

**Youth Justice Board Conference**  
**‘Preventing Offending and Anti-Social Behaviour:  
Targeted Interventions for Young People at Risk’**  
**8<sup>th</sup> March 2007**  
**Speaking Note [1310 words]**

**[Introduction]**

Good afternoon – I’m very pleased to be closing this important and very timely conference.

As Minister with responsibility for Social Exclusion, and as a former social and community worker, I have seen at first hand how failure to intervene early and to provide the right support and the right challenge to problem behaviour can result in outcomes down the line that are costly to individuals, families and the wider community.

I welcome the shift in emphasis that this Conference represents. Indeed the Youth Justice Board was created to help drive this government’s determination to tackle the causes of crime – or to “nip offending in the bud” as Jack Straw called it at the time.

It started a challenging, but very necessary, move away from the old system that only kicked in when young people were already presented to the criminal justice system. Now we have Youth Inclusion Programmes that identify the most at-risk young people and divert them from crime. We have Final Warnings and

Acceptable Behaviour Contracts that set firm boundaries for young people to stop the escalation of trouble. And we have Anti-Social Behaviour Orders to tackle bad behaviour before it becomes criminal offending. Most of you here today have been at the sharp end of getting these reforms in place and getting them working.

We need now to take the next steps to build on this. I see two clear ways in which you can help us move even closer to ensuring that young people are given the support, the challenge and the opportunity they need to keep them away from criminal behaviour.

The first is to get involved even earlier, and in an even more targeted way.

The second is to ensure that we are using programmes that have a rigorous, proven track record of success.

### **[Early Intervention]**

Naomi Eisenstadt spoke earlier about the Action Plan we launched last September and the key principles we need to adopt if we are to tackle social exclusion, particularly early intervention. We know that there is a strong link between factors of social exclusion such as low income, poor parenting, poor health, and education and offending, and we know how critical the early years are to a child's life chances.

Parenting has a vital role to play here and our Nurse Family Partnership programmes in 10 areas of the country will work with

the most vulnerable mums during pregnancy and for the first two years of a child's life. Long before a child enters school, behaviours are established and risks experienced that profoundly influence a child's future. There is powerful evidence that poor attachment, stress during pregnancy, post-natal depression, poor parenting styles and low levels of stimulation are strongly associated with negative outcomes later in life such as anti-social behaviour and offending during adolescence.

So we are trying to tackle this by providing the support that parents need during the critical first two years.

But when we talk about early intervention, this does not just mean the first two years of a child's life. We cannot write children off if patterns of behaviour have been established early in life, because as Joe (Tuke, Respect Taskforce) said earlier, even one intervention has a high likelihood of stopping problem behaviour, and the chances increase every time we intervene.

We know more than ever about what the risk factors are throughout the stages of a child's life both in their family and as individuals. Many of you are in the best position to identify those at risk and to use the networks like Youth Offending Teams and Every Child Matters to share information and to ensure action is taken swiftly. We must build on the work you are doing to identify and assess these young people and ensure we develop a personal, targeted, menu of interventions tailored to that young person's needs. We need to challenge their behaviour, build their resilience and address the risk factors in their life, in their family

situation and in their local community, with the right package of measures.

For example, Communities That Care has community-based programmes that are highly localised and targeted, and have multiple components to them, which are chosen according to the risk factors of that community. We need to ensure we have a range of evidence-based interventions that can be bought into a package for a particular young person, taking account of the challenges they face.

And we need to anticipate young peoples' key transition points, and the particular life stages which we know to be vulnerable, such as school transitions, or a parent going into prison. We need to complement the universal services on offer to children and young people, with a targeted range of support to enable them to build up resilience at the most critical points.

We cannot afford, with the knowledge we have about risk factors and about what works in prevention, to allow problems to develop until they are intractable and until there are damaging, irreparable consequences for the individual and the community.

### **[Delivery through Proven Interventions]**

The emphasis must then be on evidence-based interventions, my second rallying cry.

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There is a bewilderingly wide range of programmes and interventions available, as you will be aware, and many areas are trying new ways of tackling youth crime. Yet while innovation and local leadership are important, we cannot continue to fund programmes that we cannot prove, through rigorous, controlled evaluation, have the desired outcome in terms of preventing offending. Indeed some programmes are actually having a negative effect and making bad situations worse.

Programmes such as the Incredible Years, which is being rolled out throughout Wales, the Nurse Family Partnership that we are putting into ten areas, the SEAL programme, Multi-Systemic Therapy and many others have a proven track-record in reducing violence and anti-social behaviour, improving relationships and improving behaviour and attainment in schools.

And we know the crucial role that voluntary and charitable organisations can play in the delivery of some of the most effective programmes.

But they must all be rigorously applied and empirically validated.

To help you and other local commissioners in navigating the complex minefield of intervention programmes, we are establishing, with DfES, a Centre of Excellence for children and young people's services. This will recommend only proven interventions that, if implemented with fidelity, will ensure a reduction in the kinds of poor outcomes that too many of our young people are facing.

I recently visited the United States where the University of Colorado run a Blueprinting system for violence reduction programmes, of which some of you may be aware. Out of more than 200 programmes, only 11 got the blueprint mark as being guaranteed to result in reduced violence. This is an approach we are looking at with our centre of excellence.

I would like to see your £57 million pound grant-funding programme for prevention take this approach to using only the most rigorously evaluated and proven interventions.

### **[Family]**

Finally I would like to mention that throughout the approach that I have set out, there is one key element that runs through it all, and that is the family.

We all know that effective parenting and a stable home environment are an overwhelming factor in terms of the likelihood of young people entering the criminal justice system - and indeed how strong the correlation is between a parent having been convicted or imprisoned, and their child following the same route.

But we also know that this cycle can be broken. And this is why I believe that the delivery of flexible, integrated support for parents – delivered by children's, adult and community services joining up together – is necessary if families are to have the help they need, when they need it. All too often, children and adults services work

separately, not taking account of the wider impact of decisions on dependents and other members of the family.

So I have asked the Social Exclusion Task Force, led by Naomi [Eisenstadt] to lead a 'Families at Risk Review' to be published this summer. This will explore in more depth an integrated 'whole families' approach to delivering support to families which are facing complex and entrenched problems.

### **[Conclusion]**

It's certainly not easy to wrap up reflections on what has clearly been such a full day – and I only regret I wasn't able to join you for all of it. But I'd say again that I'm very pleased, as Minister for Social Exclusion, to be closing this Conference based on the importance of early intervention to prevent the exclusion of young people at risk.

I hope you have found this a productive day and a good opportunity to debate and find solutions to the critical issues that will inform the Youth Justice Board's draft preventative strategy.

And as I said at the outset, I believe this discussion to be timely and appropriate. I very much hope that it can mark a key point in a renewed and re-invigorated focus on prevention.

You have a real opportunity here with good funding and strong political support for preventative work to have a real impact on

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changing the lives of our young people by using proven, preventative interventions.

This is an opportunity to prove you are capable of reshaping youth justice for the future, and ensuring all our children have the opportunity and aspiration to succeed.

**ENDS**