



New  
Philanthropy  
Capital

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### **Charities providing innovative schemes to prevent youth crime**

Youth custody is becoming a form of 'respite care' for local authorities dealing with the most troubled and difficult children. A new report on youth justice in England and Wales finds that local authorities have few incentives to invest money in effective alternatives to custody, as custody is paid for centrally by the Youth Justice Board.

*Trial and error*, a report by charity think tank and consultancy New Philanthropy Capital, finds that it is charities who are piloting innovative schemes, reaching many young people that government services struggle to engage.

*'We know that 75% of young people reoffend within a year of release, and the current 'get tough' stance on youth crime has not worked,' says report author Iona Joy. 'We found that many charities like Barnardo's, Dance United and Action for Children are providing more effective support for young people, which stops them having to go down the custody route and helps get their lives back on track.'*

While the custody figures have shown a decrease in recent months, England and Wales still have the highest rates of youth custody in western Europe, with the number of children sentenced to custody tripling between 1991 and 2006. While the government has increased its emphasis on alternatives to custody with the Youth Rehabilitation Order, Penelope Gibbs, from the Prison Reform Trust, feels it hasn't gone far enough: *'Spending up to £200,000 a year locking up a young teenager is likely to be money down the drain. Money should be diverted from custody to early intervention and to better support those who are in trouble with the law. Only a tiny minority of those presently imprisoned really need to be there.'*

NPC's report examines the work of over 50 charities working with young people who have committed or have a high chance of committing a crime. It highlights a number of new approaches to cutting offending currently being piloted by charities, such as Multisystemic Therapy at The Brandon Centre, and Intensive Fostering at Action for Children. The report finds that many community based projects are increasingly successful in reaching young people and getting them back into education or employment.

The charity Dance United runs a 12-week intensive dance programme for young offenders and young people at risk of offending. It works in Bradford, which has one of the country's highest re-offending rates for young people. A study by Manchester University found that half of the students who engaged with the programme didn't re-offend, and of those who did re-offend, the frequency and severity of their offending was reduced. Dance United's approach has been so successful that it is opening an east London academy later this year.

Tara Herbert, the artistic director at Dance United, says young people become more confident and focused during the course.

*'I think a lot of young people need structure as they get caught up in a world without boundaries. They get that structure and discipline from dance, it's a hard job, your feet hurt, your muscles ache and that's just after one day. The young people we take on do this five days a week for twelve weeks. We don't focus on what they've done but on what they can achieve. All of these young people have potential, not all of them will get there, but we've got to give them a chance.'*

Matt was 14 when he first heard of Dance United and went on one of its courses. Although he found it hard at the time, he believes it has changed his life, and he's now auditioning for a place at one of the top contemporary dance schools in the country.

*'The course was really tough, they were pushing you every two minutes but even though sometimes I wanted to leave, a part of me knew I had to keep going. Doing that course has turned my life around completely. It got me into college, I'm doing my A-levels and it's a really big step forward. I look at my friends and none of them have got anything, two of them have been in and out of prison and it makes me think about what could have happened to me.'*

NPC's report highlights the need for charities to provide more evidence of successful interventions. Four in five magistrates say that the effectiveness of local community programmes influences their sentencing decisions. The report concludes that if charities could give courts confidence in community alternatives, it could lead to a reduction in custody for young people.

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## **Notes to Editors**

### **1. Case studies**

#### **Sarah**

Sarah joined the intensive fostering scheme when she was 16 years old. She had finished school and had started drinking a lot and taking drugs. She then began to get into trouble with the police for violent assaults. Her family relationships rapidly deteriorated.

It was when she was in court being charged with assault that Sarah was told about intensive fostering. She didn't like the sound of it, but faced with a choice between that or six to nine months in a juvenile centre, she decided to try fostering.

Sarah began her intensive fostering placement in April 2008. At first she was resistant to the scheme, but she settled down quite quickly. Sarah felt that she understood the '*big boundaries*' that were in place and the points system that would reward or punish her behaviour, but she hated having to stay in on Friday nights, rather than seeing her friends. She says her foster carer was lovely, and '*the most supportive woman in my life*'. The foster carer talked to Sarah about life in general, and encouraged her to use her time positively and effectively.

Following her intensive fostering placement, Sarah has started a horse management course, which she attends four days a week. She has been praised for her full attendance

and getting her assignments in on time. Sarah loves the course and says if it hadn't been for her foster carer, she would never have gone to college or made a success of her future.

Sarah is back in touch with her original circle of friends, but says it's completely different now—she'll never go back to how she used to behave. She says, *'For anyone who wants to sort themselves out, I think intensive fostering is a really good thing to do, you get so much out of it. When I look back, I know I wouldn't be getting the opportunities I'm getting now if it hadn't been for my time in intensive fostering.'*

## **Matt**

Matt was fourteen when he first heard of Dance United. He was referred to the charity by the Bradford Youth Inclusion Project (an early intervention project working with young people at risk of offending). At first, he joined the youth dance group and was then persuaded to take part in a twelve-week course. He says that at the time, a lot of his friends were getting into trouble and doing drugs and he didn't want to go down that route. Although he found the course hard at the time, he believes it has changed his life.

*'The course was really tough, they were pushing you every two minutes but even though sometimes I wanted to leave, a part of me knew I had to keep going. Doing that course has turned my life around completely. It got me into college, I'm doing my A-levels and it's a really big step forward. I look at my friends and none of them have got anything, two of them have been in and out of prison and it makes me think about what could have happened to me.'*

Matt is still a member of Dance United's Performance Company and has performed at various places around the country. He is currently auditioning for a place at one of the top contemporary dance schools in the country.

2. **New Philanthropy Capital (NPC)** is a consultancy and think tank dedicated to helping funders and charities to achieve a greater impact. We provide independent research, tools and advice for both charities and funders in the UK and internationally. We have an ambitious vision: to create a world in which charities and their funders are as effective as possible in changing people's lives and in tackling social problems. For charities, this means measuring the results of their work and using evidence to learn and improve, as well as to attract support. For funders, it means using evidence of charities' results to make funding decisions and to measure their own impact. For further information, see [www.philanthropycapital.org](http://www.philanthropycapital.org).
3. **Intensive Fostering** is an alternative to custody for young offenders who have had disruptive home lives. It is funded by the Youth Justice Board. Young people are placed in a foster home with highly trained foster parents and are supported by a team in the community. Intensive Fostering uses a system of points and rewards to encourage good behaviour and tackle offending. There is good international evidence that it is effective at reducing re-offending and pilots are currently being evaluated in the UK. Action for Children is running two of the schemes in London and Wessex. For further information, see [www.actionforchildren.org.uk](http://www.actionforchildren.org.uk).
4. **Multisystemic Therapy (MST)** is funded by the Department for Children, Schools and Families and the Department of Health. It is a pioneering programme that works closely with the families of young people with severe conduct problems, including persistent and serious offending behaviour. MST is being piloted by The Brandon Centre, a charity in north London, and involves a trained therapist working with the child and family to help them change behaviour patterns, resolve conflicts, introduce rules to improve conduct, and reduce opportunities for delinquent behaviour. Practitioners visit the home two or three times a week and are on call 24 hours a day. Five years in, preliminary analysis suggests that MST significantly reduces criminal and aggressive behaviour. The charity's trial is now being used by the government to set up this approach in other areas in England. For further information, see [www.brandon-centre.org.uk](http://www.brandon-centre.org.uk).