



positive parenting

YOUTH
JUSTICE
BOARD

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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a summary of the National Evaluation of the Youth Justice Board's Parenting Programme

THE PARENTING PROGRAMME

The last few years have seen profound changes in the youth justice system in England and Wales. One key innovation has been the introduction of a new disposal, the Parenting Order, for parents of young people who are at risk of or known to be engaged in offending, or who are failing to attend school. Under the terms of a Parenting Order, parents must participate in a parenting support and education service in a form directed by the court or their local youth offending team (Yot). Failure to comply with the terms of the Order can result in criminal 'breach' proceedings, a return to court and potentially a fine or a further Order being made.



42 new parenting projects

Yots are charged with the responsibility of providing or identifying suitable services for these parents, as well as for other parents who are not in receipt of a Parenting Order, but who may benefit from preventive intervention. In support of this, the Youth Justice Board's Parenting Programme funded the development of 42 new parenting projects across England that were set up and run by Yots in partnership with other local agencies, both voluntary and statutory.

This report documents the results of a three year national evaluation of the effectiveness of the Youth Justice Board's Parenting Programme, carried out by the independent Policy Research Bureau. The research took place between June 1999 and December 2001. It explored the process of setting up and implementing the projects, and the outcomes in terms of their impact on parents and young people in 34 of the projects that were funded.

THE PROGRAMMES

Most projects were able to offer a combination of one-to-one advice, practical support and group work. Many of the existing 'off the shelf' programmes had to be adapted to suit the needs of these parents. Most dealt with addressing problem behaviour, supervision of young people, setting boundaries and improving communication.

WHO ATTENDED

Overall, nearly 3,000 parents started a parenting programme run by one of the 34 parenting projects between spring 1999 and the end of 2001. Two thirds of the parents came on a voluntary basis. One in six was on a statutory Parenting Order, usually a criminal order, but the needs and characteristics of this group were similar to others who attended voluntarily.

One third were referred from non-criminal justice agencies such as education, health and social services and only **5%** referred themselves.



nearly

3000 parents attended one of the 34 projects

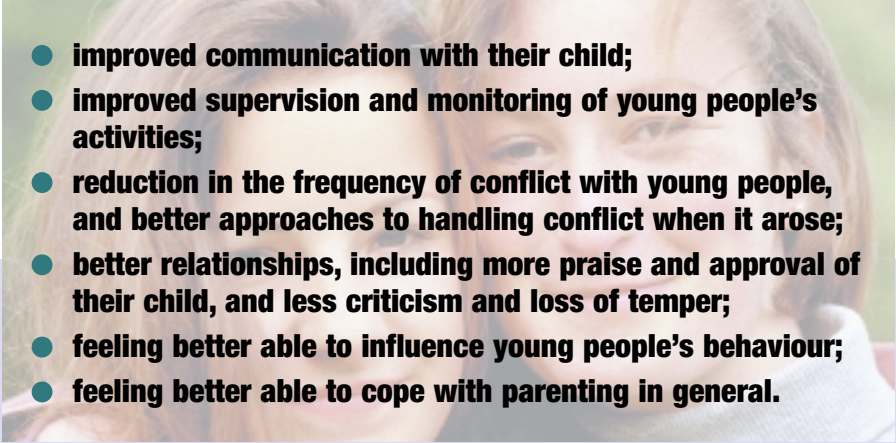
There were regional variations in the use of both Orders and parenting programmes. The largest numbers of referrals were made in the South East, North West and North East regions. More Parenting Orders have also been made in these regions, as well as in London.

Most of the parents who attended were white, British (**96%**) and most were female (**81%**). Half were lone parents (**49%**). These parents reported very high levels of need – ranging from problems with debt and housing, to problems with health and personal relationships. More than eight in ten said they particularly wanted help in managing their child's difficult behaviour, providing discipline and handling arguments. A quarter of the parents were under the age of 34, implying many of them would have become parents in their teenage years. Almost all of the children were over the age of 11 and most were aged between 14 and 15.

IMPACT ON PARENTS

Parents showed high attendance rates at the projects. Most went to three quarters of all the sessions that were provided for them by the projects and each parent attended an average of 6.4 sessions. **54%** were fully engaged in the programmes. Those on statutory orders had a higher rate of attendance, on average, than those who came on a voluntary basis, but the difference was not large.

By the time parents left their projects, they reported significant positive changes in parenting skills and competencies, including:

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- **improved communication with their child;**
 - **improved supervision and monitoring of young people's activities;**
 - **reduction in the frequency of conflict with young people, and better approaches to handling conflict when it arose;**
 - **better relationships, including more praise and approval of their child, and less criticism and loss of temper;**
 - **feeling better able to influence young people's behaviour;**
 - **feeling better able to cope with parenting in general.**

Many parents and staff thought the parenting of younger siblings might change as a result of things parents had learned. At the very least, the parenting programme might have helped to 'apply the brakes' on a sharp downward course for young people.

Though some parents had mixed expectations at the outset of what a programme would be like and parents on Parenting Orders were especially likely to feel negative, 'exit' ratings at the end of the programme were very positive. Only **6%** were negative or indifferent about whether the programme had been helpful and over nine in ten would recommend it to other parents in their situation. Parents were especially positive about the qualities and skills of the project staff.

IMPACT ON YOUNG PEOPLE

The young people who had been the cause of their parent's referral to a parenting programme were a very high need, difficult group. Three quarters had behavioural and emotional difficulties. In the year prior to the parent's involvement in the parenting programme **89%** of their children had been convicted of an offence, compared to **61.5%** in the year after their parents left the programme - a reduction of nearly one third.



in the year after the programme only

61.5% of children were convicted of a crime



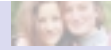
in the year before the programme

89% of children were convicted of a crime

On average each had committed 4.4 recorded offences prior to the programme. This reduced to 2.1 in the following year - a **50%** reduction.



reduced to 2.1 recorded offences



prior to the programme

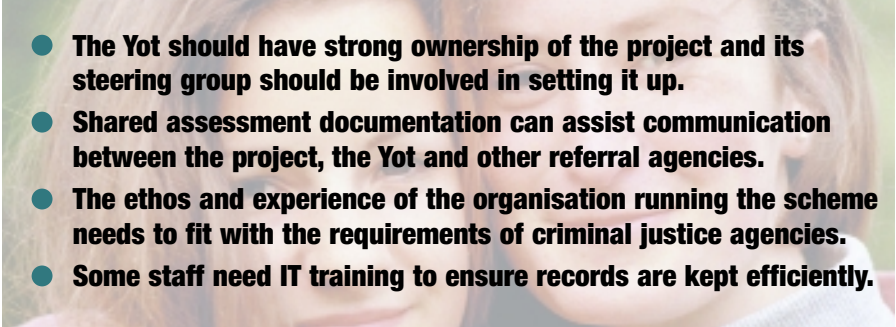
4.4 recorded offences

There was no difference between those whose parents were on statutory orders and those referred from criminal justice agencies on a voluntary basis.

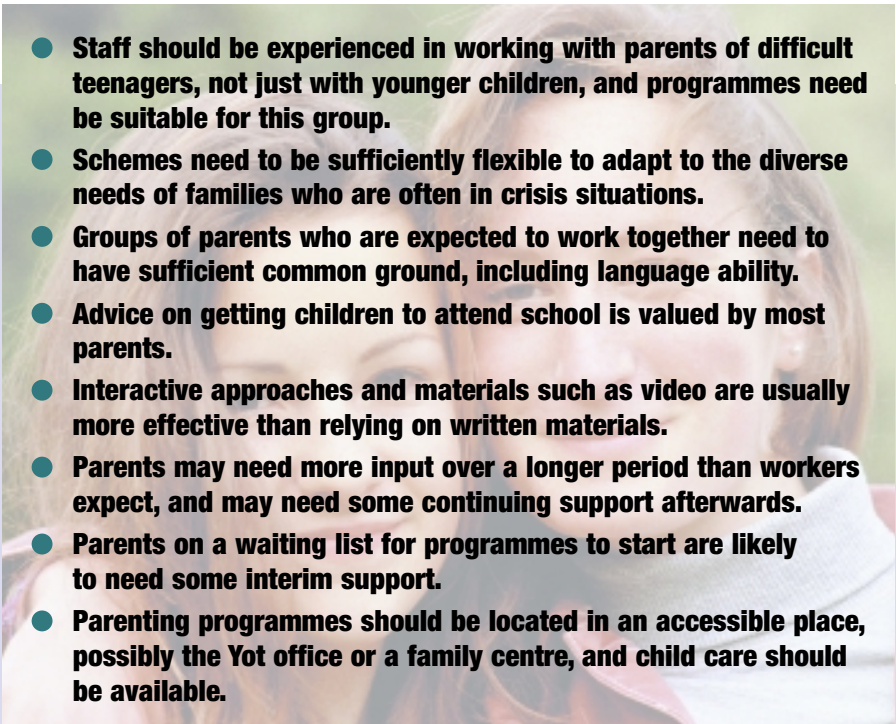
CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study indicates that despite the controversy that surrounded the introduction of Parenting Orders, there does seem to be a role for them. They may provide a powerful way to reach vulnerable and needy parents who might otherwise never attend a parenting support service. The following recommendations for developing effective parenting programmes were identified as part of the evaluation.

structure and policy

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- **The Yot should have strong ownership of the project and its steering group should be involved in setting it up.**
 - **Shared assessment documentation can assist communication between the project, the Yot and other referral agencies.**
 - **The ethos and experience of the organisation running the scheme needs to fit with the requirements of criminal justice agencies.**
 - **Some staff need IT training to ensure records are kept efficiently.**

delivery of programmes

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- **Staff should be experienced in working with parents of difficult teenagers, not just with younger children, and programmes need to be suitable for this group.**
 - **Schemes need to be sufficiently flexible to adapt to the diverse needs of families who are often in crisis situations.**
 - **Groups of parents who are expected to work together need to have sufficient common ground, including language ability.**
 - **Advice on getting children to attend school is valued by most parents.**
 - **Interactive approaches and materials such as video are usually more effective than relying on written materials.**
 - **Parents may need more input over a longer period than workers expect, and may need some continuing support afterwards.**
 - **Parents on a waiting list for programmes to start are likely to need some interim support.**
 - **Parenting programmes should be located in an accessible place, possibly the Yot office or a family centre, and child care should be available.**

The full report on which this summary is based is available on the Youth Justice Board website.



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