

EQIA Youth Co-ordinators

Kath McAvoy, Dawn Grant, Robert More, Jennifer MacDonald (Police Scotland), Cath King

The Proposal

The 3 Police Scotland posts are fully funded by the Council. The proposal is to cease the funding for the posts, saving £0.137m.

The posts are based in:

- Thurso, covering Caithness, Sutherland down to Milton/ Invergordon;
- Dingwall, covering Ross-shire, Skye and Lochaber.
- Inverness, covering Inverness, Nairn and Badenoch.

The function of the posts

- Individual and group work with young people at the request of teachers, social workers, parents/carers, youth workers and the young people themselves.
- Identifying youth offenders or youths on the cusp of offending or associating with offenders and highlighting these to relevant agencies.
- Thereafter information sharing/ Police liaison between Youth Action Team, Social Work Department, Education and SCRA.
- Providing the named person with the above information and assisting with any interventions or diversionary support for the youths involved.
- Support young people via SCRA as a consequence to offending (asked by Reporter to see and speak with offender rather than "no action" or other consequence). Young people are spoken with and given input and advice as relevant to their circumstances.
- Attend guidance and Solution Focus meetings in school regarding children who are coming to school attention.
- Process and discuss the Youth Offending VPD's (Vulnerable Person Database submissions) carry out the discussions with the Youth Action Team Managers for each referral and identify actions plans/interventions.
- Oversee the Restorative Justice process for Highlands N Division.
- Setting up, running of diversionary activities such as Rock Challenge , Operation Youth Advantage, Twilight Basketball , Driving Ambition and Safer Highlanders
- Liaise with Children's Care Homes in the respective area's
- Deliver Drug and Alcohol Awareness to schools and Youth Cafe and other groups such as Brownies and Ross County Youth Football Academy
- Inputs to young offenders in order to deter them from further offending
- attend Child Plan and Professional's meetings for individual cases

Number of young people impacted on by the service

In the 6 month period between April and September discussed 53 VPD Youth Offending forms in north area and more in the mid/west area. Record check to minimise risks for

youths and victims, for example - 34 names from Caithness and 10 from Sutherland for November alone this year.

Numbers can vary from month to month, one to one contact or with groups, for example Operation Youth Advantage 40 youths for 1 week; diversion or One Youth for one meeting only.

At present involved with a group of 12 young people from Charleston Academy that I meet once a week (these young people are either coming to Police attention or to the attention of schools due to behavioural issues). I have previously had a similar group from Culloden Academy – looking in the coming weeks to start a girls only group with Charleston Academy (6 girls) for 12 weeks and Alness Academy are looking to start a new group within the new year (another 12 youths for 12 weeks). This activity has helped build positive relationships with the schools, the young people involved and their parents.

A database was created to note a record of young people coming to attention etc. This will enable the YoCo to track the young person if they are regularly coming to attention and highlight this to the relevant services. Nearly 500 young people have been inputted onto the database for the Inverness area for the year so far.

Link to the YAT

The posts are an integral part of the Youth Action Teams and often carrying out joint visits with partners to clients who are the subject of concern. This approach has a significant impact in reducing crime and demonstrates that a multi-agency approach is not only the most effective but produces long term and sustainable results.

Weekly discussions with the YAT manager regarding new VPD's (Child Concern Forms) for youth who are offending and for which there are concerns. Appropriate disposals are agreed.

On a regular basis attend the YAT office where specific cases are discussed and joint visits with the Youth Action workers arranged and undertaken.

Impacts

Early identification and intervention has proven to support the vulnerable and "at Risk of Offending" youths which in turn keeps them from becoming persistent Offenders. The key being to deter and divert their activities, good communication between all the agencies enables quick resolutions to be identified and prevents the consequences for services and the individual once within the system.

Prevention, diversion and early intervention work would be dramatically reduced with the removal of this formalised link between Police, Reporter, Care and Learning, Action for Children and other groups such as Women's Aid, British Army, Barnardo's resulting in higher youth offending.

Youth crime, disorder and anti-social youth behaviour has reduced since the role was introduced.

Poorer communication between agencies could lead to an increase in youth offending and less support for a vulnerable group of young people.

A high proportion of young offenders come from deprived backgrounds and/or are looked after or ex looked after children. There would be a negative impact on young offenders and those on the cusp of offending if this proposal is implemented.

Local alternatives and rural impact

There does not appear to be an alternative link between youths, social work, education, voluntary sector and Police Scotland, that would be focussing specifically on young offenders etc. The Public Protection Unit is based in Inverness, so there is likely to be a negative rural impact.

There is a separate proposal to reduce the number of Resource Managers in the Youth Action Service. If the two proposals were both approved, this would lead to some operational difficulties in managing the Child Concern process. There would also be an additional pressure on other managers in Children's Services.

Appendix 1 – Email feedback from one secondary school and Line manager feedback.

Subject: Boxing group

Dear Alan

Thanks for your help today with the boys. I feel some of the boys are making huge (and measurable) progress both in school and out of school. Of our current 13 boys – 11 of them have been involved in serious incidents in school and in most cases this includes exclusions. Since their involvement in the boxing there has been none – for the boys in 3rd year this has been the case for almost a year. No fluke. The boys themselves recognise and value the positive impact the boxing has made. A significant number of teachers have also noticed that change and attribute this to the boxing.

When there are minor issues (as there will be with almost all young people) the boys have shown a resilience and willingness to look for solutions (and recognise at times they are a part of a problem.)

Out of school – as far as I can recall off the top of my head – 10 of the boys have been involved in incidents with the Police. Again, since starting boxing there has been a complete drop off – in some cases a marked reduction. For all an improvement!

I'm saying boxing but I feel that sport is just the vehicle (though it is important it is boxing.) Your work with the youngsters at the club and also in the school is the key. The advice / guidance that they receive from you as a Police officer is the factor that is leading to the improvements listed above. Otherwise it is just training – if it was just training we wouldn't see these results. It is early intervention at its best.

I hope that you are able to remain committed to this initiative. As I discussed and clarified with you if the Police were unable to support this initiative we would withdraw. Two staff out of school during school hours is a significant commitment by the school. My Head Teacher would correctly not support that for just training.

Kind regards,

Gordon Stewart

Depute Rector – Charleston Academy

Line Management – PS Fowler, DCU

Since taking up the supervision of the YoCos just over a year ago I have been able to see first-hand the positive effects that their roles have had in turning round their lives. I have attended the Boxing Lessons run by PC MacLennan and noticed how the young people (male and female) have been built up in confidence and were shown simple life skill such as respect for others, discipline and communication skills as they all take turns in carrying out things like drills and warm ups. I am also aware that as part of the conditions of attending this group they have to attend school and be respectful staff and other pupils and this has had dramatic effect on those attending as commented on by the Depute Rector above. Although difficult to evidence in relation to statistics I feel the work carried out is invaluable in relation to preventing youth crime and also in helping the more vulnerable young people to have a chance in life.

The operation youth advantage is also another similar scheme that offers a chance to such individuals and over the years there have been many examples of youngsters deciding to turn their lives around in an effort to have some chance in life. Some have even offered to help out (once too old to attend) after attending the courses.

Rock Challenge, which has been run for a number of years now, has also had a very positive effect on young people would not have been staged had it not been for the effort of PC MacRae who was heavily involved in securing funding for the event in 2014 and has passed the arrangements for the 2015 event onto PC MacLennan. This event reaches a wide audience from primary school age through to upper high school and emphasises how young people can have a good “high” without the need to be involved in such things as drugs and smoking and again tries to promote right living.

I am aware from speaking to other officers throughout Scotland that there are similar jobs being carried out by police officers and support staff that are known as Early and Effective Intervention Officers. From looking at the quantity and quality of work carried out by the YoCos I feel it is imperative that some form of post is kept in place whether fully or part funded by Highland Council or even as a fully funded police post. The partnership working with the Youth Action Teams is one of the essential keys to success and if the police were not to be a part of this partnership then the work of the whole partnership would struggle to go forward, to the severe detriment to our communities.

Mel Fowler P.S.421