

and/or problems with schooling. It is perhaps not surprising that it is also my experience that these same factors are found with the overwhelming majority of young people in acute housing need who are referred to the Foyer I run.

The head of the Tower Hamlets Youth Justice Team informed me a while ago that his team was responsible for supervising 37 young people under 16 [of school age] who the youth court had placed on Supervision Orders. Of these only 4 were attending school, the remainder were supposed to attend either special off-site education programmes or receive tuition: none regularly attended and some never attended. From his and my own experience the majority of these youngsters will be street children for an important part of the day (e.g. from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m.).

My experience at our Foyer is that for a majority of our somewhat older client group [average age of 18 to 19], being on the streets for an important part of the day is common. We find that the life experience of many with whom we work is one of constantly moving from one friends floor to another friends sofa, getting up in the early afternoon and going to bed in the early hours and as a result unable to access training or employment. Many will have experienced this kind of lifestyle for several months before entering our Foyer.

This summer our new Labour Government passed its Crime and Disorder Act. This new legislation requires the development of strategic frameworks for tackling youth crime at a local level, as well as the introducing of a number of changes to the criminal law and the provision of new orders available to youth courts. Much of the Act is already operational but some of the more innovative aspects will be subject to pilot schemes before being fully implemented. There are a couple of new initiatives that I believe are worth spending a moment looking at.

Local authorities and the police are being made jointly responsible for bringing together a partnership of agencies to formulate and implement a strategy for the

reduction of crime and disorder in their area, and for the establishment of inter-agency Youth Offending Teams. It is my experience that whether people are working in the police service, social services, in education, for health authorities or in the probation service, they are all clear that factors such as low parental supervision, relationship problems with parents, truancy and poor educational achievement play an important part in offending behaviour. I have often felt frustrated to the point of desperation that getting these different agencies to work effectively together is an almost impossible task. I have found it rare to see teachers, social workers and youth workers collaborate in the interests of a young person in difficulties: and yet very often they will all be employed by the same local authority [and in the case of teachers and youth workers, often even working in the same department]. If as a result of this new legislation we finally witness a sense of common purpose emerging among these agencies then we will have achieved a great step forward.

Another initiative worth mentioning is the creation of parenting orders. Youth courts are being given the power to make a parenting order that requires a parent or guardian of a child appearing before the court to attend counselling or guidance sessions. The order may also be applied to parents who have failed to secure their child's regular attendance at school. The relevant condition is that the parenting order would be desirable in the interest of preventing a repetition of the behaviour, or the commissioning of further criminal offences. Where a parent fails to comply they will be liable, on conviction, to a fine.

I am wholeheartedly in favour of schemes that promote good parenting skills. One only has to look at the family histories of many of the young people who appear before the courts to see that all too often problems repeat themselves through successive generations. A vivid example of this phenomenon I witnessed a while ago when sitting with a very experienced and elderly colleague. We had before us a young defendant accompanied by this