cases where Child protection is a factor, then confidentiality between the advisor and young person can not be guaranteed, for the sake of safety to the young person.

All Personal Advisers at Connexions must undergo child protection training, or supply evidence that they have recently undertaken such training.

'Working Together to Safeguard Children', issued by the Department of Health in association with the Department for Education and Employment, sets out how all agencies and professionals should work together to promote young people's welfare and protect them from abuse and neglect.

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Personal Advisers should comply with the principles set out in this guidance, following any specific child protection arrangements for the situation and location in which they are working. For example, Personal Advisers working in schools must comply with the child protection arrangements of the particular schools in which they are working. These Personal Advisers will have an obligation to report cases of potential abuse to the named Child Protection Officer within the school. These are sometimes referred to as Designated Teachers. Personal Advisers working in situations that are not covered by such arrangements should follow the child protection procedures set out by their Connexions Partnerships.

Connexions Partnerships are required to have written procedures for dealing with allegations of abuse. These procedures should reflect guidance set down by the local Area Child Protection Committee and should set out the steps that a Personal Adviser would need to take to bring the allegations to the attention of someone with the appropriate authority to take them forward, for example a school or LEA official with designated responsibility for child protection. Personal Advisers must follow these procedures when dealing with allegations of abuse.

Open Relationships and Connexions

Connexions highlights this policy as particularly important as it helps the advisor and young person develop an objective views of the situation and helps both work on ways to help the young person progress through whatever difficulties they may have.

When a Personal Adviser starts working with a young person, they should clarify the rights and responsibilities of both parties. Personal Advisers should explain their role, including how they can help address a young person's needs and how they will broker access to specialist services if required

One of the key aims of the Personal Adviser role is to identify a young person's barriers to learning and to provide or facilitate a service which addresses these needs in a coherent way. In order to do this, it may be necessary to seek detailed information from the young person and to share this information with other agencies that are working with them. Under the Data Protection Act 1998, information can be shared with others as long as the young person has given their informed consent

YOT & Child Protection

YOT Teams, like Connexions, must undergo Child Protection training as part of their duties and then exercise this training in their roles.

Child Protection in a Leeds case did not achieve its purpose when " Child E" took their own life. This review examined the circumstances around the life of a teenager who took his own life. Child E suffered a troubled childhood and adolescence, and several agencies had had involvement. The review found that the local YOT team failed and made some recommendations to them.

Recommendations for the Youth Offending Team

* That the YOT review their procedures to highlight child protection concerns where an individual expresses intentions of self-harm or suicide.

* That YOT review their procedures to ensure that an appropriate agency continues to be involved with a child in cases where YOT have withdrawn.

Certainly in this case the YOT team failed to fulfil it's obligations to Child protection, thankfully however this is the exception to the rule.

Many YOT Teams are also part of local Child Protection Committees.

YOT - Education, Training and Employment

As already stated, YOT has close ties with the local Connections team when it comes to education and further training. However, they may also employ their own education delivery professionals. Education welfare officers, teachers from schools and colleges, special educational needs (SEN) co-ordinators and youth workers all contribute to making a difference to the education and training opportunities available to young people who offend.

YOT Also has a " Vulnerable Children's Grant. Education practitioners are able to apply for money for reintegration of young offenders into education. YOTs are encouraged to approach their LEA to seek funding from this source

All YOT teams are supposed to work closely to ensure that where possible, children are helped into education in many areas such as, Education of looked-after children (LAC), Education other than at school (education otherwise), Mentoring schemes and also working with schools to help people placed in custody to continue their education.

Section 4 - Every Child Matters

Every Child Matters, or ECM for short, is a UK government initiative that was launched in 2003, at least partly in response to the death of Victoria Climbié^{1/2}. The word child applies to anyone under the age of 19. Its main aims are for every child, whatever their background or their circumstances, to have the support they need to:

- * Be healthy
- * Stay safe
- * Enjoy and achieve
- * Make a positive contribution
- * Achieve economic well-being

Each of these themes has a detailed outcomes framework attached to it, which requires multi-agency partnership working to achieve.

All organisations that work with young people have to come together help protect the young. They need to work together and share information in order to help achieve this. Also, under ECM, young people have a greater say in what happens to them and have an increased voice.

There are six significant measures that affect both agencies. These measures help implement changes of ECM. These are,

- * Appointing of a lead professional - the young person may be known to more than one agency, in this case a single professional is responsible for ensuring a coherent set of services as a single point of contact.
- * Common assessment Framework - a standard format using non technical language so that all agencies can use it and understand it across agencies. It looks at the strengths and needs of the young person, the support being provided and the effectiveness of the support.
- * The information sharing index - electronic tool that holds basic information on the child. A professional who has a concern about a young person may access an assessment (if already made) for a child.
- * Common core of skills and knowledge - identifies the core skills and knowledge that should feature in the professional preparation of all those working with young people. What skills and knowledge people should have before working with the young. These relate to Communication, Child development, Safeguarding and promoting welfare and Sharing Information.
- * Integrated qualifications framework - transferable study units so that people can be working with young people can change their career.
- * Joint statement of inter-professional values - to identify a set of shared values working with Children and the young.

The real impact on this within YOT and Connexions in the way both agencies have had to positively integrate with each other. The common assessment framework is just one method used, by giving professionals a generic method of assessing young people's needs and then using this with

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appropriate agencies. This is just one method that helps to promote information sharing and increase methods of communication.