

Youth Inclusion and Support Panels: Preventing Crime and Antisocial Behaviour?

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Executive Summary

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Executive Summary

Research Context – Every Child Matters

In 2002, the Youth Justice Board (YJB) set out its commitment to develop and pilot pre-crime at-risk panels, later renamed Youth Inclusion and Support Panels (YISPs). The new panels were designed to identify and support young people aged 8–13 who are at high risk of offending and antisocial behaviour before they enter the youth justice system, and were regarded as a key component of the Government's campaign to prevent crime and combat antisocial behaviour. The YISPs were described as multi-agency planning groups which seek to prevent offending and antisocial behaviour by offering voluntary support services and other complementary interventions for high risk children and their families. Pilots were established to test the development of YISPs, paid for by the Children's Fund under the auspices of the Department for Education and Skills (DfES).¹ In 2003 we were commissioned by the DfES to evaluate thirteen new pilot YISPs, located in Barking & Dagenham, Birmingham, Ealing, Greenwich, Knowsley, Lancashire, Liverpool, Nottingham, Salford, Sheffield, Southwark, Tower Hamlets, Walsall, and Wigan. The Youth Justice Board (YJB) provided detailed guidance to the pilots relating to implementation and operation of YISPs. It was assumed that, in most cases, the Youth Offending Teams (YOTs) would act as the lead agency for the YISP on behalf of the Children's Fund and the local authority.

Providing high-quality services for children and for their families has been regarded as an essential step in preparing young people for the challenges and stresses of everyday life and giving them opportunities to achieve their full potential and thereby contribute positively within diverse, multicultural communities. Increasingly, in recent years, the focus has been on prevention and early intervention, particularly with respect to children deemed to be at high risk. The Government has set out five outcomes for children which now provide the core outcomes framework for all government policy relating to families and to youth justice, including YISPs. They are that children and young people should: be healthy; stay safe; enjoy and achieve; make a positive contribution; and achieve economic well-being. Youth justice agencies are important partners in the delivery of children's services which focus on early prevention of antisocial and criminal behaviour. The emphasis is on multi-agency approaches which tackle the risks associated with offending. Clearly, the key to prevention lies in being able to target effectively children and young people most at risk of becoming involved in crime and antisocial behaviour. Using a matrix of the risk and protective factors which may lead young people into, or protect them from, crime, the YISPs were tasked with constructing a personally tailored package of support and interventions, summarised in an integrated support plan (ISP) designed to facilitate the kind of provision which will prevent the young person moving further

¹ The DfES was renamed the Department for Children, Schools and Families in July 2007.

towards crime. Central to the concept was the role of keyworkers, who are responsible for assessing risk and co-ordinating and monitoring the package of interventions, thereby ensuring that children and their families receive mainstream public services at the earliest opportunity. It was considered essential that the YISPs should provide accessible services which reflect the diversity of the local population and which take account of ethnicity, religion, disability, sexual orientation, gender, age and race.

Involvement in YISPs is voluntary. Children and their families are asked to consent to referral and assessment for consideration by a panel, and to co-operate with the ISP. One of the core principles of YISPs is that children and their parents/carers should be involved as much as possible in each stage of the process. At the centre of YISPs is the multi-agency panel, which should include representatives from a wide range of agencies. The expectation is that the panel will be involved in prioritising cases, considering detailed assessments and designing ISPs. Panels are not specifically required to oversee compliance with ISPs but are expected to monitor and review the child's progress and satisfaction with the interventions offered.

Evaluating the YISPs

The key problem faced by any evaluation of a particular initiative such as YISPs is the tendency for outcomes to result from a myriad of influences. It was essential, therefore, for us to understand how YISPs targeted children and young people, assessed the risk and protective factors, developed integrated support plans and delivered multi-agency interventions, and then to consider how YISP interventions might interact with other initiatives designed to prevent criminal activity and to support children and families. We regarded a scoping phase as an essential first step which would help us decide how to meet these requirements. There was a considerable degree of flexibility in the way in which YISPs were being implemented locally, with some pilots starting from scratch in developing panels while others were building on existing initiatives. We noted that the pilot YISPs were not all targeting the same groups of children, making overall comparison problematic. We regarded the variations in practice as potentially very interesting on the one hand, and as a potential threat to a robust research design on the other. These variations underscored the importance of capturing as robust data as we could about process, outputs and outcomes both quantitatively and qualitatively through *in situ* fieldwork. Specifically, we needed to examine the implementation and operation of YISP panels, models of practice, outputs, activities and outcomes, and contextual issues. We adopted an action-research framework and delineated two complementary strands to the evaluation: a quantitative micro-level element, including a study of costs, and a qualitative case study element. Our aim was to collect quantitative data from all 13 pilots and to focus our qualitative work in four pilot areas.

The Quantitative Micro-Level Element

We wanted to gather information from all the YISPs about each new referral in a given time period (February 2003 to October 2005). A management information system, known as YISPMIS, had been developed for the YJB for use by the pilots, and we were encouraged to use it as the means for data capture for the evaluation. Unfortunately, YISPMIS proved to be far more problematic than helpful for the evaluation and many pilots were frustrated by its complexity. As a result, there were ongoing problems relating to the extraction of data throughout the evaluation. When we were eventually able to access the data, the file consisted of 2,235 referral records. Many of these fell outside our evaluation time-range and many children were outside the YISP age-range of 8 to 13. Stripping the data set of these cases reduced it to 1,642 records. We discovered, also, that there was a considerable amount of missing data for many of these cases, the most serious gaps relating to data about assessments which we had expected to rely on to give us a picture of the impact of YISP intervention. In only 403 cases were initial, midway and closure assessment scores available for calculating changes in a child's risk

scores during YISP intervention but other missing data meant that not all these cases were useable for our analysis of outcomes. The extent of the quantitative analyses we were able to undertake was severely compromised by the poor quality of YISPMIS data. Nevertheless, we have drawn on the quantitative data wherever possible, to provide a wider context for the in-depth qualitative work, but caution must be used in interpreting the results. We were asked to consider the costs of YISPs, and this proved to be one of the most difficult elements in the evaluation. Pilots found it difficult to provide the data we needed, so our analysis of costs must be read with considerable caution as to its generalisability.

In-Depth Qualitative Case Studies

Our in-depth qualitative work provided a rich tapestry of information about how the YISPs operated and about the more subtle impacts on children and parents. We selected four pilots as case-study sites: Birmingham, Ealing, Lancashire and Nottingham. During the evaluation, however, it became clear that Nottingham was receiving very few YISP referrals and we switched our attention to Wigan, which had high numbers of referrals and was using an innovative family group conferencing approach. Our in-depth work involved us in the examination of seven separate panels in four pilot areas (three in Lancashire, two in Birmingham), all of which are very different. We used a range of methods to study these, including observations, interviews with professionals, exploratory interviews at different points in time with children and parents, discourse and narrative analysis, and documentary analysis. The primary purpose was to identify the factors which might contribute to successful and unsuccessful delivery of interventions, identify the outcomes as perceived by the providers and receivers of the interventions, and explore the organisational aspects of service delivery.

Representativeness

Measuring the effects of YISPs across such a diverse landscape presented many challenges. We have addressed the question of representativeness, particularly in light of the inadequacies of the YISPMIS data set. Our multiple assessments of generalisability indicate that the social conditions across all the pilots combined were substantially more challenging than those faced in most of the country as a whole. In this sense, the pilots have been a tough proving ground for the implementation of YISPs. This may have given them more chance to appear effective because there was more scope for YISP intervention to have an impact, or it may be that local conditions have made making any impact at all more challenging. Our findings relating to short-term outcomes must be considered with a high degree of caution, however. We simply cannot know what the longer-term outcomes might be or whether YISP interventions ‘work’ to prevent children becoming involved in antisocial behaviour and criminal activities. The extent to which the pilot YISPs contributed to the *Every Child Matters* outcomes is a matter for conjecture primarily because the findings represent an evaluation of a new initiative in its early stages, enabling us to consider only the potential YISPs have to play a major role in reducing crime and antisocial behaviour. Wherever possible, we identified those elements of YISP practice which, in our view, are most likely to contribute to positive outcomes, and those which seem to be less helpful.

We believe that the evaluation has highlighted the difficulties many agencies face when tasked with implementing a new initiative, the delays in getting new approaches accepted and established, unrealistic predictions about target numbers, the challenges inherent in multi-agency partnership and the importance of grounding new initiatives within existing structures and local conditions while simultaneously responding to a wider national agenda for change in the delivery of children’s services, particularly those focused on prevention and early intervention.

Troubled and Troublesome: Targeting High Risk Children

In order for children to be referred to a YISP, an assessment must indicate that four or more risk factors are present in their life. Furthermore, the child's behaviour should be of concern to two or more of the partner agencies and/or the child's parents/carers, all of whom consider that a multi-agency response is called for. Children and young people should not have passed the police reprimand stage; should not be known to the criminal justice system (although they may be offending and 'known' to the police); and should be judged to be at very high risk of offending.

Across the thirteen pilots, referrals tended to come from several statutory sources, including education, social work, health, and criminal justice agencies such as the police and youth offending teams. Referrals from education were received in every pilot area, and were the most common referral source. Some 10 per cent of referrals were in respect of children who were not in full-time education and nearly 30 per cent of children were regularly truanting from school. By far the most common factor relating to education was difficulty with schoolwork. Several pilots received considerable numbers of referrals from the police while other pilots received hardly any. Pilots varied considerably in their throughputs. Lancashire recorded the highest number of referrals, and Nottingham received the least. The vast majority of the children and young people referred to the YISPs were male and half of all children referred were aged 11 or 12. Eighty per cent of the children were categorised as 'white', with higher percentages of non-white children recorded in the London boroughs.

Parents and carers interviewed usually believed that their child's worsening behaviour at school, at home or in the community had triggered the YISP referral. Prior to the referral, many parents had been asking for help for some time with a variety of often complex and interrelated problems relating to the child's education, family relationships, antisocial behaviour, or emotional and mental health. Indeed, many parents had been at their wits' end, trying to cope with a child who was causing a variety of stresses, and desperate for someone to do something which could help them as well as help the child. Some parents had tried to access mainstream services such as CAMHS and frequently felt let down by their apparent failure to respond. The children and young people themselves were usually aware that they had been referred to the YISP because they had been naughty in some way, but most had little idea what to expect. The YISP staff acknowledged that parents and children were not always given accurate information about what YISPs could offer and parents were inclined to regard YISP as an agency which would take children off their hands for a while. Some children were worried that they might be taken away from their families.

In some areas, YISP staff felt that they had been used as a 'dumping ground' for hard cases which the statutory agencies had not been able to handle. On occasion, the YISP had been used as a 'back-up' service or as a 'bolt-on' to other services, and some agencies had referred children to YISP as part of their own exit strategy from a family. The YISPs felt that dealing with these inappropriate referrals had at times made relationships with some statutory agencies quite difficult. As YISPs have evolved they have tended to become more selective about which referrals are appropriate, tightening their gatekeeping and verification procedures. While a number of strategies were in place in many YISPs to increase referrals and reduce inappropriate referrals, keyworkers recognised that it is very difficult to identify, target and predict the young people who are at most risk of offending and for whom YISP intervention is most appropriate.

Assessing Risk

A new referral and assessment process was developed for use in the pilot YISPs by a team in the Centre for Criminology at Oxford University. Known as ONSET, the new tool has been used by pilot YISPs since autumn 2003, and research has been conducted by the Oxford team in order to validate ONSET in parallel with our national evaluation of YISPs. The ONSET is the only specifically designed tool in use in early intervention/prevention programmes. In order to fit with the YISP process, ONSET includes: a referral form (which can aid verification of suitability); a pro-forma for parental and child consent; a standardised assessment form; a self-assessment questionnaire for children, entitled *Over To You*; a self-assessment *Over To You* questionnaire for parents/carers; mid-way review; and a closure review.

The referral form seeks information about the child being referred, the child's family, the child's educational details, the involvement of statutory services, the child's criminal or offending history, and reasons for the referral. It contains a list of potential risk and protective factors that might apply to the child being referred. When a referral has been verified, the referral form should be passed to a keyworker for detailed ONSET assessment. The assessment document is more substantive: fuller details are required about behaviour and other aspects of the child's life. Each section has to be given a rating which indicates the extent to which there is a likelihood of offending or antisocial behaviour on the part of the child in the future. In other words, the keyworker has to make a judgement about the link between the problems identified and the child's future offending behaviour. This is very important because it draws the distinction between the existence of risk factors and problems *per se* and the likelihood of them leading to criminal behaviour. A scale of 0–4 is used to rate each section in terms of its relevance to further offending, with 4 indicating a strong association.

Keyworkers have the option of using the *Over To You* self-completion questionnaires, which allow an opportunity for parents and the child to answer questions from their own point of view. Pilots varied in terms of how often they used these. Some used them very infrequently whereas others used them in the majority of cases. A further form which documents the child's risk of serious harm should be completed by the keyworker if a child is thought to pose a risk of serious harm to another person. The ONSET referral form, and to a greater extent the assessment document, were designed to provide evidence about each child accepted by a YISP, which could both guide subsequent panel discussions and the development of a tailored ISP and enable measures of change to be recorded at a later stage in the intervention. Clearly, the assessment can stand alone as a working tool, but its primary use is in measuring and assessing outcomes. We had expected to base our quantitative study of outcomes on changes in ONSET scores, but the numbers of cases in which initial and repeat ONSET assessments were recorded was a relatively small proportion of the total number of cases recorded on YISPMIS during our study period. In respect of 1,440 children referred to YISPs over the period 1 February 2004 to 31 October 2005, 552 closure forms were completed and recorded, relating to approximately 40 per cent of children and a third of all referrals to YISPs in the thirteen pilots. Again, there was much variation between panel areas in respect of their use. Unfortunately, not all these cases had an initial ONSET score recorded, rendering them unusable for analyses relating to change in risk factors.

Analysis of the available data has shown that education, neighbourhood, lifestyle and emotional and mental health were the most serious risk factors recorded at the beginning of YISP intervention. Initial ONSET scores varied between pilots. While keyworkers regarded ONSET as a useful tool to clarify their thinking and highlight risk and protective factors, they have been less convinced about the ultimate value of the scoring system. Inevitably, professionals from different backgrounds and with varying degrees of experience in working with children at risk of offending are likely to score from their own perspective. There was a perception that keyworkers with a social services or YOT background might score risks of offending lower than those with youth work or education backgrounds

because the former are used to dealing with much more difficult cases. It is clear from our analyses that some pilots were working with lower-risk children than others.

Assessing a young person's risk of offending or antisocial behaviour is at the heart of the YISP referral process. Unfortunately, the lack of consistency across the pilot YISPs relating to the recording of ONSET assessments has rendered it difficult to be certain that we have captured a true picture of how assessments have been undertaken with children and young people referred to the YISPs. Many YISPs had not embraced the notion of conducting follow-up assessments in order to examine change over time. It seems essential that assessments should be undertaken by fully trained staff, irrespective of the agency in which they work, who approach the task with a clear understanding of the purpose of the assessment and the uses to which it might be put.

Youth Inclusion and Support Panels in Action

Panels have several responsibilities: first, to ensure that the most appropriate services are available at the earliest opportunity to each child/family referred to a YISP; second, to monitor changes in risk and protective factors during YISP intervention; third, to ensure that the children and their families are satisfied with the help they receive; and fourth, to make sure that children are maintained in full-time education. When establishing panels, YISPs were advised to consider a number of factors, including: the catchment area to be served; the anticipated workload; the roles and responsibilities of panel members; how children and families will be involved in panel decision-making; the strength and efficacy of relevant local strategic partnerships; and information exchange and confidentiality. The YJB argued that, because of the specific remit of YISPs, certain agencies (YOTs, the police, social services, health (CAMHS), Children's Fund, and schools/education) should form the core membership of every panel, with additional specialist and other agencies invited to join according to local circumstances (youth service, housing, Connexions, and voluntary and community groups). This inclusive approach to panel membership suggests that each YISP panel is likely to have a minimum of eight members, and most will probably have rather more. Attendance is expected to be regular and panels are expected to meet at least once a month. Pilot YISPs have had to strike a balance between keeping panels effective and having representatives of sufficient seniority to commit resources, and ensuring that panels are not unwieldy and potentially intimidating. The maximum number of invitations issued for any one panel meeting was 41. The agencies most frequently invited were YOTs, followed by schools. Pilots were often critical of the poor attendance record of some agencies, particularly social services. Each panel has to appoint a chair, and while many YISPs selected the chair from within their own structure (e.g. the YOT manager or YISP co-ordinator), others appointed the chair from a local service (such as the police or education).

Securing agency representatives at the right level – able to commit resources but with sufficient local knowledge to inform decision-making – has presented a challenge for some YISPs. Not all, for example, found it easy to engage police representatives in the early months and others struggled to involve headteachers. Nevertheless, the panels we have observed in action have managed, for the most part, to secure appropriate membership, although attendance has sometimes been sporadic in some areas. Inevitably, panels which take place in more rural or smaller catchment areas are likely to have smaller numbers of regular members and involve staff who work at an operational rather than a strategic level.

Involving the local community in the development, delivery and operation of YISPs has presented another challenge. Some YISPs decided not to involve community representatives, citing confidentiality as the main reason for their decision. Where members of the community have been regular members of a panel, they have contributed a good deal of local knowledge both about specific neighbourhoods and about individual families living in them. Although the YJB expected that children,

young people and their parents would be included in panel meetings, in practice most pilots have not invited families to the panel. The exception is Wigan, where a family group conferencing model was adopted in which children, parents and other family members are central participants in the decision-making. It was evident from our observations in Wigan that while families were fully involved in the family group meeting, rarely, however, were many professionals present. As Wigan did not hold a YISP panel meeting as such, the lack of outside involvement could be seen as a disadvantage. It appeared that some of the real benefits associated with panels in other areas might have been lost in Wigan.

Each panel developed its own *modus vivendi* and there were considerable variations in approach. Some adhered more closely than others to YJB guidelines while others tended to largely ignore ONSET assessments and expectations that YISP intervention would be intensive but relatively brief. Some panels lost sight of the focus on preventing crime and antisocial behaviour and adopted a more welfare-oriented approach to long-term care and support of vulnerable children and young people.

Planning, Delivering and Receiving Preventative Services

In considering the type of early intervention that might be appropriate for a child, YISPs were expected to focus on the provision of mainstream services. The YISPs do not have a substantive role as commissioning bodies or, directly, as service providers, but they do look to ensure that a holistic service is made available. This is a challenging remit, and the pilot YISPs varied considerably in their approach to service provision. In order for YISPs to execute their role effectively they undoubtedly need the support and commitment of a range of statutory and voluntary services.

The ONSET assessment was designed to help panels and keyworkers decide the key targets for intervention, and the ISP should set out the expectations for the child, the family and the service providers. Although relatively few data were available about ISPs on YISPMIS, we were able to see from the quantitative and qualitative information that a range of interventions were offered. These tended to fall into two distinct categories: direct work with children and indirect work on behalf of children. The former included activities for children, one-to-one support, mentoring, and issues-based sessions/programmes. Structured activities such as sports, art, media and computing were popular. Most activities had developmental and social learning aims as well as providing fun and diversion. Keyworkers regarded them as helping to build self-esteem, improve social skills, offer one-to-one attention and enhance the social inclusion of YISP children. Direct one-to-one work was offered in most pilots by the YISP keyworker. All the keyworkers believed that a one-to-one relationship is crucial to the success or failure of most ISPs. However, differences of approach emerged within and between YISPs regarding what were considered to be appropriate interventions. Many keyworkers made use of programmes for addressing risk factors, which they had bought in (e.g. Teen Talk), downloaded from the internet or designed themselves. Some keyworkers stressed that the ‘crime and consequences’ work, as it was often termed, was only of value when integrated into an ISP which addressed deeper issues, such as family functioning. Deciding whether, and how, keyworkers should be involved in direct service delivery to children and families was an issue with which many pilots had to grapple. Resource and workload considerations resulted in some keyworkers being unable to devote much time to direct work with YISP children. Furthermore, the professional qualifications and practice skills of keyworkers were variable.

The indirect work on behalf of children often included referrals to other agencies. On occasion, keyworkers could fast-track children into services such as CAMHS and parents were delighted that their children were able to access services in this way. Another important keyworker role was that of mediating between home and school. Throughout our evaluation of YISPs we became increasingly aware of the difficulties that can arise between parents and educational institutions. Although most

parents emphasised that schools had been supportive, they often did not understand why a school had taken particular courses of action. Parents described how they could feel powerless, patronised and harassed by teachers. In addition to liaising with schools, the YISP keyworkers had also liaised with other agencies such as the police, housing authorities and social services departments, on behalf of families. Keyworkers saw this as important in helping parents deal with situations which were clearly adding to the risks for children.

Occasionally, keyworkers had perceived the need for parents to access help for themselves. Keyworkers often gave information or advice to parents about a variety of relevant services such as domestic violence, bereavement, debt counselling, college courses, support groups and local activities for their children. Many parents reported that YISP keyworkers had, in addition to helping them access other services, provided them with emotional support, 'a listening ear'. Although some keyworkers had received specialised training to work with parents, most described themselves as offering informal parenting advice and support.

Although ISPs were individualised, it was not always easy to identify the links between interventions offered and the perceived risks articulated in the ONSET assessments. Frequently, the interventions were not structured in terms of dosage, duration and order of delivery. It was rarely easy to discern which interventions were focused on specific targets for change. Furthermore, not all issues and risks identified as key factors in the initial ONSET assessment were addressed in the ISPs. There may be legitimate reasons for this gap, such as a lack of appropriate services, but our findings suggest that there is some disjunction between assessment and intervention. Only those risks which could be addressed seemed to be noted in the ISPs. Others were simply left to one side and not addressed. It should be stressed, however, that our interviews with keyworkers indicated that they were usually very aware of the risks faced by each child and had a very good understanding of each case, irrespective of what was contained in the ISP.

Facilitating Engagement

We wanted to tease out which factors encouraged and which inhibited successful engagement with YISP interventions. A number of key themes emerged from our interviews with families and keyworkers: parental support, the enthusiasm of the child, and the relationship with the keyworker. Conversely, the lack of parental support, the child's lack of interest and ongoing disruptive behaviour, and a lack of local resources on which keyworkers could draw inhibited families' engagement with YISPs. It was clear that some children and young people had engaged fully with their ISP, while others had not. Keyworkers regarded the support and encouragement of parents as absolutely essential to the engagement of their children. Clearly, it was also important that the young person was motivated to engage with the YISP. A successful relationship with a keyworker can enhance motivation to comply with an ISP and make changes in behaviour. Other factors which keyworkers from all the YISPs highlighted as impinging on service delivery included staff absences, staff shortages and heavy caseloads. Most YISPs had experienced these problems in some measure.

Closing Cases

If children and families are committed to getting help, and if keyworkers establish positive relationships with the children, compliance is likely to be higher than if motivation is low. Dilemmas still exist, however, for some YISPs in respect of the length of involvement with YISP children. Some YISPs limited intervention to about three months. Others kept cases open for anything up to two years. There was a tendency for some panels to want to keep cases open and to review them periodically even if little intervention was being offered. Some keyworkers were reluctant to offer too much support for

fear of creating a sense of dependency in the family. Nevertheless, all our case study YISPs felt that it was important to develop an exit strategy for each case. This might include an onward referral to another agency or to a mentor. Leaving families without support is not acceptable and could undo all the positive impacts of YISP intervention. Where there was no one to continue the work begun by YISPs this was frustrating for keyworkers and for the families. In these circumstances, there is a real danger that cases may simply drift, either when they are kept open for long periods or when there is no clear exit strategy in place. Such a strategy requires strong multi-agency collaboration, and, to be effective, YISPs need to be located within a continuum of support and/or preventative services. Keyworkers told us that they found it challenging, when they were undertaking case closure, to have to focus on issues which might lead to a risk of offending rather than on those which are more welfare-oriented.

Multi-Agency Working

All the keyworkers, YISP co-ordinators and managers were firm believers in the principle of multi-agency working and regarded YISPs as an excellent model of this kind of approach. The benefits are regarded as: ease of information-sharing; provision of professional advice and guidance; having a named agency representative; opportunities for networking; the provision of local knowledge; and the provision of professional support about how to help children and young people. The YISP panels have the potential to get all the local agencies together to focus on developing an integrated support plan tailored to each child's needs.

In order to examine this aspect of YISPs, we studied three panels and their areas in depth. Data were obtained largely through semi-structured interviews with senior staff and panel members in agencies linked to YISPs. The objectives were to ascertain: how the different agencies involved understood the operation of YISPs; the issues raised by multi-agency working; the roles played by different agencies associated with the YISPs; and how the YISP remit varied in different areas. We studied the origins of each YISP, the structures in which it was embedded and the processes that had been implemented. All three panels had been developed from some kind of existing structure for or commitment to multi-agency working in the area of preventing youth crime. Most of those involved felt that the introduction of YISPs had formalised the system of collaboration and had resulted in greater sharing of information, improved co-ordination of activity; more structured interventions with children and families; and higher levels of accountability on the part of the collaborating agencies. This is not to say, however, that multi-agency working was universally and unequivocally regarded as a good thing. The YISP staff in some pilots experienced frustrations, such as securing the involvement of agency staff senior enough to commit resources to the YISP, and a lack of commitment to regular panel meeting attendance. During our interviews, YISP keyworkers emphasised what they perceive as a gap between commitment at a strategic level – agencies have signed up to the concept of YISPs – and the allocation of resources, including staff time, to allow these agencies to engage in service delivery. It became clear to us that the lack of resources/services offered by partner agencies can be a source of serious frustration for YISP staff. Networking can be very positive, but, if services are not being offered to YISP children, good relationships alone cannot provide the services a child might need.

We found that different agencies play different roles in the YISPs. The nature of the role depends on the degree of involvement (active and passive) and whether the agency provides referrals, information and services to the YISP. We looked specifically at the participation of YOTs, the police, education and social services in respect of these activities. The YOTs were very active in all aspects of YISP involvement. The police are the agency whose policies and structures are most consistent with YISP, and their role is generally an active one also. Education was also active in terms of referrals from schools, although the Education Welfare Service did not play an active role in most panels. Getting

teachers involved in YISPs has been a challenge although they are key players in the preventative agenda. Perhaps the most interesting of the agencies is social services. This was the agency that aroused the most passion among all those involved in YISPs. Of key importance was the tightening of its thresholds for working with young people and the implication of this for its relationship with YOTs. Although this agency was often detached from the work of YISPs, it was precisely in this detachment that its importance resided. We can place it very much in the 'passive' role, but the views of a number of interviewees suggested that social services' impact on YISPs was not neutral, as 'passivity' suggests, but actually negative.

The issue of resources is one which needs to be addressed if YISP panels are going to be able to function effectively. It may be that partner agencies offer very little in the way of intervention because the cases YISPs deal with fall below the usual threshold of involvement with the statutory services. If YISPs are successful in targeting children and young people before they get into trouble in order to undertake preventative work, there is a conundrum for statutory services. Some YISP keyworkers believed that YISPs were highlighting gaps in the ability of existing mainstream services to offer early intervention.

Exploring and Understanding Outcomes

Although we did not set out to conduct an impact study and had no control or comparative data on which to draw, an important objective of our evaluation was to attempt to assess whether and how YISP interventions make a difference in children's lives and, in particular, whether they might have the propensity to reduce antisocial or criminal behaviour. We also wanted to assess the extent to which YISPs might meet the five *Every Child Matters* outcomes and those identified in *Youth Matters*. We approached the task of exploring what outcomes there might be in three main ways: first, by examining whether YISP interventions had a statistically significant impact on a measurable indicator of the risk of problematic behaviour; second, by exploring levels of satisfaction for parents and children; and third, by considering the perspectives of the parents, children and keyworkers who were interviewed in the case-study areas. Our original intention was to conduct a rigorous analysis of changes in a range of measurable outcomes and in risk factor scores identified in final ONSET assessments. The more qualitative data would then enable us to understand the findings from the quantitative analysis. The first task, therefore, was to analyse ONSET scores over the period of YISP intervention. The second task involved analysis of satisfaction questionnaires administered to parents and children by the pilots, and the third involved analysis of in-depth interviews with families which were undertaken at two periods in time. Inevitably, interview data provide a more subjective understanding of outcomes rather than numerical evidence of changes in risk scores, but they also enable us to explore more subtle impacts on the day-to-day lives of families who agreed to participate in the YISP programme.

Changes in Risk

The quantitative modelling centred on an examination of the change in ONSET score for each case, the aim being to account for patterns in the change in ONSET scores through *explanatory variables* such as the gender of the child involved and the type and number of the interventions the child received. We could examine only 229 cases in six of the thirteen pilots which had recorded both an initial and closing ONSET score and for which we had a full set of data. Other cases with full ONSET data had to be discarded as other key information, such as the gender of the child, was missing. The pilots are known to be working in very different ways, and there was considerable variation between them in terms of the levels of risk reduction they achieved. Along with the differences between pilots, caused perhaps by contrasts in policy or practice, we found considerable variation at the case level. We conducted a large number of analyses using the YISPMIS data to measure changes in risk and found:

1. The higher the child's starting risk the greater the likely level of risk reduction.
2. Older children are less likely to experience large risk reduction.
3. The gender of the child and the level of deprivation in the home neighbourhood are not statistically related to risk reduction levels.

These findings are important in that they endorse the importance of targeting high risk children as early as possible. We looked for evidence that certain interventions might be more effective than others, but all those which were most commonly used (and whose effectiveness can as a result be more reliably measured) showed similar levels of effectiveness, with risk reduction levels of between 4 and 5 points. There was very little difference in the outcomes for children referred by different agencies, although children who were referred by social services showed a slightly larger average ONSET-measured risk reduction. The model we used accounts for about 20 per cent of the variation between children in the level of change in their ONSET scores, and we undertook further analysis to consider whether there were patterns in the residual variation which could be identified so that the model could account for these patterns too. There were no residual patterns and we have reached the following tentative conclusions:

- having a higher initial ONSET score was strongly linked to greater reduction
- children receiving mentoring saw a risk reduction averaging over two points
- children who were said to discriminate against other people at initial assessment tended to have increasing risk scores

From the quantitative analyses we have concluded that the value of the initial ONSET score – ‘the size of the initial problem for that case’ – can be regarded as the key influence on the likely scale of the measurable effect of the YISP intervention on the risk of antisocial or criminal behaviour. It is probable that if YISPs are rolled out they will have the greatest effect if they are targeted at the highest risk children. However, there is relatively little statistical evidence that any particular interventions have much stronger impacts than others. Because of the extent of the missing data on YISPMIS, these conclusions should, of course, be treated with appropriate caution.

Measuring Parent and Child Satisfaction

In our second approach to measuring outcomes, we examined data relating to the satisfaction of parents and children. While satisfaction is a softer outcome measure than changes in ONSET scores, it is an important indicator. We received 29 satisfaction questionnaires completed by children interviewed in the four case study areas (22 boys and 7 girls), and 26 questionnaires completed by parents of those children, mostly mothers. Caution should be employed when interpreting these findings, as we cannot claim to have a representative sample. Nevertheless, both children and parents appeared to be well satisfied with the service they received from their local YISP. Most parents felt that YISP intervention had helped their child, and some had clearly received considerable support for themselves. Parents said they would recommend the YISP to others. Children generally felt positive about YISP involvement and particularly enjoyed doing activities.

The Reflections of Parents and Children

During our in-depth interviews with parents and children we examined their perceptions of the changes that had occurred, as a result of YISP intervention, across the four risk domains of a child's life: family, education/school, community, and individual well-being. We also examined whether the young people had been in trouble with the police since they had been engaged with the YISP. We would caution, however, that it is very difficult to isolate the impact of YISP intervention from other interventions in the lives of children and families. Most of the families in our interview sample had received a range of services either prior to or during YISP involvement. These may have included family counselling, family therapy, parenting support, learning support, social work intervention and so on. It is also important to recognise that YISPs varied considerably in respect of the duration and intensity of YISP involvement, so the outcomes described by parents and children were drawn from a range of different YISP models. We are also very aware that parents and children do not conceptualise the problems they face in terms of 'risk'. Moreover, the risk of their child being involved in antisocial behaviour was rarely at the front of parents' minds. Nevertheless, the interviews told us a great deal about the stresses and strains in these families' lives and the kinds of risk children were facing.

Looking at family life, a substantial majority of families interviewed mentioned living arrangements, specifically overcrowding, as a significant concern when their child was referred to the local YISP. Some keyworkers were able to support applications to move house, for example, but YISP involvement did not specifically address problems with living arrangements. Undoubtedly, poor housing conditions increase the risk factors for children and any improvements can substantially improve family well-being. In addition, the majority of parents were concerned about their children's attitudes and behaviour at home. Children were apt to be disruptive, aggressive, abusive and generally disobedient. On the other hand, they spoke of their own concerns about family life, often referring to parental conflict; loss of contact with a parent or grandparent through separation, bereavement or imprisonment, and domestic violence. Many children had experienced complex and difficult family situations. The YISPs were able to address some of the problems relating to home life, and most parents reported an improvement in their child's behaviour as a result of YISP interventions. Children and young people mostly described the situation at home as having improved. Nevertheless, a minority of parents regarded their child's behaviour as a matter of ongoing serious concern, despite YISP involvement.

Problems at school had been a major worry for most parents at referral, and almost two-thirds reported some improvement during the period of YISP intervention. Most parents said that their child was working better at school, had an improved attendance record, was behaving better, and had a better attitude. Improvements at school meant that parents were no longer feeling harassed by teachers. Parents stressed, however, that it was too soon to conclude that some problems would not persist. Just over a third of parents told us that things were as bad as before or had got worse: some children had been excluded from school during YISP involvement and a few were attending a study centre or pupil referral unit. These parents were frustrated and depressed about what they saw as a never-ending cycle of exclusions. While YISP intervention had clearly reduced some children's risk factors relating to school, some of the educational improvements at the end of YISP involvement were very fragile, and it was unlikely to take much for children to revert to their previous poor behaviour. Things could be particularly difficult for children when YISP involvement came to an end, leaving little ongoing support in place.

Reflecting on the neighbourhood in which they lived, most parents took the view that this put their child at risk. They expressed concerns, when we first met them, that their children were involved in vandalism, fighting, mugging, joyriding, begging, and other antisocial behaviour in the neighbourhood. Some parents believed that their children were at risk through staying out late, or overnight, in areas which were rife with social problems such as drugs, car crime, abductions and murder. A number of

parents were worried about their children being drawn into a drug culture; others that their children were getting a bad reputation locally, which would lead to them being targeted by the police and the community. When we first talked to the children, many freely admitted their involvement in antisocial or offending behaviour, and some obviously regarded it as 'fun'. They clearly got a kick from climbing on roofs, shoplifting, fighting, riding motorbikes illegally, stealing the dust caps from cars, damaging property, and knocking on doors then running away. These children had witnessed a good deal of crime taking place in their neighbourhoods, including gang fights, drug-taking, shoplifting, joyriding and mugging. They had seen a good many police chases and raids, and crime had frequently become a normal part of their everyday lives. What is clear from our follow-up interviews, however, is that many of the children and young people had substantially improved their behaviour since we first talked to them. Over a third of parents had noted large improvements that meant their children were no longer out on the streets and were not getting involved in crime and antisocial behaviour. Nevertheless, many parents were well aware that the improvements might not last. Some thought that it was only a matter of time before peer pressure reasserted itself.

Almost all the parents had been concerned about their child's emotional and psychological well-being at the time the child had been referred to YISP. Parents frequently mentioned self-harm as a problem, as well as poor temper control. Over half of the parents believed that their child had some kind of emotional, behavioural or mental problem, such as ADHD, which they felt was linked to a number of factors. They told us that their child had been bullied (often because of being overweight), lacked social skills, had low self-esteem, or showed a lack of pride in their appearance. Some children had clearly suffered as a result of parental separation or the death of a significant adult. Many parents told us that their children smoked and several parents were worried about drug taking. When we re-interviewed the parents and children, around a third of the parents reported that their child's psychological health had improved. They described their children as happier and less aggressive. Some were said to have 'calmed down' or to have 'settled down'. Children themselves reported that they had 'calmed down'.

The majority of parents reported that the children had not offended or been involved in antisocial behaviour during YISP involvement, and most were optimistic that they were not likely to reoffend in the future. Parents felt that children had learned their lesson and had turned a corner, and that the outcomes were positive. Only a few young people reported that they had offended during YISP intervention. Clearly, some children had made great strides during YISP involvement and wanted to stay out of trouble. Others were still living on the fringes of antisocial and criminal behaviour and some parents were concerned that these children would always be labelled potential troublemakers.

Although YISP activities may not themselves have had a direct impact on the children, some of the changes in circumstances may well have been facilitated by the fact that the child had been referred to YISP and members of the multi-agency panel had been able to commit resources to effecting change in the family's life. In addition, the one-to-one relationship with a keyworker seems to have had a positive impact, alongside the availability of constructive leisure activities. Being listened to was an important trigger for change for some young people. Taking part in activities also gave children the opportunity to learn new skills. Some made new friends as a result, and realised that they could have fun doing things other than offending. Parents could see the change in their child's behaviour and noted increased self-confidence and self-esteem. Improvements in children's behaviour were evident also when parents had received support. Although YISPs direct most of their resources towards children and young people, some support is usually offered to parents. It seems that YISP keyworkers were successful in establishing the kind of rapport and trust with parents and children which parents often felt was lacking in their dealings with other agencies. Keyworkers were described as accessible, relaxed, informal and friendly. One of the biggest challenges facing keyworkers in their one-to-one work was how to engage the less motivated children. Some keyworkers had spent months winning the trust of young people who at first had completely refused to engage in YISP. This commitment, however, was more difficult for those YISPs that limited their intervention to twelve weeks.

Keyworkers, then, emerge as a very important factor in the success of YISPs. Positive outcomes can be facilitated through a constructive, supportive keyworker relationship. Usually, YISP was not regarded as 'a miracle', as one parent put it, but as an intervention which could be helpful and which might make a real difference in the long run. It seems that much depends on the extent to which other agencies continue the constructive work YISPs have started. Keyworkers were positive about the impact of YISP intervention but found it difficult to gauge any potential long-term outcomes relating to criminal and antisocial behaviour. They preferred to consider short-term outcomes which are achievable, such as: the child no longer being involved in antisocial or offending behaviour; the child staying in full-time education; the child having accessed mainstream services, such as CAMHS; the reduction of a major risk factor; and raising the profile of the family and ensuring multi-agency support from social services, housing, police and education. Children who had high risk factors might be successful in small ways, and keyworkers were keen that, in the words of one, 'little bits of success' should be celebrated.

We clearly need to be tentative when considering the outcomes of YISP intervention, but it has become clear from both the quantitative and the qualitative data that the younger children are when YISPs intervene the greater the chance that early intervention will have an impact. Children and young people referred to YISPs frequently presented with a range of risk factors across several domains. Tackling risks at different levels was usually more effective than focusing solely on one risk. YISPs have huge potential, because the multi-agency panels should ensure that help is forthcoming from a range of agencies simultaneously. The role of the keyworker in co-ordinating this support and in working intensively with the child and the family has emerged from our research as a key factor in YISPs being able to deliver positive outcomes. Regular and intensive keyworker support has been highly valued by parents and children, whereas inconsistent keyworker involvement has been regarded as unsatisfactory. We have reached the conclusion that YISP intervention, to be effective, needs to be both intense and sustainable.

The Costs of YISP Intervention

One of the most challenging aspects of our evaluation has been to attempt to determine the costs associated with the YISP programme. The purpose of the costing exercise was to determine the financial, time and other costs involved in delivering the YISP pilots for different offices and panels. Three main components of activity and cost involved in administering and delivering YISP at the area level were identified, as follows:

1. The number of children dealt with by type of activity (referral process, ONSET assessment, panel attendance, etc.) and the time input of YISP and non-YISP staff.
2. The expenditure involved in providing services/activities to children, in respect of YISP and non-YISP staff.
3. The office costs in running YISPs, including allowances for variable and fixed costs (e.g. rent, furniture, and fungibles such as telephones and printing).

Data were returned for nine of the thirteen areas. The data were not always returned in the manner required and some of the returns were of relatively poor quality. The costs study is based on just seven pilot areas, therefore. It is a small sample and findings must be treated with caution. Analysis of the data available indicates that the average cost of dealing with a child under the YISP procedure was relatively small. Depending on the exact view of the average daily rate of staff involved, the estimates give an average cost of less than £500 and, perhaps, only half this figure. It must be remembered that

this was a snapshot, as individuals were not followed through the YISP procedure, but rather the activities and costs were calculated on a monthly basis across pilot areas. On average, a pilot area dealt with 129 children each month, and another 93 undertook activities, with the financial costs (excluding staff) amounting to less than £6,000. However, by far the greatest element of cost was the staff time input, which amounted to 306 days a month, of which 56 related to the input of senior staff. It is important to remember that we were not in a position to estimate the costs associated with panel meetings themselves. We could not and would not estimate whether YISPs represent value for money, therefore. This must be a judgement made by policymakers and those administering preventative and early intervention initiatives.

Preventing Youth Crime and Antisocial Behaviour

In order to inform both policy and practice in this relatively new area of work, we focused deliberately on understanding YISP processes – the various elements which might contribute to an effective service – as well as considering outcomes wherever possible. Considerable variations in practice were evident across the pilots. The model for YISPs involved a systematic process from referral to delivery in which the children and their parents/carers would participate at every stage. The key elements in this process which emerged as significant in striving to achieve positive outcomes were:

- being able to target high risk children
- systematically and rigorously assessing risk
- making contributions through multi-agency (panel) working
- developing a tailored, integrated support plan and empowering children and their families
- delivering preventative services which address the identified risk factors

We summarise the key elements in turn.

Targeting High Risk Children

It is clear that the numbers of children and young people referred to the pilot YISPs during the national evaluation were significantly lower than had been expected. Whether this is a result of ignorance about a new initiative or an inability to identify high risk children is a matter for conjecture. We were aware that some professionals were concerned about pulling children who have not offended into the criminal justice system – net-widening, as it is commonly called. A wide range of agencies made referrals during the evaluation, and most cited the incidence of antisocial behaviour or offending as the major cause for concern. Problems relating to school were commonplace, as were problems in the home. It would seem that these three problem domains frequently occur in combination, indicating that offending/antisocial behaviours are associated with difficulties at home and school. Looking for problem clusters may well be a helpful way for professionals to target the highest risk children. We suspect that the different professions tend to look primarily for difficulties in their own domain (e.g. teachers are aware of problems at school) without necessarily enquiring about problems in other domains. It is notable that many parents we interviewed had been aware of problem behaviours for several years, suggesting that the YISP children could have been identified earlier, particularly by parents and teachers. It seems likely that some if not all of these children might have benefited from YISP referral at an earlier stage. For the most part, they were only identified when behaviour or

troublesome situations began to worsen. The evidence suggests that attracting early referrals relating to children who can benefit most remains a key challenge.

Assessing Risk and Protective Factors

Simply adding up risk factors is not likely to help in enabling us to predict which children might get into trouble. Nevertheless, the greater the number of risk factors in a child's life the greater the risk of offending behaviour, although risks are rarely static. Assessing risk needs to be a continuous process, and this was clearly the thinking behind the development of the ONSET suite of assessment tools. It is unfortunate that the pilot YISPs did not all recognise this and that the ONSET assessment was often used as a one-off exercise at the time of referral. Contrary to expectations, ONSET did not inform all aspects of YISP intervention in most pilots.

Although assessment is not an exact science, there were considerable regional variations in scoring, with some pilots recording very high ONSET scores and others recording lower-than-average scores. We believe that there was some confusion about scoring risks *per se*, and scoring the risks of offending and antisocial behaviour. We detected some scepticism among YISP staff as to whether the scoring system is helpful, and it seems essential that with the introduction of the common assessment framework there should be more consistency in the approach of professionals towards assessing children and young people. It may be helpful to note that while overall scores may not have changed significantly as a result of YISP intervention, the individual components of the score may have shifted, indicating that any scoring system must be very sensitive to change and considered in the broader context of a child's life at any given moment in time.

YISP Panels and Multi-Agency Working

We observed some very dedicated panels during the evaluation, and many developed a strong identity. Few panels actually involved young people and their parents/carers directly, however, so that most families who participated in the pilots had little understanding of the panel process. Pilots adopting a family group conference approach were the exception to this although the family group meeting took the place of the YISP panel, thus rendering it a completely different kind of experience for families. In terms of the work undertaken by panels, we noted that not all the panels engaged in the development and review of ISPs. Some panels received detailed information relating to each referral; others received relatively little information and tended to rely more on what the panel members might already know about a child. We were aware of a strong caring ethos within each panel we observed, although this sometimes resulted in panel members becoming overly involved in the cases and being reluctant to agree closure.

It would be reasonable to suppose that YISP panels would be highly costly if the time of panel members were to be taken into account. Our costs study did not do this. While it is important that agencies are represented at a senior level on the panel in order to commit resources, the cost of this might be questioned, particularly when some of the agencies represented did not actually contribute to ISPs. There is a clear tension when YISP children fall below the threshold for statutory service provision even though needs have been identified for interventions such as CAMHS services. Many keyworkers were of the view that too much of the support was left to them and that they did not always get the resources they needed from other agencies. Multi-agency working was identified as a major benefit of the YISP programme, but not all agencies appeared to be willing to offer services to YISP families.

Delivering Tailored Services

The YISPs were designed to occupy the middle ground between welfare, youth offending and community safety. They were not intended to have a role as commissioning bodies or, directly, as long-term service providers, but they were expected to ensure that a holistic, tailored, individualised package of support could be delivered. The ISP was seen as the tool which would enable families to receive appropriate services. Keyworkers were in a unique position to encourage the children and their parents to engage with YISP. If children and/or their parents were not motivated to engage this was likely to result in non-compliance with YISP expectations and the ISPs. Nevertheless, YISP keyworkers recognised that there is a danger of over-intervening in the lives of YISP families and becoming a long-term caseworker. The evaluation would suggest that there needs to be closer links between assessment, the drawing up of the ISP and service delivery. It is easy to fall into the trap of offering services simply because they exist without ensuring that they will address identified risk and/or protective factors.

Understanding Outcomes

We have been acutely aware of the very hard work and high level of dedication of YISP staff and panel members, but the evidence we have been able to garner has been primarily qualitative despite our best efforts to conduct a robust, quantitative study. Qualitative data have enhanced the learning about what appears to be working well in YISPs, but we cannot be as robust about the impacts or outcomes as we had expected. There is evidence from the national evaluation that many children who experienced YISP intervention did demonstrate improvements in their mental health and well-being; they were less likely to roam the streets and get into trouble; they were doing better with their schooling and making a more positive contribution at school and at home. Just how far these improvements were sustained we simply do not know, but the trends appeared to be in the right direction for many of the children.

It is important to understand, however, that there are key differences between prevention and early intervention and policy initiatives need to be clear about the aims and objectives. Prevention involves reducing the likelihood of problems emerging, while intervention starts with evidence of risk. This distinction between preventing difficulties emerging by ensuring that children and families have the support they need for children to attain the five *Every Child Matters* outcomes; and intervening to address identified risk factors which are impacting negatively on a child would suggest that universal and targeted services such as YISPs need to be developed hand in hand. The critical questions relate to whether YISPs work: do YISPs reduce the risk of children becoming involved in criminal and antisocial behaviours? We were never going to be able to consider anything other than short-term outcomes and we had always acknowledged that identifying and attributing even short-term outcomes to YISP intervention would be problematic. Although the quantitative findings need to be interpreted with caution, they are important: they suggest that the higher the child's risk factors at referral the greater the likelihood that YISP intervention will reduce the risks, and that younger children are more likely to experience a significant reduction in risks. It would be reasonable to conclude that if YISPs are able to target the higher risk children they will demonstrate the most impact because small changes can contribute to important shifts in behaviour and attitude. The more positives there are to work on in a child's life, the greater the likelihood of success. Our qualitative findings suggest that positive shifts might be very subtle, that changing patterns in risk factors are related to a variety of factors and the links between changes in ONSET assessment and YISP interventions are complex. Many parents were cautiously optimistic about the future, although factors outside YISP were often responsible for this optimism. However, other parents continued to be anxious about the sustainability of positive outcomes after the end of YISP engagement. The fragility of support for the future was evident, and longer-term evaluation would be required to test just how far improvements were sustainable.

Two key questions emerge from the evidence in respect of early intervention, and they are both relevant here:

1. Which problems require action when, and over what time period?
2. How are gains/positive outcomes to be sustained?

The first question is relevant to YISPs, particularly since we found that the majority of referrals were for children at the upper end of the 8–13 age range. Indeed, most YISPs accept referrals relating to young people up to the ages of 14 or 15 and these make up the highest proportion of cases. Far fewer children in the younger age range are referred for YISP intervention, yet many parents told us that problematic behaviour patterns had been manifest for a long time. Problems such as hyperactivity and aggressiveness tend to appear in early childhood, whereas poor peer relationships and schooling problems emerge only in the primary school years. Conduct problems associated with crime, antisocial behaviour and delinquency generally emerge in adolescence. It is these conduct problems which normally led to YISP referral. It seems likely, however, that there are multiple pathways into crime, and early childhood problems can be catalysts for later criminal behaviour.

Elements of Promising Practice

One of our objectives has been to identify elements which appear to be significant in developing best practice. From the evidence available to us, these can usefully be summarised as follows:

1. Developing multi-agency partnerships which are effective at both the strategic and the service delivery levels.
2. Developing a model of intervention which is clearly articulated and which distinguishes YISP intervention from other types of welfare and youth justice programmes.
3. Working with referring agencies to agree clear referral criteria so as to avoid over-emphasis either on children with very complex, mental health problems or those children who are better suited to interventions from welfare agencies.
4. Deciding how high risk children and young people can be identified prior to their becoming involved in offending or antisocial behaviour.
5. Adopting rigorous assessment procedures which become a routine and essential part of engagement with children, young people and their families and which are regarded as continuous processes.
6. Linking rigorous assessment to the development of integrated support plans so that interventions are targeted at specific risk and/or protective factors.
7. Deciding on the dosage, duration and order of multiple interventions, and ensuring that they are delivered via a coherent, holistic programme of work which does not allow cases to drift.
8. Promoting effective engagement through the development of supportive relationships between the keyworker and the child and the keyworker and the child's parents/carers.

9. Delivering one-to-one direct work with children and young people in conjunction with other kinds of activities and interventions.
10. Developing and agreeing coherent exit strategies to ensure families receive continuing support as necessary.
11. Securing the participation and commitment of children, young people and their families at all stages in the YISP process.
12. Employing effective, user-friendly management information systems to record individual-level case data routinely, accurately and effectively so as to enable ongoing analyses of inputs, outcomes and change.

The YISPs should be able to empower young people, encourage them to make a positive contribution, and help them achieve, thus reducing risk factors and enhancing the protective factors in their lives. To do this, however, YISPs will need to be extremely focused in their remit and clear about their specific role within the ever-widening preventative and early intervention agendas. Many YISPs are still considering how best to involve children, young people and their families and how to incorporate restorative justice approaches within the YISP process.

Despite promising findings from the national evaluation, there is a danger that YISP intervention could become just another kind of long-term welfare service, and the evidence would suggest that more needs to be done to determine and uphold appropriate intervention and time boundaries. There is evidence that, if the elements of good practice identified through the national evaluation of YISPs were put into place, YISPs could play a significant role in the Government's agenda for an effective youth justice system in which every child matters.

Additional Information

Research Briefs and Research Reports can be accessed at www.dcsf.gov.uk/research/

Further information about this research can be obtained from Jude Belsham, 6S20, DCSF, Sanctuary Buildings, Great Smith Street, London SW1P 3BT.

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