

father and grandfather - during the course of the past 35 years all three of them have appeared as children before him [the only thing that had changed was the new court building]. At a local primary school where I am a governor, six years ago we introduced a programme called 'parents as educators'. This accredited course involves about 15 parents [mostly mothers]. For one day a week during term-time, they come to school and learn different strategies for engaging with the education of their children. In addition to all the elements you may expect of such a programme it also covers, in depth, strategies for conflict resolution and addressing challenging behaviour. Several of the mums who have completed this course have made a point of saying how important they found this part of the programme and for example where previously they regularly resorted to hitting their children they now rarely do so. Now that this programme is established we find past course participants promoting the course to their friends and neighbours. However a fundamental difference between the parenting programme run in this school and the one introduced by the Government is that one is voluntary while the other follows an order of the court. Personally I have grave doubts about compelling parents to engage in such programmes. Personally I would much rather see the Government put its resources into funding quality voluntary schemes where parents positively seek to participate.

The North East London Probation Service earlier this year published a report commissioned into the links between crime and homelessness, I was a member of the Steering Group that managed this study. The research undertaken, which underpins the work, revealed a cyclical link between committing crime and becoming homeless, and once homeless, committing crime.

Each year the North East London Probation Service expect around 800 16 to 19 year olds to begin sentences in the community. In 1997 approximately 30% were aged 16 to 17, 35% were aged 18

and 35% were aged 19. Less than 10% were female. It is interesting to note that 37% were experiencing a lack of stability with their housing and that for this group 74% were unemployed [10% higher than the average for the client group as a whole].

The results of interviews conducted with young people for this study confirmed how they fell through the network of provision set up to help them, and suggested that what is absent, is an effective framework to co-ordinate and access the services that will both meet their needs and promote desistance from further crime. They were of the view that, at present, help and support too often comes after the 'drama has turned into a crisis', a crisis that leads to entering or progressing through the criminal justice system. This situation was also borne out in a Council of Europe study on street children.

Crime certainly stacks the odds further against young people, who were acutely aware of this. A sense of fatalism was much more apparent among young offenders, who were less clear about their future plans than young people in general. It was striking however that the whole sample group for this study [with and without criminal records] had universally been victims of crime themselves at some time in their life, and usually on a number of occasions.

The young people involved with this study gave us the following messages:

- \* leaving home is normal even if prompted by factors they felt were beyond their control, but they lack some practical skills to survive, such as money management and the ability to negotiate with agencies to gain access to the services they feel they need;
- \* they recognise the journey is difficult, but they would appreciate much better access to information and speedier decision making by agencies with whom they are involved;