# Positivity in practice:

approaches to improving perceptions of young people and their involvement in crime and anti-social behaviour

Kerry Martin, Ruth Hart, Shona MacLeod and Kay Kinder

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# Glossary

| | |
|---|---|
| ACPO | Association of Chief Police Officers |
| APA | Association of Police Authorities |
| ASB: | Anti-Social Behaviour |
| CDRP | Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership |
| CSP | Community Safety Partnership |
| DCLG | Department of Communities and Local Government |
| DCSF | Department of Children, Schools and Families |
| DSOs | Departments' Strategic Objectives |
| EWS | Education Welfare Service |
| NEET | Not in Education Training or Employment |
| NFER | National Foundation for Educational Research |
| NIS | National Indicator Set |
| LA | Local Authority |
| LAA | Local Area Agreement |
| PCSO | Police Community Support Officer |
| PR | Public Relations |
| PSA | Public Service Agreement |
| RDF | Research Development Fund |
| Third Sector: | Non-governmental organisations including voluntary and community organisations, charities, social enterprises and cooperatives |
| YOT/YOS | Youth Offending Team/Service |

# Summary

## Introduction

The aim of this NFER-funded research was to investigate the approaches being taken by local authorities (LAs) and partner organisations to improve how young people[1] are perceived, especially in relation to crime and anti-social behaviour.[2] The study also looked at the challenges for and benefits of activities aiming to improve public perceptions of young people, and the methods used to measure the impact of these activities.

The project's methods included initial desk research of policy documents, research papers and media reports. There were telephone interviews with staff from 20 LAs including personnel from integrated youth support and development services, youth offending services, crime and disorder reduction partnerships and community safety partnerships. Three case studies involved interviews with frontline staff and young people.

## Why is it important to address negative perceptions of young people?

Young people are facing the challenge of growing up in a culture that has widespread negative perceptions of them. In one poll, six out of ten 16–19 year olds thought that older generations felt negatively about young people (DCSF, 2008a).

Statistical evidence suggests the number of young people involved in offending is decreasing (for example, see DCSF, 2008b), yet public perception is thought to be out of step with this reality. For example, a recent survey found 64 per cent of British adults overestimate the number of young people involved in crime (Catch 22, 2009).

Public perception is said to be strongly influenced by the negative portrayal of young people in the media. For example, Ipsos MORI (2006) found that 57 per cent of media stories about young people were negative,[3] and the majority of these focused on violence, crime and anti-social behaviour.

The need to address negative perceptions of young people is an integral part of national policy priorities and objectives, such as the government's Youth Crime Action Plan (HM Government, 2008) and Aiming High strategy (HM Treasury and DCSF, 2007).

There are also various national and local targets relating to improving perceptions, for example, Home Office Public Service Agreement (PSA) targets (HM Treasury, 2009). The introduction of Local Area Agreements (LAAs) may also have implications for the kinds of strategies and approaches adopted by local services to address negative views of young people.

## What approaches are being used to improve how young people are perceived?

Work to improve perceptions of young people, and their involvement in crime and anti-social behaviour was found to be diverse, and delivered by a variety of agencies with different remits and wider agendas.

The range of work can be placed on a continuum. At one extreme, activities were entirely 'universal' in their remit (that is, any young person or adult might be involved or affected). At the other extreme were activities deliberately targeting young people and adults with very specific characteristics (for example, perpetrators and victims of anti-social behaviour or crime).

Three key types of approach were identified, demonstrating the range of activities from universal to highly targeted work. These were labelled as:

- Approach 1: communication with the public about young people, anti-social behaviour and crime (for example, media coverage and PR campaigns).

- Approach 2: youth-focused work (including providing opportunities for young people to do things, and be seen to do things, which counter (negative) stereotypes)

- Approach 3: bringing young people and adults together (including inter-generational activities).

There was also evidence of increased targeting of activity within each of these approaches.

The majority of local areas featured in this study were taking a multi-pronged approach to improving perceptions of young people. Activities often involved at least two of the three broad approaches against a backdrop of more general community safety work.

Although formal or integrated strategies to improve perceptions of young people were rare, there was recognition of the need to think strategically and create a 'portfolio' of interventions.

## Did the activities make a difference to negative perceptions of young people?

Some interviewees (particularly frontline staff) felt able to comment on the actual or potential influence of activities on public perceptions, and could recount how these activities had led to an improvement in opinions. Staff at more strategic levels felt this was harder to judge due to their limited involvement in the delivery of activities.

Overall, interviewees who responded felt there had been improvement in perceptions as a direct result of the activities implemented. This included, for example, changes in attitude amongst certain opinion-formers such as members of a parish council; improvements in relationships between young people and adults; and young people's sense of being given greater respect by adults.

Others highlighted specific measurements, such as the Place Survey (the recently introduced nationwide survey of the public's views and perspectives about where they live) as useful indicators of changing views about young people and anti-social behaviour more broadly. This was noted in LAs, for example, where survey responses signified 'young people hanging around' in local areas and other aspects of anti-social behaviour (such as vandalism, graffiti, and drunken and rowdy behaviour) being less of a problem.

There were also impacts resulting from the activities, which interviewees predicted would lead to a corresponding improvement in public perceptions. These included:

- an increased engagement of young people in positive activities

- a decrease in young people's negative behaviours

- adults developing a greater understanding of young people's behaviour

- wider promotion and improved profile of young people in the community

- enhanced community areas and provision as a result of young people engaging in positive activities (such as litter picking and the removal of graffiti).

Some interviewees felt that it was, and would continue to be, very hard to judge whether and to what extent activities make a difference, due to the difficulty of measuring changes in perception.

## How are perceptions about young people measured?

Interviewees considered it difficult to measure accurately perception change. Consequently, there had been few attempts to quantify the direct impact of activities. The biggest challenge was the variable nature of perceptions and the range of influences upon them.

Where activities and interventions were highly targeted, it was thought the impact on those involved could be measured and attributed. Case notes and direct feedback from participants were given as examples of evidence that could be used to measure the impact of a very targeted activity. Where activities were universal or population-wide, their impact was more diffuse and, therefore, viewed as harder to measure and attribute.

The most common forms of 'measurement' cited by interviewees were national and local surveys such as the Place Survey. While these provided information on public concerns, few of these surveys enabled specific concerns about young people and their involvement in crime and anti-social behaviour to be separated out from general concerns and fears. Similarly,

population-wide measurement of public opinion and perception, such as these surveys, cannot attribute change to a specific activity or intervention.

Other methods such as focus groups, neighbourhood consultations and house-to-house visits facilitated more-focused enquiry and some interviewees suggested these had the greatest potential to reveal any changing local picture. However, such methods were often discounted as impractical due to the associated expense.

At the project or activity level, interviewees acknowledged they often had insufficient means to assess adequately the impact of work on public perceptions so were reliant on using proxy indicators such as local crime rates and complaints made to the local council about young people. Interviewees also recalled observable changes in behaviour and feedback given to project delivery staff and partners to demonstrate perception change. This evidence was typically gathered informally and often not recorded in a systematic way.

Although proxy indicators may be considered fairly tentative determinants of perception change, they provide some indication of potential change that may warrant further investigation by more direct and systematic methods.

There was some concern from staff that they did not have the necessary skills to devise appropriate measures or, indeed, to analyse and interpret the results of any data that was gathered. Limited time and resources to undertake such work compounded this. There was also limited awareness of data gathered by other agencies, such as the police or housing organisations that could be used to indicate perception change.

## What are the facilitating factors in improving perceptions of young people?

Interviewees were clear that in order to influence perceptions of young people, there must be clarity of purpose, with effective use made of local 'intelligence' to understand better the problem and devise appropriate solutions.

It is important to implement a range of activities, from those that are universal to those that are highly targeted (including a particular focus on adults with entrenched negative views of young people, and young people at risk of, or engaging in, crime and anti-social behaviour.) Highly visible activities, including the use of mobile facilities that can be set up in 'hot spot' areas, can have significant impacts on public perception.

Key to improving perceptions is hearing young people's voices, rather than adults speaking on their behalf. The involvement of young people in all stages of an activity to improve their profile and public image is also important. This includes creating opportunities for young people to be part of the solution, for example, by involving young people in crime prevention strategies as well as giving them the opportunity to respond directly to the negativity often levelled at them in the media and at public meetings.

Intergenerational activities are highly successful. They specifically bring together younger and older people, and provide opportunities for them to learn from each other and challenge stereotypical views and misconceptions, particularly in relation to young people 'hanging around' in large groups and making noise.

Direct work with young people needs to be backed up with effective and systematic communications activity if it is to have the maximum impact on perceptions.

Other facilitating factors include prioritising work to improve perceptions strategically within a LA; drawing on the insights and resources of a wide range of partners including young people and the local community; effective leadership and management of activities; and working with specialist communication teams and staff.

## What are the challenges around improving perceptions of young people?

There was a range of challenges inherent in approaches to improving perceptions of young people, not least the potential risks of drawing attention to young people and their behaviour, and the danger that unsuccessful activities may add to community tensions, 'fuel fear' and 'do more harm than good'.

Particular concerns centred on a sense that the public are becoming increasingly intolerant of young people, and that expectations of young people (in terms of their behaviour, such as the desire by adults for young people 'to be seen but not heard') are simply unachievable and unrealistic.

Improving perceptions is seen to be particularly challenging where a large proportion of the local population is made up of the older generation, and, in some rural areas, residents are geographically isolated and said to be strongly influenced by hearsay and local media.

The tendency by much of the media to favour bad news stories about young people is seen as unhelpful. Even where there are constructive relationships with the local press, efforts and progress can be undermined by national coverage.

Some professionals have limited skills and experience of communicating and publicising work to improve perceptions of young people, and this can be problematic. Communications may not be something that is explicitly part of the role of delivery staff or, indeed, something they are able to do with any regularity due to competing priorities. Where a core team deals with communications, competing demands in terms of their time and availability was also a challenge.

## How do local areas plan to develop work to improve perceptions of young people in the future?

The key aim of youth-focused activities may not be improving the public's perceptions of young people, yet these often make an important contribution to perceptions. Interviewees were looking to extend or replicate work in this area.

Many interviewees were keen to make greater use of adults, for example, by involving local residents, perhaps as volunteers, in direct work with young people.

There were plans to try to exploit more fully the communications potential of frontline staff in other services. Interviewees reported the need to review how they work with colleagues in other services. Plans included educating

and encouraging frontline staff (particularly those from adult-focused services such as housing) to spread the 'message' and correct misinformation; nominating youth champions to advocate for young people in particular forums; and positioning young people where they could be seen to be contributing to the search for solutions to local social problems.

Further support and guidance on tracking and evidencing the impact of work on public perceptions, including support to identify reliable sources of local 'intelligence' which could be used in planning, was also seen to be of value.

## Conclusions and recommendations

Our study raised a number of issues that can be taken forward by policy makers and strategic leads at both national and local level. These include the need to:

- undertake a local audit of activities already under way designed to impact positively on perceptions. This will support future strategic planning and co-ordination

- measure the impact of activities more systematically in order to provide clearer direction for those developing, commissioning and championing work locally

- develop further the skills and knowledge of operational staff with local or regional training activities, toolkits and guidance documents

- provide a policy steer that is specific to youth perceptions and underpinned by legislation requiring agencies to work together.

## Notes

1  In the context of this report, 'young people' are those typically defined by interviewees as individuals between the ages of nine and 20.

2  'Anti-social behaviour' is defined as any aggressive, intimidating or destructive activity that damages or destroys another person's quality of life (Home Office, 2010).

3  Neutral stories that feature young people but do not portray a clearly positive or negative view of them (30 per cent) the number of positive stories (12 per cent).

# 1 Introduction

NFER fosters and financially supports a range of social research through its Research Development Fund (RDF).

In 2009, RDF funding was secured to conduct in-depth research exploring an issue identified in an NFER literature review of young people, crime and public perceptions (Halsey and White, 2009). The overarching aim of the present study was to consider the approaches being taken by LAs and their partners to address or improve perceptions of young people, and their involvement in youth crime and anti-social behaviour.

This chapter introduces the research study and presents:

- the aims and objectives of the study

- the research methods employed during the study

- an outline of the rest of this report.

## 1.1 Aims and objectives of the study

There is a body of evidence about society's perceptions of young people, crime and anti-social behaviour. There are also commitments and references for the need to tackle these issues at the local and national level. Together these led NFER to consider the extent to which LAs and their partners are working to improve social perceptions of young people and reduce exaggerated fears about youth crime and anti-social behaviour.

This exploratory study was designed to further what is known about local responses to this issue. It focuses on developing an understanding of the range and depth of activity. Whilst not being an evaluation of the activities, the study was designed to support any future evaluative research.

This study aimed to:

- audit the activities used by LAs and their partners organisations to reduce fear and suspicion of young people, and the approaches used to promote positive images of young people in their community

- investigate the issues, challenges and benefits of improving public perceptions of young people and explore the methods used by LAs to measure the impact of such approaches on public perceptions

- identify examples of good practice and effective approaches that can be shared with other LAs.

## 1.2  Methods

Data for this study was collected in three main ways.

- **Phase one: scoping study** (April–May 2009). Desk research at the beginning of this study identified policy documents, research papers and media reports. These have been synthesised in order to present an analysis of what is known about the scale and nature of negative perceptions of young people.

- **Phase two: telephone interviews** (May–June 2009). Telephone interviews were conducted with staff from 20 LAs including personnel from integrated youth support and development services, youth offending services (YOSs), crime and disorder reduction partnerships (CDRPs) and community safety partnerships (CSPs). These interviews provided an opportunity to explore in-depth the range and the nature of activities to improve perceptions of young people; the issues and challenges related to promoting positive perceptions; and the perceived effectiveness of the approaches employed.

- **Phase three: case studies** (June–September 2009). Three case studies were selected based on nominations of good practice in phase two. The first case study (in the south east of England) focused on a media campaign; the second centred on youth-focused work (in the north of England); and the third covered activities bringing young people and adults together (in the Midlands). Additional key personnel and young people were interviewed to gather their views on the activities employed. The case-study findings have been synthesised with data gathered in phase two and appear throughout the report. The appendix contains a detailed account of each of the individual case-study approaches.

## 1.3 Structure of the report

The structure of the remainder of this report is:

- Chapter 2: background to the importance of addressing negative perceptions of young people and their involvement in crime and anti-social behaviour

- Chapter 3: overview of approaches to improving how young people are perceived

- Chapter 4: a consideration of the difference these activities can make to addressing negative perceptions of young people

- Chapter 5: investigation into how perceptions of young people are measured

- Chapter 6: challenges and facilitators to improving perceptions of young people

- Chapter 7: local areas' planned future work to improve perceptions of young people and their involvement in crime and anti-social behaviour

- Chapter 8: conclusions and key issues to be considered in future work to address perceptions of young people.

# 2 Why is it important to address negative perceptions of young people?

## 2.1 Introduction

The focus of this research was to consider the approaches being taken by LAs and their partners to address or improve perceptions of young people, and their involvement in crime and anti-social behaviour. In this chapter, the importance of addressing negative perceptions of young people is considered and covers:

- the extent of negative perceptions of young people

- the current national policy context concerning this issue

- changes within local government, which may affect how this issue is addressed and monitored.

## 2.2 The extent and nature of negative perceptions of young people and their involvement in crime and anti-social behaviour

The frequent portrayal of hooded teenagers terrorising communities and media coverage of high-profile criminal cases involving young people is said to have a negative impact on the image of young people today. A study by Ipsos MORI (2006), for example, found that 57 per cent of media stories about young people were negative,[1] and the majority of these focused on violence, crime and anti-social behaviour.

An opinion poll of over 1000 young people taken by the government's Youth Taskforce showed that almost six out of ten 16–19 year olds thought older generations felt negatively about young people (DCSF, 2008a). The consequence of the intense focus on young people's behaviour is that they are faced with the challenge of growing up in a culture that has widespread negative perceptions of youth. This concern is echoed in Aiming High, the government's ten-year strategy for positive activities:

*The level of fear and mistrust at play today undermines community cohesion and corrodes the stake young people need to feel they have in society.*
(HM Treasury and DCSF, 2007, p13)

One of ways in which wider public perception of crime and anti-social behaviour is being measured is by the Place Survey.[2] Results from the 2008 survey showed that one in five people consider anti-social behaviour to be a problem in their local area (DCLG, 2009). Although the survey itself contains very few questions specifically about young people's involvement in anti-social behaviour, it offers a broader context in which the existence of negative perceptions of young people can be understood.

The few studies that have attempted to define and measure public opinion in relation to youth crime have found a tendency for the public to overestimate:

- the scale of youth crime

- the number of young people involved in offending

- the proportion of overall crimes committed by young people

- the seriousness of offences (especially in terms of violence).
  (Halsey and White, 2009)

For example, a poll commissioned in 2009 by the children's charity Catch 22 found that 64 per cent of British adults overestimate the number of young people involved in crime. Further, when asked, ten per cent of adults considered the level of young people's involvement in crime to be eight times higher than it is, 'effectively labelling two in every five teenagers a criminal' (Catch 22, 2009, p.1).

This perception contrasts with statistical evidence indicating the number of young people involved in offending is decreasing.

- The number of young people aged 10–17 receiving their first reprimand, warning or conviction in England currently stands at 74,033 for 2008–09, a decrease of 21.6 per cent from 94,481 young people in 2007–08 (DCSF, 2008b).

- The number of first-time entrants to the Criminal Justice System in England fell from 103,955 in 2006–07 to 93,601 in 2007–08 (according to National Performance Indicator data) (DCSF, 2008b).

Moreover, the literature suggests perceptions of youth crime are not always based on personal experiences, and perceptions of prevalence tend to outstrip direct experience of youth crime (Anderson *et al.*, 2005). These findings are particularly alarming given that other research has shown fear of crime has an impact on quality of life (Ipsos MORI, 2008; Casey, 2008).

## 2.3 Current national policy context

The Youth Crime Action Plan 2008 (HM Government, 2008) states the government, Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) and the Association of Police Authorities (APA) will deliver more effective responses to the issue of youth crime, improve relationships between the police and young people, and improve public perceptions.

In addition, the Home Office's PSA also sets various targets relating to this.

- Make communities safer – Indicator 3: reduce the percentage of people perceiving anti-social behaviour as a problem (PSA 23).

- Reduce the harm caused by alcohol and drugs – Indicators 4 and 5: reduce the percentage of the public who perceive drug use or dealing as a problem and perceptions of drunk or rowdy behaviour as a problem in their area (PSA 25).

- Increase the number of children and young people on the path to success – Indicator 2: increase the level of young people's participation in positive activities (PSA 14).
  (HM Treasury, 2009)

More recently, in 2009, the Home Office published a two-part publication aimed at frontline delivery partners such as CDRPs, to support them with evidence and practical advice on how to build public confidence in the work being done to tackle crime and anti-social behaviour via communications (Home Office, 2009a). The research report on which the Home Office's practical guidance is based notes:

*Depending on particular priorities in each local area, communications on the response to crimes involving young people and anti-social behaviour [...] may be effective ways to build confidence and provide reassurance to those in the local area. Communicating effectively with young people, not just about them, is also an important consideration.*
(Home Office, 2009b, p7)

The Aiming High strategy, setting out the government's long-term vision for improved services and opportunities for young people, also recognises there is a need to dispel negative perceptions about young people by building better relations between the generations. It advocates the creation of positive activities such as volunteering, intergenerational activities and celebration events to foster more positive perceptions in local communities and in society more widely (HM Treasury and DCSF, 2007).

There is growing evidence of promising approaches tackling such negative perceptions and their associated outcomes. For example, a study of intergenerational activities conducted by the NFER in 2008 identified the potential for intergenerational work to offer solutions to many social issues, including fear of crime, racial tensions and community safety (Springate *et. al.*, 2008).

## 2.4  Changes within local government

Alongside national policy priorities, the need to address the negative perceptions of young people is also a significant issue at a local level.

Since the publication of the Strong and Prosperous Communities white paper (DCLG, 2006), the strategic and operational context in which LAs plan and deliver services has changed. This change is characterised by increases in duties and responsibilities, as well as autonomy, at LA level. Since April 2008, every LA has had a Local Area Agreement (LAA) through which the priorities for local service delivery have been negotiated and agreed, underpinned by the introduction of a National Indicator Set (NIS).[3] LAs agree up to 35 specified targets (drawn from this NIS) for their area as part of their LAA.

The introduction of LAAs is likely to have implications for the kinds of strategies and approaches that are pursued, and adopted by, local services to address negative views of young people and crime. The NIS has been based on PSAs and central government's departments' strategic objectives (DSOs). The consequence is that there is a clear relationship between the recent changes within LAs and the importance placed on addressing negative perceptions of young people and their involvement in crime and anti-social behaviour within current national government policies. Underlining the importance of this relationship, Table 2.1 sets out a selection of the specific national indicators related to the PSAs relevant to this research (noted in section 2.3). The wide range of indicators would suggest that this area of work is relevant and of strategic importance.

**Table 2.1  Relationship between public service agreements and the National Indicator Set**

| PSA | National Indicators (selection) |
| --- | --- |
| PSA 14 Increase the number of children and young people on the path to success | NI 110: Young people's participation in positive activities |
| | NI 111: First-time entrants to the criminal justice system aged 10–17 |
| | NI 112: Under-18 conception rate |
| | NI 115: Substance misuse by young people |
| | NI 117: 16–18 year olds who are not in education, employment or training (NEET) |
| PSA 23 Make communities safer | NI 17: Perceptions of anti-social behaviour |
| | NI 19: Rate of proven re-offending by young offenders |
| | NI 21: Dealing with local concerns about anti-social behaviour and crime issues by the local council and police |
| | NI28: Serious knife crime rate |
| PSA 25 Reduce the harm caused by alcohol and drugs | NI 38: Drug-related (Class A) offending rate |
| | NI 39: Rate of hospital admissions per 100,000 for alcohol-related harm |
| | NI 41: Perceptions of drunk or rowdy behaviour as a problem |
| | NI 42: Perceptions of drug use or drug dealing as a problem |

Source: Adapted from *National Indicators for Local Authorities and Local Authority Partnerships: Handbook of Definitions* (DCLG, 2008).

## 2.5 Concluding comments

Given the national findings illustrating the extent of public negative perceptions about young people, the current policy drivers for this work and changes within LAs which may affect how this issue is addressed and monitored, it is likely that this work in local areas will be more greatly prioritised in the near future. This research into the range of activities used in to improve public perceptions of young people, and the impact of such interventions, is timely and will hopefully provide useful information for those wishing to develop and conduct similar work.

## Notes

1 Of the remaining stories, 30 per cent were considered to be 'neutral' i.e. they featured young people but did not portray a clearly positive or negative view of them. Twelve per cent of the stories featuring young people were positive (Ipsos MORI, 2006).

2 The Place Survey is a nationwide survey introduced in 2008 (administered every two years and conducted at a local authority level) to provide information about the public's views and perspectives on their locality.

3 The NIS is the only set of indicators used by central government to performance manage local government and replaces the Best Value Performance Indicators (BVPIs) and the Performance Assessment Framework (PAF).

# 3 What approaches are being used to improve how young people are perceived?
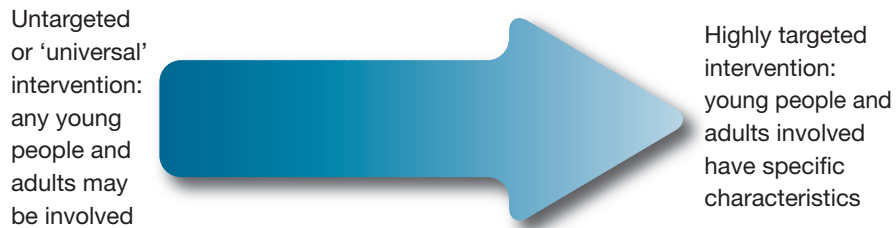
## 3.1 Introduction

Telephone interviews conducted with key personnel across 20 LAs identified a wide range of approaches and activities aimed at improving how young people are perceived. This chapter describes the patterns that emerged in a range of work under way to improve public perceptions of young people and it provides examples of the activities being delivered.

## 3.2 Categorising the approaches and activities employed to improve perceptions

The work to improve perceptions of young people and their involvement in crime and anti-social behaviour was found to be diverse, being delivered by a variety of agencies with different remits and wider agendas. Despite this, however, there were clear patterns in the extent to which such activities were intended to involve, and impact on, particular groups of young people or the wider (adult) public.

The range of work in this area can be placed upon a continuum of activity (see Figure 3.1). At one extreme, the work is entirely 'universal' (that is, any young person or adult might be involved or affected). At the other extreme, the work 'targets' young people and adults with very specific characteristics (for example, perpetrators and victims of anti-social behaviour or crime). This type of work is likely to affect a smaller number of people. Figure 3.1 demonstrates the increasing levels of targeting of activities in relation to both young people and adults through the variegated shading.

**Figure 3.1 A continuum of targeted activity to improve perceptions**

Untargeted or 'universal' intervention: any young people and adults may be involved

Highly targeted intervention: young people and adults involved have specific characteristics

The range of activities used to improve perceptions could be categorised into **three key types of approach**, each of which demonstrates the progression from universal to highly targeted work. The three approaches, from least to most targeted, are:

- communicating with the public about young people, anti-social behaviour and crime
- youth-focused work
- bringing young people and adults together.

Whilst progression in targeting is apparent between the three key types of approach, it is important to note that **there is increased targeting *within* the three key types of approach**. Youth-focused work, for example, ranged from relatively untargeted educational work, delivered to year groups or other large cohorts within a school, to diversionary activity involving young people with very specific characteristics (for example, those with a criminal record).

The progression in targeting between and within approach types is shown in Figure 3.2. The triangular form draws attention to **the smaller number of people directly involved or affected as approaches and activities become more targeted**. Hence, the widest part of the triangle,[1] corresponds with the most universal interventions, potentially operating population-wide. The tip of the triangle corresponds with the most targeted interventions (that is, those involving very small numbers of people with very specific characteristics).

**Figure 3.2 An overview of the range of approaches and activities**

Untargeted or 'universal' intervention: often population-wide,
any young people and adults may be involved

### Approach 1

*Communicating with
the public about young
people, anti-social
behaviour and crime:*

- balanced media coverage
- 'PR' campaigns
- research and dialogue
  about the problem

### Approach 2

*Youth-focussed work:*

- education
- positive activities
- diversionary activities

### Approach 3

*Bringing young people
and adults together:*

- community events
  for people of *all* ages
- purposively inter-age
  activities
- restorative justice

Individual intervention types demonstrate increasing levels of targeting in relation to both young people and adults

Highly targeted intervention: young people and adults
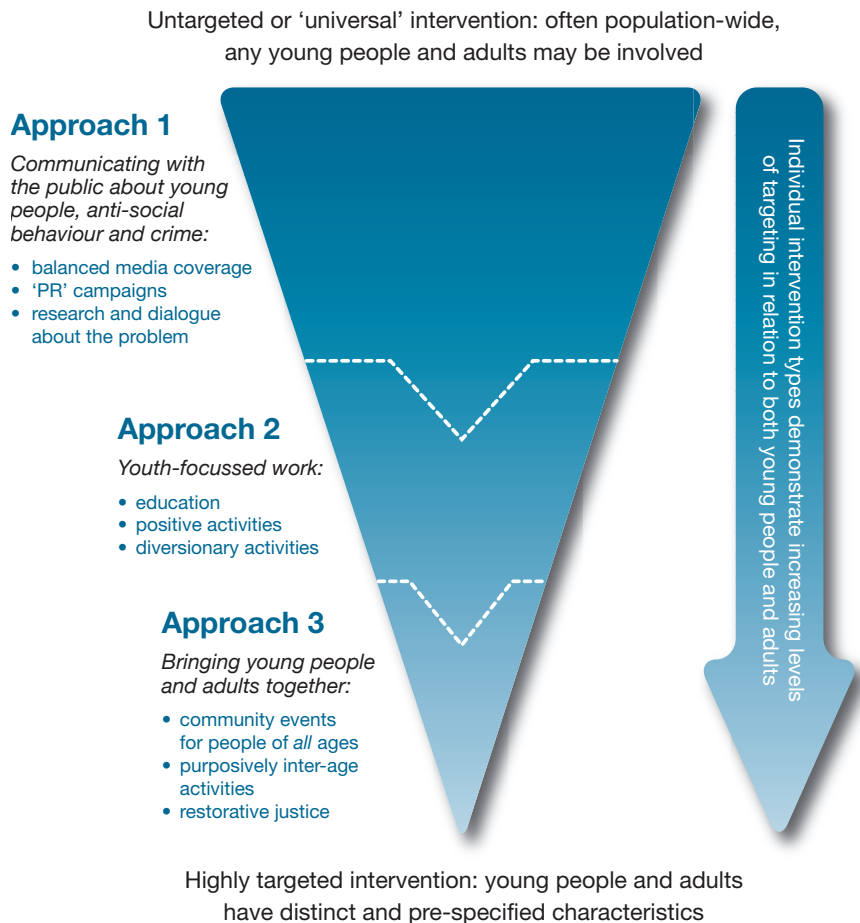have distinct and pre-specified characteristics

Figure 3.2 shows the different types of work reported as having a significant part to play in improving how young people are perceived. The three delineated areas represent the three broad types of approach, their relative targeting, and the progressive targeting of the activities within them. The model does not encompass more general work related to crime, fear of crime, and confidence, such as environmental activity (for example, removing the evidence of neglect, anti-social behaviour and crime), crime prevention work and offender management. However, it is recognised that this wider work may also have an impact on the public's perceptions of young people.

## 3.3 Approach 1: communicating with the public about young people and their involvement in crime and anti-social behaviour

Communications activity appears to be a key part of the work to improve perceptions of young people. Within this approach, work includes:

- balanced media coverage

- PR campaigns

- research and dialogue about the problem.

Most of this work is relatively untargeted, with the intended audience being, in some cases, the entire population of a LA or sub-region. However, communications activity is not just concerned with controlling, strengthening or transmitting a particular message. It is also about introducing dialogue, which aims to increase the understanding of alternative perspectives and what underpins them.

Work which we have categorised within this approach as 'research and dialogue' may in fact be relatively targeted as it includes activities to bring about the exchange of information and views by particular agencies (for example, the police), and communities (for example, the residents of a particular estate).

Although overall communications activity appears to be the most 'universal strand', there is variation in the extent to which different communications activities are targeted.

### 3.3.1 Communicating with the public: balanced media coverage

At the most universal end of the continuum is work to bring about more balanced media coverage to improve the public's understanding of young people. Many interviewees were concerned by what they saw as the predominantly negative coverage of young people in the national media, and the powerful impact this has on the public's perceptions of young people.

Interviewees considered it important to make sure that the communities in which they worked were aware of what they and their colleagues were doing

to encourage and enable young people to make positive choices in their lives. Most had also given some thought to how they might promote more balanced and sympathetic coverage of young people by the local press, and were undertaking a number of activities.

- **Websites and directories** were being used to promote the facilities, events and initiatives available to, and used by, children and young people more widely. For example, one interviewee described how their 'Click' website provided a definitive list of things going on in the area, and included 'mini-sites' onto which different activity providers could upload programmes, photos and articles which could be viewed by the public.

- **Regular and positive** '**youth news**' releases make sure the local media is informed about young people's experiences and achievements, not simply their mistakes and misdemeanours, and can achieve balanced coverage. In one LA, a youth service interviewee reported how they, and other senior colleagues, were tasked with producing at least 24 positive press releases about young people each year, with the expectation that this would lead to one positive article in the local newspaper each month. An interviewee from another area commented: 'We are constantly looking for good news stories – that's part of our management information meeting agenda now.'

- **Professional communications staff** (occasionally a dedicated officer, but more commonly the LA communications team) develop and disseminate stories, react to negative coverage, and provide media guidance. Several interviewees emphasised the importance of developing strong links between youth services and LA communications teams. A children's services manager in one area explained: 'We've got a specific person within the communications department who looks at how we can portray [our] messages more professionally.'

- **Inter-agency strategies and media guidance**, developed with the support of professional communications staff, can improve the quality, consistency and coordination of messages across an area. To this end, one safer communities partnership has developed and circulated a Media Principles document, setting out key messages and how partners should seek to promote them. The youth service in another area had established a Young People's Publicity and Promotions Group.

### 3.3.2 Communicating with the public: PR campaigns

In several areas, communications work had been taken a step further with systematic PR campaigns being launched. These use a range of media and mechanisms to address negative perceptions and highlight young people's achievements.

- **Bespoke media products** have included short films shown on large screens in public spaces and, more commonly, promoting positive messages in council and police newspapers and newsletters. One LA used its 20-screen television network to promote good news stories about young people. The benefits of maintaining control of the broadcasting were highlighted: 'It's a medium that we control 100 per cent, we determine the content on that and we don't get it with a nasty spun headline that the local media might put in.'

- **Poster campaigns** have been used to great effect. One campaign, entitled 'This is me', profiled young people whose background and appearance might lead them to be stereotyped as troubled or troublesome. Posters included statement such as: 'Young people are often labelled yobs. I am not a yob. I am an individual.' This LA also used posters to put across very explicit messages about the reality of youth offending in the LA, using the strapline '95 per cent of our young people DON'T offend'.

- **Weekly profiles** of young people in a local newspaper highlighted achievements. Young people and the public were asked to nominate friends and family members who had achieved something admirable or out of the ordinary. Those profiled then competing for a modest prize (see case study 1 in the Appendix).

- **Awards ceremonies** and events intended to showcase and recognise young people's contributions to society were relatively common. These were often in conjunction with media activity or campaigns. Some areas had established locally-specific schemes, for example, the [Local] Heroes campaign, which was set up to celebrate the good things young people do, and how they contribute to the community. Other LAs had signed up to national programmes such as the 'Young People of the Year' scheme.

- **Youth advocates**, champions and ambassadors can challenge negativity and promote positive messages in particular contexts or settings. This activity might take the form of:

  - *encouraging and supporting frontline staff* (for example, those working in housing or adult social care) to engage in more constructive dialogues about young people with adult service users: 'So when people say "there's nothing for young people to do in our area", our staff are able to say "did you know there was this…", rather than going "Erm, yes, I know", which reinforces negativity' (Safer Communities Partnership Officer).

  - *appointing young people as 'youth champions'* to professional committees and forums in order that: 'Services which aren't necessarily child-centred see young people in a different light. Sometimes you need to promote positive images among the workforce, as well as the public' (Community Safety Team Policy Officer).

  - *identifying intergenerational champions* and having older people, with special training, acting as a voice for young people amongst their peers.

### 3.3.3 Communicating with the public: research and dialogue about the problem

Interviewees from a variety of services emphasised the importance of understanding the different perspectives within a community. They were often involved in work exploring the concerns of residents from particular areas, and how young people figured in these communities. However, interviewees also stressed that, for such research to be of value in improving community members' perceptions, it needed to be followed with action and feedback. Interviewees described a number of activities.

- **Dialogue with adults in a community**. The police and partner agencies increasingly used consultations and public meetings to explore community concerns, the points of particular tension between younger and older people, and the possibilities for compromise and resolution. One interviewee commented: 'Once you start a dialogue in communities, there can be a discussion around what people perceive as anti-social behaviour.'

- **Members of the police force acted as intermediaries or 'go-betweens'**. One interviewee detailed the training undertaken by members of their neighbourhood police teams to mediate between younger and older people in relation to anti-social behaviour: 'Our biggest challenge around anti-social behaviour is that quite often it's just young people being young people! A lot of it is to do with perceptions.' Police teams communicated the perspective of one group to the other and increased understanding between younger and older members of the community.

- **Attempts to 'close the feedback loop'** were being made in a number of LAs.

  - Several interviewees commented on the practice of reporting back to various meetings on the work being done. In one LA, for example, youth action groups were represented at local area partnership meetings in all areas, providing a community-specific report on both positive activities and youth issues. Their attendance appeared to discourage the use of these meetings as a forum in which to perpetuate negative perceptions of young people and, instead, contribute to the creation of more positive messages.

  - After some community members turned up 'mob handed' at a neighbourhood meeting about youth disorder, one LA used 'You said… We did…' postcards to make sure the wider public was aware of efforts to respond to identified problems, not simply the issues of those individuals who had voiced their concerns. The aim here was to disseminate messages to more local people and spread 'good news' to underpin or support opinion change.

## 3.4  Approach 2: youth-focused work

Interviewees consistently drew attention to the direct work they were doing with young people and the role played by youth work, in its various forms, to improving how young people were perceived. This work was seen as:

- helping young people understand better how their behaviour was interpreted by adults, and the influence their conduct and practices had on public perceptions

- providing an opportunity for young people to do things, and be seen to do things, which countered (negative) stereotypes
- being a tool for behavioural change (that is, turning 'at risk' young people away from negative, anti-social or criminal behaviours).

These functions are evident in the three kinds of youth work:

- education
- positive activities
- diversionary activities.

Again, these demonstrate progressive targeting, as in the model as a whole.

### 3.4.1  Youth-focused work: education

In quite a few areas, explicit educational work with young people was helping them understand how their behaviour is perceived, for example, why older adults might find congregations of young people threatening. On the whole, this activity appears to be applied universally, though some interviewees reported more targeted work with young people with particular interests, for example, cycling, or from selected local communities.

The police appear to have substantial involvement in this educational work. Police community support officers (PCSOs) visit schools or host visits from school groups. And community services staff go into schools to educate young people about, for example, bike safety, encouraging respect for pedestrians, and talk about anti-social behaviour. A community safety manager said:

> *We've tried to get out to the school establishment …* [and] *tried to get* [young people] *to realise that their presence in groups on the street gives a negative image, particularly to older generations.*

Role-play and theatre activities followed up by reflection and discussion is another form of educational work. For example, acting out scenarios such as 'kids messing around at a bus stop' and exploring how these might be perceived by different members of the community.

Of course, education, in a broader sense, is part of most youth work today, though in some activities and projects it may be education 'by stealth', for example, as described by one interviewee: 'fun activities which lead to personal and social development.' As such, it is a continuing thread in many of the more targeted positive and diversionary activities.

### 3.4.2  Youth-focused work: positive activities

'Positive activities' is a term often associated with work initiated or funded through the Positive Activities for Young People programme. It is used here in a somewhat broader sense to refer to all positive activities involving young people (and, importantly, positive activities that they are seen to be doing). As such, some of the activities in this strand of our typology are relatively untargeted, with age being the only criteria for involvement. However, other activities are organised or promoted in a way that specifically encourages young people from particular (typically, deprived) communities or populations to engage. The examples give an indication of the range and extent of the positive activities reported.

• **Youth volunteering schemes** were in operation in many areas and quite a few had an environmental focus. These included young people painting fences, gardening and picking up litter, and awarded them titles such as 'street champions' and 'junior wardens'. One interviewee explained a scheme: 'We've six junior warden schemes, where children from our more deprived neighbourhoods are taught about environmental issues and engaging in voluntarily work within the community to improve their image' (Community Services Manager).

• **Active citizenship activities** included youth councils, young inspectors programmes (in one LA investigating council services and in another the sale of alcohol to underage drinkers), and youth representation on panels 'so they become seen as contributing to the solution, rather than a perpetual problem'. One LA was taking this further, with the interviewee describing their Youth Challenge, where teams of young people, with the support of an adult mentor, were tasked with devising and testing solutions to local crime and anti-social behaviour problems. Active citizenship activities (where young people's contributions were recognised and made public) were all seen as making a valuable contribution to how local communities view young people.

- **Sports, arts and leisure programmes** were the most commonly reported activities that fall under the heading 'positive activities', being mentioned by the overwhelming majority of participants in our research. These programmes included street sports, arts and multi-media activities (for example, contributing to themed social networking sites and online discussion forums). Often these ventures were a partnership between the police and LA, as was the case with one area's Fair Play League, a football tournament where courtesy and sporting behaviour were factored into the scoring system (and described by one interviewee as 'teaching standards not taught in the home').

- **Safe social spaces** were provided in several areas in the form of youth cafés, youth discos, 'dry-bars' and, in one of the case-study areas, a temporary 'youth village' where a range of activities (for example, football, climbing and street dancing) were provided for young people in a fenced off area (see case study 2 in Appendix). These tended to be established in communities where there were known to be tensions between young and old, and/or scheduled for times (weekends and summer evenings) when young people were known to be out on the streets and engaged in behaviour that some adults class as anti-social.

### 3.4.3  Youth-focused work: diversionary activities

Many of the positive activities previously outlined might fulfil a short-term diversionary function (indeed this was sometimes portrayed as a core purpose of youth events and facilities). However, the term 'diversionary activities' is used here to distinguish those activities intended to have a more powerful and lasting impact on young people, deliberately steering them away from negative influences, behaviours and trajectories. This work demonstrates a significant step-change in targeting, with activities being designed for and involving very specific groups of young people, typically those with a history of involvement with the police (and often a criminal record). Projects and schemes often involved the Third Sector, the police, and fire and rescue services.

- A junior PCSO programme intended to develop relationships between young people and local police officers, encourage citizenship and foster pride in the local community.

- A police boxing club offered training and building relationships with young people aged eleven-upwards who are known to have offended or to be associates of offenders.

- A local Intervention Fire Education (LIFE) project run by the fire service engaged with young people in contact with the local youth offending service, offering mentoring and a disciplined environment in which they could learn basic fire-fighting and first aid skills.

## 3.5 Approach 3: bringing young people and adults together

This, the most targeted approach to improving how young people are perceived, includes projects and activities intended to facilitate 'first-hand encounters' between people from different generations. In essence, these are events or programmes of work designed to physically bring together young people and adults and, thereby, achieve greater understanding of commonalities and differences in their perspectives and concerns.

As with the other broad types of approach, there are several different types of activity, which demonstrate progression in the extent to which they are targeted. The three main strands, ordered by degree of targeting, are:

- community events for people of all ages

- purposively inter-age activities

- restorative practice/justice.

### 3.5.1 Bringing young people and adults together: community events for people of all ages

The most universal intergenerational activity takes the form of community events for people of all ages. Inasmuch as these events and activities are targeted, it is by locality or neighbourhood. Their emphasis is on engaging a diverse age-range: bringing together children, young people, their parents, and unrelated adults of any age.

Such events and events programmes appear, typically, to be led or delivered by the (integrated) youth service. However, they often involve other locality-based professionals, parents and community members. According to one youth service interviewee, they provide an opportunity for these adults 'to see young people in a positive light, and communicate with them on their [the young people's] terms'. The interviewee noted that this encouraged adults (both community members and professionals) to review whether the expectations they had of young people were, in fact, reasonable. Interviewees gave examples of this type of work.

- **One-off events bring together public service providers and the community**. One police authority interviewee told us how they, with the support of the local radio station, had organised such an event, offering a mix of information and games, along with an opportunity for professionals and community members, young and old, 'to network'.
- **Annual programmes of events are held in parks and other public spaces**. A recent event in one LA's programme offered young people and adults a chance to try a range of activities together, including archery and mountain biking.

## 3.5.2 Bringing young people and adults together: inter-age activities

An example of a slightly more targeted intergenerational activity might be the recruitment of adult community members as mentors for young people, or the 'secondment' of young people to particular panels and working groups such as a neighbourhood regeneration committee. However, for an activity to qualify fully as 'purposively inter-age', it would need to have clear (age-related) criteria for the young people and adults involved. What this might mean in practice is bringing together the under-16s and the over-55s (a group reported by some interviewees as feeling particularly fearful of crime, and threatened by and intolerant of young people). Some interviewees described how they were working with Third Sector organisations with expertise in this area such as Age Concern. There was considerable variety in the examples of inter-age projects given by interviewees.

- Joint social and leisure activities were held, such as coffee mornings, Wii fit©[2]–usage and outings. One community service manager explained their vision:

  *We encourage activities that mix young and old, intergenerational activities, so that old people can see that not all young people are bad, that they have valid opinions, and fears as much as anybody else and these fears are about anti-social behaviour and being a victim of crime, just as much as with the older generation.*

In some areas, the rather bolder step was being taken of bringing young offenders together with older people's groups, such as the Women's Institute, for activities like bowling.

- Intergenerational projects and 'task forces' included young people and older adults collaborating to solve community or environmental problems. One interviewee mused: 'A lot of young people have the same desires as the older population, in that they want to live in a nice environment.' A policy authority policy and engagement manager explained: 'This year we are going to run two intergenerational events. We're planning to invite 30 to 40 young people, and 30 to 40 older people, so there's an equal ratio […] and focus on areas of mutual concern.'

### 3.5.3 Bringing young people and adults together: restorative practice/justice

The most targeted of all our activity groupings, involving limited and very specific groups of young and older people, is restorative practice/justice. We identified two distinct types of activity within this category:

- **small groups of concerned young people providing support and assistance to older people to make good the effects of anti-social behaviour or crime**, for example, by restoring vandalised gardens. This was one of the activities conducted by young people in our third case-study area. It had the support of the local garden centre which donated plants and fencing in response to the young people's request. See Appendix for details.

- **restorative justice, in its true sense, where an offender (in this case, young offender) is involved in some sort of reparation activity, intended to benefit the (older) victim of their crime**. Involving small numbers of very specific young people and adults, and delivered by the youth offending service, this is the highly targeted activity type right at the apex of our triangular model (see Figure 3.2). Due perhaps to the small numbers (of both young people and adults) involved, interviewees provided limited details of this sort of work.

## 3.6  An overview of approaches: final comment

Formal strategies to improve perceptions of young people at an LA or area-wide level were rare. However, there was recognition among many interviewees of the need to think more strategically in relation to this work, audit activities and create a 'portfolio' of interventions. The majority of LAs did, however, appear to be taking a multi-pronged approach to improving perceptions of young people. This commonly included activities within at least two of the three broad approaches described in our model (see sections 3.3–3.5) and against a backdrop of more general community safety work.

Although the model demonstrates progress in terms of targeting it is important that it is not seen as a progressive hierarchy of activities. The aim for LAs is not to begin with universal activities and become highly targeted. All of the different approaches with the different levels of targeting can, and should be, drawn on. It is important to implement a combination of approaches and level of targeting based on analysis of local need and local circumstances. Moreover, the interconnectedness of the approaches should also be considered. For example, can communications strategies deliberately seek out examples of both youth-focused and inter-age approaches? And can the other approaches maximise the value of communicating these activities and successes?

# Notes

1  For some readers, the triangular model may bring to mind the four-tiered model of services employed in areas such as mental health and addictions. We should make it clear that whilst there are some parallels in terms of targeting, we do not see work to improve perceptions of young people as observing the systematic gradations in specialism and access inherent in four-tiered service models from those contexts.

2  Wii fit is a video game developed by Nintendo for the Wii console. It is an exercise game consisting of activities (for example, yoga, strength training, aerobics) using the Wii Balance Board.

# 4 Did the activities make a difference to negative perceptions of young people?

## 4.1 Introduction

The wide range of activities and interventions highlighted as part of this study were at various stages of development, and very few had the sole (or direct) purpose of improving perceptions of young people. Instead, most activities focused on engagement of young people and diversion from negative behaviours. Interviewees were clear that targeted activities involving young people could have an observable and/or measurable positive impact on those directly involved. However, **there were greater difficulties when trying to identify the actual or potential impacts of these activities on wider public perceptions**.

Hence, some interviewees felt able to comment on the actual or potential influence of activities on public perceptions and could recount observable change and anecdotes of how these activities had led to a change in public opinions. Others (particularly those in strategic roles) felt that it was, and would continue to be, very hard to judge whether and to what extent activities had made a difference due to their indirect involvement in the delivery of such activities. Consequently, they commented more cautiously.

The challenges associated with measuring perception change, and attributing impact to particular activities, is considered in Chapter 5. However, it is important to note here that many interviewees were either not directly involved in the monitoring and measurement of perceptions themselves or the activities they highlighted were not subject to such measurement. This, they recognised, affected their knowledge of impacts.

## 4.2 Direct improvements in perceptions

Interviewees were able to describe how perceptions had changed as a direct result of activities that had been implemented. Examples included:

- **changes in attitude amongst certain 'opinion-formers'**, including more positive views of young people among members of a parish council and a greater appreciation and recognition of the contribution of young people among the local community

- **improvements in relationships** between young people, the representatives of statutory agencies and the local community

- **young people's sense of being given greater respect by adults**, including young people being asked for their opinions, attending strategic meetings, and being spoken to like an adult

- **positive feedback from the community**, with intergenerational activities proving particularly popular, sometimes in the face of initial scepticism

- **changes in behaviour among the local community**, including residents feeling less intimidated to use areas that have been repaired and cleaned up by young people

- **local interest in replicating or extending activity**, for example, where the community viewed the work as having been a success

Some interviewees evidenced improvements in perception as indicated by specific measurements such as the Place Survey. This was noted in LAs where, for example, survey responses signified 'young people hanging around' and other aspects of anti-social behaviour (such as vandalism, graffiti and drunken and rowdy behaviour) as less of a problem.

Is important to note that the survey itself contains very few questions specifically about young people's involvement in anti-social behaviour. However, given the association between anti-social behaviour and young people (particularly highlighted in the media), the likelihood is that when responding to areas of questioning in surveys such as this, respondents have young people in mind. The Place Survey, therefore, offers LAs a broader context in which the existence of negative perceptions of young people might be understood.

Other interviewees reported that they believed there had been some improvements in perceptions as a result of the activities implemented. This was based on subjective qualitative evidence, assessments or 'general feelings' from their work in the local community.

## 4.3  Potential and subsidiary impacts in perception change

There were also certain impacts resulting from the activities implemented which interviewees predicted would lead to a corresponding improvement in public perceptions. Examples included:

- **observable greater engagement of young people**, for example, in education, participation activities and with services

- **evidence of improved personal and social development of young people**, for example, improved self-esteem, self-confidence, self-awareness, ambition and respect

- **noted decreases in negative behaviours among young people**, for example, reductions in alcohol consumption, anti-social behaviour, crime and conviction rates

- **greater understanding of young people's behaviours among adults**, for example, improved communication between young people, adults and services and agencies and improved communication about young people

- **wider promotion and improved profile of young people in the community**, for example, increased media attention and interest, successful public events, awards in recognition of achievement, and increases in young people engaging in positive activities

- **enhanced community areas and provision**, for example, cleaner communal areas due to litter being picked up, artwork, and improved amenities

While interviewees discussed these short-term outcomes, which are positive steps in the right direction, there remains uncertainty about whether such outcomes would, in themselves, lead to an improvement in public perceptions generally. Indeed, some interviewees stated explicitly that in their area the overall downward trend with regard to anti-social behaviour and crime was not accompanied by improved perceptions of young people, and this was something that would need further specific targeted intervention to overcome. For example, in one LA using a publicity campaign to promote positive images of young people, staff recognised that for some members of the

community with quite entrenched negative views, more targeted work would be required to facilitate their opinion change:

*The ones* [members of the public] *who are much more hard and fast in their views are the ones that are much more difficult to sway and I don't think marketing campaigns work on them. You need some kind of social marketing that is very focused and quite complex to get their behaviour to change.*

# 5 How are perceptions about young people measured?

## 5.1 Introduction

Firstly, it is important to note again here, as in Chapter 4, that not all of the activities and interventions described by interviewees had the sole or explicit intention of improving perceptions. Perception change was often seen as a useful additional consequence of particular activities. However, it was noted that being able to demonstrate changes in public perceptions is becoming increasingly important due to national drivers (such as PSA targets to improve perceptions of anti-social behaviour). Similarly, at an individual project level, those delivering this work were aware of the need to demonstrate wider impact in order to ensure continuation of funding.

This chapter explores the range of current and potential measurement methods and information sources used to indicate perception change as cited by interviewees, and the issues and challenges of the measurements they report.

## 5.2 Measurement methods and information sources used to indicate perception change

Perception change was considered by interviewees to be difficult to measure accurately. Where interventions were highly targeted (for example, restorative justice approaches involving a victim and young offender) it was thought that impacts on those involved could be measured and attributed with relative ease and confidence. However, where interventions were universal or population wide (for example, media campaigns) the impact of interventions is more diffuse and therefore viewed as harder to measure and attribute.

Although some form of project or activity evaluation was fairly common, very few interviewees had made attempts to quantify the impact of individual activities in terms of perception change. Instead, the monitoring and measurement of public perceptions was more likely to be conducted

generally at an LA or area level using **standardised perception measures** such as national or LA-wide surveys and 'before and after' activity surveys.

Where monitoring was conducted at the project or activity level, interviewees acknowledged they often had an imperfect measure and were reliant on **proxy indicators** to illustrate perception change. This included recorded and reported local crime rates, numbers of complaints made to the local council and public attendance at events involving young people.

The most commonly cited forms of 'measurement' cited by interviewees were existing national and local surveys (for example, the Place Survey, Safer Communities Survey, residents surveys, user satisfaction surveys and anti-social behaviour surveys). While these provided information on the public's concerns, few enabled specific concerns related to young people and their involvement in crime and anti-social behaviour to be **separated out from concerns and fears more generally**. Similarly, population-wide measurement of public perception cannot **attribute change to a specific activity**.

While methods such as focus groups, neighbourhood consultations and house-to-house visits facilitated more-focused enquiry, and were suggested by some interviewees as having the greatest potential to reveal any changing local picture, they were often discounted as **impractical due to the associated expense**.

Some of the evidence relating to perception change was gathered informally or was anecdotal including, for example, observable changes in behaviour and through feedback to project delivery staff and partners, such as the police, housing staff and elected members, and often **never recorded in any systematic way**. Because of this, there were difficulties in using and sharing this information more widely in the same way as statistics from a survey written up into a report might be.

Some measurement methods and information sources highlighted by interviewees were more appropriate and applicable to certain types of activity than others. Some examples, particularly the proxy indicators, may be considered to be fairly tentative determinants of perception change. However, they could provide some indication of potential perception change that may be worth further investigation and exploration by more direct and systematic methods.

## 5.3 Issues with measuring perceptions

Interviewees noted how public **perceptions differed from actual anti-social behaviour or crime, and reporting behaviour**, and there was a need to use existing data sets with some caution. They also recognised the variation between population sub-groups (in respect of the level and nature of their concerns) with age being the most consistent determinant, but other factors such as urbanisation and deprivation also being of relevance. However, the biggest and most consistently cited challenges were the **unstable nature of perceptions**, and the range of influences upon them. As a result, some interviewees suggested, even if change could be measured, it would be **almost impossible to attribute it with confidence to any particular initiative or intervention**.

While there was an understanding among interviewees for the need to measure the perceptions of those likely to be influenced by the activities and interventions implemented, there was some **concern from staff that they did not have the necessary skills to devise appropriate measures** or, indeed, to analyse and interpret the results of any such data that was gathered. Equally, there was potential conflict between the **availability of time** to do this, and their main role, the engagement of young people and delivery of projects. Similarly **limited budgets** meant measurement was not and could not be prioritised. It may be that greater consideration needs to be given to current evaluation tools used, for example, with intergenerational activities where questions about perception could be fairly easily added.

Generally, there was also **limited awareness of perceptions data gathered by other agencies**. A greater understanding of this among partners may help to reduce the potential for duplication of effort and resources. A further issue related to the **accessibility of the information collected by third parties** that could indicate perception change. While some interviewees were aware that records such as the number of calls to the police in relation to anti-social behaviour, for example, might be a helpful indication of perception change in relation to a particular activity engaging young people in the local area, they were sometimes unaware of how to access this information or had been prevented from doing so.

# 6 What are the facilitating factors and key challenges around improving perceptions of young people?

This chapter explores the key features of successful work to improve perceptions of young people, particularly in relation to youth crime and anti-social behaviour. It also explores the challenges relating to work in this area.

## 6.1 Key elements of success

There are a number of factors that, if implemented, help to ensure activities aimed at improving perceptions of young people are effective. Some factors are relevant to specific activities while others can be applied more generally to work in this area. These features provide a guide to those implementing existing approaches as well as developing future activities to improving perceptions.

In order to influence perceptions about young people it is important to implement **a range of activities**, from those that are universal to those that are highly focused. **Clarity of purpose** is considered important, with effective use being made of local 'intelligence' to understand better the problem and devise appropriate solutions. In some instances, it is necessary to **target work** in 'hot spot' areas where perceptions are particularly negative. Targeting particular young people may also be required, especially those at risk of, or engaging in, crime and anti-social behaviour. It is widely agreed that **prevention** and **early intervention activities** are often the most appropriate ways to respond, and providing opportunities for young people to **reflect on their behaviours** and how they might be perceived is an important first step. For the purposes of influencing public perceptions, however, it is important these intervention initiatives and their outcomes are **widely publicised**.

It is also important to ensure young people have **equal access to a range of positive activities** so that the benefits are felt across a whole community.

A **balance** must be achieved between including young people who are already 'engaged' (for example, in school councils and youth groups) and others who are less engaged, not just in terms of equality of opportunity but also to give a rounded picture of young people today.

The **involvement of young people** in all stages of activities is important. This includes opportunities to be part of solutions to crime (through, for example, involvement in crime prevention strategies) as well as opportunities to respond directly to the negativity often levelled at them, for example, in the media and at public meetings. Providing the public with an insight into the disadvantaged and challenging circumstances that some young people growing up today find themselves in can help adults to empathise. Similarly, **intergenerational activities that specifically bring together** younger and older people provide opportunities to learn from each other and to challenge stereotypical views and misconceptions (particularly in relation to young people 'hanging around' in large groups and making noise).

**Highly visible** activities are felt to be particularly important for improving a local community's perceptions. Here, the use of **mobile facilities** set up in town centres or in particular neighbourhoods are recommended. Similarly, using **public spaces** such as parks and libraries, where younger people and older people may naturally come into contact, also helps.

The challenge of improving wider public perceptions of young people is not one that can be met by members of one team or agency working in isolation. For activities to make a difference, it is necessary to sign up and **draw on the insights and resources of a wide range of partners**. This includes staff from key statutory organisations (for example, children's services, the police, housing and health) but also young people, the community and the local media.

Successful **activities to improve perceptions are often delivered in partnership**. This requires good communication, commitment and trust (see, for example, case study 1 in the Appendix where close relationships were made between the Criminal Justice Board and a local newspaper to gather and publish positive stories of young people for a year-long media campaign).

Partners can also help engage wider members of the public and change perceptions throughout their day-to-day work (for example, in one LA a social housing provider fed back to youth service staff the concerns of local residents about an activity to engage young people on Friday and Saturday nights in the local area).

Partners also help to **develop skills** of other service staff working on activities aiming to improve perceptions. In one LA, an environmental manager contacted the youth service for advice on engaging young people in local community improvement activities (see case study 3 in the Appendix).

Another key element of success in improving perceptions of young people is ensuring **positive activities they engage in are promoted to the wider community**. While the main driver may not necessarily be to improve perceptions, by communicating the good things that young people do, this can be a positive consequence. There is a need to achieve a good balance between activity and promotion.

**Systematic and ongoing communication** is considered essential. This includes planned and staged communication before and after activities as well regular publicity throughout. Also vital is having a range of **communication methods**, and suggested examples included banners, car stickers, newspaper articles, websites, high-profile launches and celebration events, see Chapter 2 for further details. The use of media that a LA or service can control and 'can't be spun' such as TV screens in sports centres and doctors' surgeries is also useful. **Word of mouth** has an important role, as do forums such as public meetings and events. Discussions with local councillors and neighbourhood police, for example, have helped to spread the word informally to local residents.

It is important for delivery staff to work closely with specialist **communication teams and staff**. Having a dedicated press officer, for example, helps to ensure activities' outcomes are quickly documented, and messages professionally conveyed and widely promoted.

In the case of media communication, there is also a need to be **reactive** and **respond to negative stories** that can often be damaging to the good work being done in local areas to improve understanding and perceptions. Here, the use of evidence and statistics on crimes involving young people are often

used to demonstrate that the majority of young people do not get into trouble and these negative incidents are rare.

**Effective leadership** of work involving young people can help to improve perceptions. Activities must be well managed, well structured and have been assessed appropriately for levels of risk so that the likelihood of them going wrong (and having a negative impact on perceptions) is minimised. Effective leaders also ensure activities are monitored and evaluated appropriately. They share their vision for improving perceptions of young people across a local area and equip frontline staff with positive messages about young people. Having a **point of contact** or dedicated person for this work within an organisation, while not always common, is useful. It also helps to have an **overview of the range of activities** that may improve perceptions of young people across a local area so that work can be coordinated. Having **dedicated time** to promote existing activities in order to reassure the public is also helpful.

A final key factor in improving public perceptions relates to the level of **prioritisation this work has at a strategically within a LA**. It helps to drive forward work to improve perceptions of young people where it is tied into national policies and agendas, and local service plans. Staff see this work as a priority where improving perceptions is seen as a priority at a high level (for example, the endorsement of a media campaign by a chief constable in case study 1 in the Appendix). While not all activities to improve perceptions had a direct cost, where they did it was important they were **appropriately resourced**.

## 6.2  Challenges to improving perceptions of young people

A number of barriers stand in the way of professionals aiming to positively influence the way young people are portrayed and perceived. Although statistically only a small minority of young people are involved in crime and anti-social activity, their behaviour is widely accepted as playing a part in the negative perception of the majority. **Changing the negative behaviour of the minority can be difficult**, particularly where these behaviours are

entrenched and there is an absence of secure and sustained funding. However, this approach is recognised as an important part of changing perceptions.

Equally, there are **risks inherent in drawing attention to young people** and their behaviour. Youth-focused activities are not guaranteed to be a success and, if not well managed and delivered, might actually add to community tensions, 'fuel fear' and 'do more harm than good'. For example, the LA in case study 2 (see Appendix) created a festival-style atmosphere on Friday and Saturday evenings offering young people a range of activities including football and street dance. This was potentially a risky strategy, given the large numbers of young people gathered together in a public area with loud music. When the young people being targeted are more challenging, drawing public attention to their activities is a potentially risky strategy.

A barrier for much of the work in this area relates to concerns that the **public are becoming increasingly intolerant of young people**, and that expectations of young people (in terms of their behaviour) are simply unachievable. It is often the case that what is perceived to be anti-social behaviour by some members of the public is simply 'young people being young people'. They can, for example, be loud and like to hang around in groups. It can also be the case that it is difficult to **establish the age** of those involved in anti-social behaviour, labelling them as young people when in fact they are adults.

Certain sections of the public are also deemed **more challenging** to positively influence than others and require more intense and focused work to facilitate perception change than universal methods such as marketing campaigns. Similarly, overcoming the **negative perceptions of young people among some partners** can be difficult. Improving perceptions of young people is also seen to be more challenging in certain areas, particularly where a **large proportion of the local population is made up of the older generation** and, in **rural areas**, residents are geographically isolated and are said to be strongly influenced by hearsay and local media.

The tendency by **much of the media to favour bad news** stories is seen as unhelpful by many of those we interviewed, and even where there are constructive relationships with the local press, efforts and progress can be undermined by national coverage. To some extent this can be balanced by a

consistent local message, but this is hard to ensure across agencies (the usual challenges of partnership working appear to pertain). Where communication is dealt with by a core team (as is often the case in LAs), there are competing demands for **staff time**. On an individual level, some professionals (particularly project delivery staff) have **limited skills and/or experience** of publicising their work more broadly and may have **difficulties in describing and translating the good work that young people do**. Communications may not be something that is explicitly part of their role or indeed something they are able to do with any regularity due to competing priorities. All this can be compounded by limited resources. In a testing economic climate, there is a concern not to expose statutory organisations to accusations **of wasting public money**. Close work with the media can also give rise to accusations of '**spin**'.

# 7 How do local areas plan to develop work to improve perceptions of young people in the future?

The various projects and activities brought to our attention by interviewees were, as might be expected, at different stages of development. Where well developed and apparently successful, lead agencies with access to additional resources were often looking to extend or replicate work. This was particularly apparent in relation to **youth-focused activities** (the most prevalent approach). Though seldom initially intended to improve the public's perceptions of young people, such work was now widely viewed as making an important contribution to this.

However, several interviewees emphasised the importance of visible activity. There was widespread recognition that, if it is to achieve maximum impact on perceptions, direct work with young people needs to be backed up with effective and systematic **communications activity**. For example, one interviewee commented:

> *I think there are lots more for all of us to do in terms of communication, and that comes out time and time again from all the different pieces of research that you read. I think lots of agencies are very good at doing the work, but not necessarily good at promoting it.*
> (Community safety officer)

Where work to improve and professionalise communications was planned, people were thinking creatively about the resources available to them (often not a great deal, in monetary terms). Interviewees reported the need to review how they might work more effectively with colleagues in other services:

> *We have practitioners that come to our* [Safer Communities] *meetings without understanding why they are there and without understanding how they can help each other, so we're going to develop an induction programme […]. We want everybody to be ambassadors for the work we are doing, so we need to induct them to what we're all about.*
> (Community safety manager)

There were also plans to try and exploit more fully the communications potential of frontline staff in other services:

*There's a need to ensure that frontline services are aware of each other's agenda and services, so that when they are communicating with residents, they can give positive messages out.*
(Safer communities partnership officer)

In addition to educating and encouraging (adult-oriented) frontline staff to spread the 'message' and correct misinformation, interviewees proposed other practices (already under way in some areas) such as nominating youth champions to advocate for young people in particular forums,  and positioning young people where they could be seen to be contributing to the search for solutions to social problems.

In future work, many interviewees were keen to make greater use of sympathetic adult members of the public by, for example, involving local residents, perhaps as volunteers, in direct work with young people. In several areas, targeted work with less sympathetic adults was also being considered, for example, by focusing on the age group believed to have the most negative perceptions of young people (the over-55s). A range of interviewees, including some of the young people interviewed in the case study areas, thought a range of **intergenerational activities** could help. For example, in one of our case-study areas, an (adult) interviewee noted that if the necessary resources had been available:

*We could have done some great intergenerational work, getting young people and older people together* [...]. *I think that's something we could learn, and definitely put into future projects* [...]. *I've put in a proposal for* [funding for] *an inter-generational project, looking at getting together young people who are* [involved] *in anti-social behaviour now, or are starting to go down that road, and adults that are complaining about young people, and doing some concentrated workshops.*
(Youth worker)

Interviewees were largely conscious of the weaknesses in the evidence base for claims that work was impacting on perceptions, and their reliance on proxy indicators (of variable quality). However, several emphasised the limits of their own resources and expertise, saying **support and guidance on**

**tracking and evidencing impact would be greatly welcomed**. Support to identify reliable sources of intelligence that could be used when planning, for example, targeting resources, was also seen as of value. Assistance in both these areas should promote the development of a more strategic approach to improving perceptions.

# 8 Conclusions and recommendations to be considered

Previous research and government policy such as Aiming High (2007) highlights a mismatch between perceptions and reality regarding the scale of young people's involvement in crime and anti-social behaviour. Professionals contributing to our study corroborate this mismatch and also note that negative perceptions are detrimental to both young people and their communities.

Our study has raised a number of recommendations that can be taken forward by policy makers and strategic leads at both national and local level.

✓ **Undertake a local audit of the activities already under way that are designed to impact positively on perceptions. This will support future strategic planning and co-ordination.**

Our audit of activities revealed considerable variety in the work to improve perceptions of young people under the leadership of a range of agencies. In most of the LAs studied, there was evidence of a multi-pronged approach to improving perceptions. Activities covered at least two of the three elements of our typology set out in Chapter 3 (communicating with the public, youth-focused work, and bringing young people and adults together). However, some interviewees were keen to acknowledge that there may well be other work going on in LAs, delivered by other services and agencies that they were not necessarily aware of.

Formal strategies focusing on improving perceptions of young people appeared to be rare, but the need to think strategically and develop a 'portfolio' of interventions was increasingly recognised. Many interviewees were committed to extending and replicating work. Our typology may provide a useful starting point for the development of a simple audit tool that

could be used by the CDRP or LSP, for example, to support strategic planning and co-ordination.

The central importance of communicating with the public about 'good news' regarding young people is evident. Those responsible for any youth-focused work and intergenerational activity should seek out opportunities for promoting their programmes in the media, and particularly relay the positive impacts that are achieved. Some LA programmes are indeed already doing this, and ensuring their communication strategies with the local media are proactive, positive and ongoing.

## ✓ Measure the impact of activities more systematically in order to provide clearer direction for those developing, commissioning and championing work locally.

Interviewees acknowledged the evidence base for determining the positive impact of activities on perceptions is underdeveloped. There was consensus that measuring perceptions and how they change is difficult, and attributing any changes to a particular activity or intervention can be even more so. Many interviewees recognised a need to refine monitoring and evaluation, with a view to building a better evidence base and the case for future funding for work in this area.

Reliably measuring and attributing changes in perceptions is far from easy, and there is a certainly a need to expand our knowledge about the impact of specific interventions and programmes. It is vital that those measuring perception change consider what the specific interventions and activities are aiming to achieve and what is an appropriate measure. In many cases, this might include looking at different sources of evidence than are currently being utilised. There is also scope to improve our understanding of the 'problem' and the wider influences that affect perceptions about young people at both the local and national level. One way this understanding might be achieved is through the introduction of a wider range of youth-specific questions to national surveys such as the Place Survey.

**Further develop the skills and knowledge of operational staff in order to share effective practice and key factors associated with success. This can be supported though local or regional training activities, toolkits and guidance in order to help professionals overcome challenges and exploit opportunities.**

Despite the limited evidence of impact, interviewees did, on the whole, feel able to identify factors impeding and increasing the chances of achieving a positive impact on perceptions of young people. Some of the challenges identified related to the known characteristics of the youth and adult population. Others concerned the skills and resources available to staff to conduct effective monitoring, evaluation and communications of activities. These included:

- the involvement of a range of partners
- clarity of purpose and the effective use of local intelligence (in order to target work)
- the creative use of resources
- a balance of approaches and activities to improve perceptions (for example, from highly targeted to the more universal).

**Provide a policy steer that is specific to youth perceptions and underpinned by legislation requiring agencies to work together.**

This study has highlighted good practice at a local level to improve public perceptions about young people that needs to be operating nationally (for example, the need for partnership working, and to implement a range of activities, from those that are universal to those that are highly focused). Although there is a body of broadly relevant policy concerning community safety (set out in Chapter 2), there does not appear to be a strong policy steer specific to youth perceptions: there is no parallel with the duty of partnership imposed by Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998. Such a steer could be a significant catalyst for LAs to engage with the issue of communities' perceptions of young people, particularly if underpinned with guidance and examples of good practice.

It may be beneficial to introduce criteria for future funding of relevant initiatives. Such criteria could include addressing perceptions of young people. Similarly, setting responsibilities for safer schools partnerships and CDRPs to focus on this issue as well as performance management targets for LA staff could also help.

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# Appendix: the case studies

In order to examine the impacts of activities aimed at improving perceptions of young people and their involvement in crime and anti-social behaviour, case studies were undertaken in three LAs. Efforts were made in the case studies to reflect the categorisation of activities as set out in Chapter 3.

**Case study 1**: approach 1 – media campaign

**Case study 2**: approach 2 – youth-focused work

**Case study 3**: approach 3 – bringing young people and adults together.

## Approach 1: media campaign

### *Background to the project*

This media campaign is running in the east of England and aims to challenge stereotypes about young people and their involvement in crime and anti-social behaviour. The campaign is targeted at one of the most deprived parts of the county. According to the Best Value Survey 2006, people in this area were more concerned than those in other parts of the county about young people hanging around on the streets; people being drunk or rowdy in public; vandalism; and illegal drug use.

The majority of funding for this work comes from the Office for Criminal Justice Reform's Race and Confidence Challenge Fund. There are also various financial and 'in kind' contributions (for example, staff time) made by partners.

Young people are involved in the campaign along with:

• Criminal Justice Board

• local newspapers

• Connexions

• Fire and Rescue Service

• County Council

• District Council/Youth District Council.

### *Project objectives*

The media campaign aims to:

• challenge stereotypes about young people and their involvement in crime and anti-social behaviour

• promote positive images of young people

• increase confidence in young people and spread the message that the majority of young people lead crime-free lives.

A local newspaper editor involved in the project spoke about the campaign's overall goal:

*It's up to young people that we hear enough about the good they do because inevitably we will quickly hear about the bad. I think that it's not just educating the media, although that could probably do with a bit of a boost, I think it's young people being encouraged to stand up and be counted and start shouting from the rooftops 'this is what we're about'.*

### Project activities

Based on the premise that people tend to have a 'hometown favouritism' towards their local media, trusting their views and reporting more than national sources of information, the project focuses on a year-long positive media campaign. Young people and the public are invited to nominate young friends and family members who have achieved something admirable. Each week, the newspapers profile a different young person's story and, each month, a panel of judges rewards the young person or group whose story they deem the best with a £50 shopping voucher.

The campaign also includes:

- a high-profile event to raise awareness of positive youth activities in the local area

- posters in prominent public places featuring local young people holding up positive slogans to counter negative stereotypes

- campaign car stickers distributed via local newspapers

- banners advertising the campaign displayed outside fire stations

- coverage of the campaign on a local radio stations

- a short film (developed by the Youth District Council) promoting the campaign

- young people and adult attitude surveys (including a prize draw incentive).

### Monitoring and measurement of perceptions

The campaign includes two surveys to measure perception change:

- an adult survey to measure attitudes towards young people before and after the campaign, both online and in the newspaper

- a youth survey run in local colleges and schools about how young people feel they are perceived by adults and portrayed in the news.

The first young people's survey was conducted between January and February 2009 around the time the campaign was launched. A total of 2238 were completed. The results, evaluated by the district council, showed 54 per cent of older people felt negatively about young people, and many young people felt their age group received a raw deal when it came to coverage of young people in newspapers, television and the radio. The majority of young people (70 per cent) said bad news coverage of young people meant adults tended to be more negative towards young people as a whole, not just those who were misbehaving.

### Outcomes and impacts

A range of positive developments can be linked to this work. The campaign itself provides young people with a platform to redress negative images in the media. As one interviewee commented: 'It gives young people some sort of sense of empowerment to get in there and talk about the things that really do concern them and to defend themselves.' The campaign also highlights the varied things young people do in their local communities including a wide range of volunteering work that the public may not often hear about.

Being involved in the campaign also led adults to consider their own attitude towards, and portrayal of, young people. A journalist involved in the campaign noted:

[Involvement this project] *makes you maybe hold back your pre-conceptions about things … . I'd try to report things in a balanced way*

*anyway, but I guess there are moments of weakness when you do maybe get a bit stereotypical or do see the easy picture without looking into it in more depth.*

A key outcome of the campaign is that the publication of positive news stories involving young people is now given increased priority. An interviewee felt that, had the newspapers not been involved in the campaign, 'there probably wouldn't have been this sort of story in the paper every week due to time pressures'. The district-wide campaign also enables the wider promotion of positive images of young people and there was felt to have been greater awareness among the local community after the events: 'There was widespread community support and a lot of good and positive feedback, everywhere I go it does seem to get mentioned' (Newspaper editor).

Importantly, there is also some anecdotal evidence that the project has achieved its overall aim of improving public views of young people. Although this research was conducted half way through the campaign, one of the interviewees told us: 'I'm not pretending that there has been any sort of revolution in terms of attitudes but one definitely feels that there has been a small but, I would suggest, significant shift of opinion.'

The campaign has also received wider recognition for its positive impact. It won Best Communication in Youth Justice Award from the Youth Justice Board (YJB) and the Community Campaign of the Year in the East of England Award. Other LAs have expressed interest in the campaign with one replicating the project. Additional funding has been secured to produce and promote a toolkit of project activities so that practice can be shared more formally with other areas. The campaign is also due to be launched in other local newspapers in the county.

### Key challenges and constraints

One of the challenges for this campaign is the exaggerated negative media reporting of crime, in general, and youth crime, in particular, which was believed to have a strong influence on public perceptions.

High-profile stories depicting young people's involvement in crime in the national press, for example, had the potential to jeopardise the campaign. The importance of committing to the campaign, despite this risk, was acknowledged, as was the need to counteract negative stories with facts about the numbers of young people who actually offend.

There was some initial concern from the local newspapers about committing to a year-long campaign due to the potential difficulty in accessing sufficient positive stories involving young people each week. This was not due to a lack of such stories but that publication depended on people actively nominating them to the newspaper. Conversely, there was also some apprehension about whether the paper during particular peak news times would be able to find enough space for campaign material within its weekly publication. Although these concerns have not manifested, one interviewee felt there had been some difficulty in accessing stories which were representative of young people:

*It's difficult to find young people that aren't within what I would call a middle class background to put people forward. So one of the things that I think we've found is that we haven't got many people from different communities* [volunteering themselves for stories].
(District Council representative)

This issue was largely overcome when partner organisations such as Connexions nominated young people from more diverse backgrounds.

The project received time-limited grant funding which had the potential to constrain the project's impact. Effective project management helped to overcome this, and keep the project on track and within budget. Some of the partner agencies were working together for the first time on a project which had never been trialled before. There was slight uncertainly among some of the agencies involved about how the project would develop. Partners were required to take a leap of faith and commit their time for the campaign to operate successfully.

### *Facilitators of success*

Interviewees highlighted the importance of having a well-developed idea with clear aims and objectives as a key factor of success. The project lead, an officer with the local Criminal Justice Board, identified key milestones, assessed potential risks and established contingency plans prior to project initiation. Forward planning, effective project management and enthusiasm were key elements in the campaign's success.

From the outset, all partners were fully committed, and the campaign was endorsed by high-profile individuals in the local area including the chief constable. One of the local newspaper's journalists had specific responsibility for collating young people's news stories, and this was felt to be a facilitating factor in the project's success. It fostered ownership and commitment to the campaign and ensured stories were prioritised and presented consistently.

The regularity of issuing positive messages about young people is said to be a key factor in helping to improve perceptions. One District Council representative noted: 'Because we've had loads of positive stories, week in week out, it's kept up the profile of the campaign.' Similarly, commitment from partners to a year-long campaign, particularly the newspaper's commitment to regular stories, and recurrent marketing of the campaign ensured consistency of work and messages. This is evidenced by the newspaper's editor:

*This week there's a wonderful picture in our paper of a group of young people who have taken a group of elderly people out for the day on an open-top bus trip to the seaside. And whereas I think before this might have seemed a little bit unusual, the fact is, it almost seems quite normal now.*

The range of media used to promote the campaign, including posters, car stickers, banners, radio, newspaper articles and film, ensures the message reaches as many people as possible.

The involvement of young people in the campaign is also key factor:

*They did all the photographing and all of the design for it* [the poster campaign], *and that was really, really, really good. Because it wasn't from an adult's point of view, it was from a young person's* […]. *I think it's really important* [to have this sort of involvement from young people]. *You have to have buy-in.*
(District Council representative)

**Case study 1**

## Approach 2: youth-focused work

### *Background to the project*

This youth-focused project running in the north east of England was established in response to results from the LA's Fear of Crime Survey, which identified residents were particularly concerned about young people 'hanging around'. The survey also indicated that having more activities for young people would make residents feel safer. These findings, in addition to ongoing demand from young people themselves for more and better places to go, lead to the development of a mobile 'youth village' facility.

### *Project activities*

The youth village aims to engage young people aged 13–19 years old and, in particular, those most disadvantaged and disengaged from society in positive activities through a festival-style event. Events take place in six locations across the LA every Friday and Saturday evening over a period of ten weeks. A team of qualified youth workers and volunteers staff each event. In an enclosed area, young people are able to gather safely. The activities offered in each youth village are adapted according to the needs and interests of those attending and can include cage football, DJ decks, computer games, street dance tuition and climbing walls. There is also health advice available on sexual health screening, drugs and alcohol. Upon entry, all young people are photographed and provided with ID cards. On the specific request of young people, those attending are scanned for weapons and breathalysed if suspected of drinking alcohol. There is a strict code of conduct.

### *Project objectives*

The youth village aims to:

- provide highly visible and safe places for young people to go to in their leisure time where they can get involved in a wide range of positive activities

- give more young people (particularly those who are disadvantaged) the opportunity to participate in activities that support their personal and social development

- offer young people access to information, advice and support

- build a dynamic partnership between the LA and third, private and public sector partners to deliver and operate a financially sustainable option for young people

- reduce the numbers of young people drinking alcohol and being involved in anti-social behaviour.

### *Monitoring and measurement of perceptions*

Before (and sometimes after) events, social housing provider staff and police community support officers (PCSOs) consult with local residents face-to-face and via questionnaires about their views on the youth village. Although data about their perceptions is not formally collected, staff do sometimes obtain feedback that indicates a positive change in attitude towards young people.

The LA uses the Place Survey as an indicator of public perception. It also uses results from the Fear of Crime Survey and local statistics on the prevalence of youth disorder to monitor impact.

### *Outcomes and impacts*

Negative public perceptions of young people and anti-social behaviour in this LA have reduced substantially since 2003 as highlighted by the Place Survey. Anecdotal evidence as well as other 'proxy' indicators suggest the youth village has contributed more recently to this ongoing downward trend. One interviewee noted: 'The kids have said things like "because we have got this to do we're not on the street corner drinking and causing trouble, we're doing something positive".'

Local residents witnessing young people engaging in positive activities firsthand helped to change their views. A member of delivery staff

commented: 'Some [residents] now come along and dance outside […] so they can actually see the young people having fun, having a good time, but not being a nuisance.'

Similarly, young people attending the events were aware of a shift in attitude among some older people. One young person said: 'They [local residents] say good things like "it's getting kids off the streets and stopping them drinking outside of their houses".'

Young people talked about enjoying 'having something to do', particularly those who volunteer to help set up and run activities. One young person felt having the opportunity to volunteer at a youth village in a different area from which she lived stopped her getting into trouble with the police. The events also provide young people with an opportunity to mix with youth workers and other project staff. This experience helps them to relate better to older people and challenge their own preconceptions. One young person told us:

*I used to think that old people didn't used to like you and we didn't used to like them. You get to see them and get to know them and see a different point of view which sticks in your head after you leave here.*

The youth village has also engaged young people into other youth provision, thus reducing their likelihood of getting into trouble and contributing to negative perceptions.

The youth village has expanded each year and the LA has recently purchased two new mobile buses to enhance the provision. This summer, the youth village will be delivered in more locations and include a wider range of activities and facilities including live performances by young people's bands. Employment opportunities have been created for 25 young people who are currently NEET to support delivery.

### Key challenges and constraints

The main challenge relate to the concerns of the local community. Residents were apprehensive about large numbers of young people

gathering in one place. They were worried about the level of noise the events would create and the likelihood of young people engaging in anti-social behaviour in the local area afterwards. One LA officer highlighted the level of anxiety among the local community prior to the event:

*The community got wind of it before it went public* [...]. *We had people ringing up saying 'there will be blood on your hands with young people all in one area' so we are so pleased that actually now they were coming back to us and saying it has worked.*

There were also challenges relating to the logistics and legal implications of running the events. This included the need to develop clear and concise guidelines on the management and deployment of youth village events; staff training requirements on health and safety issues; and general issues related to the running and delivery of events such as the availability and mobility of equipment.

### *Facilitators of success*

Access to positive activities for young people on Friday and Saturday nights is seen to be key in addressing negative perceptions, as is offering a range of different activities in order to encourage as many people as possible to get involved. Youth village events are targeted at communities that have little or no youth provision and have high indices of need or youth disorder issues. Young people in particular feel that the youth village helped by giving then 'a place to hang around at night'. One young person told us: 'The youth village gives us something to do, it stops us causing a nuisance and they ([local residents] are less likely to see us as a bother. Another commented: 'It helps the public to see they [young people] are doing something positive and people are seeing something good in their neighbourhoods.'

Some of the young volunteers also felt anti-social behaviour caused by their peers was often related to the consumption of alcohol and the

youth village had deterred young people from drinking. A member of staff commented:

*We've put things in that attract the young people. We think about what they're into, we give kids the things that they like doing – having fun, without the need to drink. When this finishes at 8.30pm they've not drunk all night, they're probably less likely to get drunk after that because its quite late so they won't be causing as much trouble in the local area for people to complain about.*

Another factor contributing to the success of this work is that improving perceptions of young people is a strategic priority at the LA level. This prioritisation helps to drive the agenda forward and ensure funding and staff time is allocated to this work. The youth village is just one aspect of a portfolio of work aimed at addressing the negative perceptions of youth in the LA.

Effective organisation and planning has been key to the youth village's success. The local community, parents and young people were consulted before the events were finalised and given feedback.

The first event, piloted in 2008, was not widely advertised to young people. Instead, those already attending local youth provision were invited to build the events slowly before promoting them more widely. Lessons were learnt from each of the pilot events and subsequent activities were changed accordingly. This included, for example, giving walkie-talkies to staff so that they could communicate with each other and respond quickly to residents' concerns. This helped to build up relationships with residents and reassure them that staff would immediately deal with any issues.

## Approach 3: bringing young people and adults together

### Background to the work

The intergenerational activities described have taken place in conjunction with a youth-focused project (a young people's group established on a deprived estate with a reputation for youth disorder). The group was set up with the support of a street and environment manager at the district council, but is largely youth-led. It has now opened up its membership to young people (aged 9 to18 years old) from the village as a whole.

The activity of the group goes beyond the intergenerational work which is the focus of this case study, and includes a range of mini-projects which might be categorised as positive or diversionary activities (for example, environmental improvement, sports and leisure opportunities). This highlights how individual projects, as they develop, may encompass a mix of activities and approaches.

### Project objectives

The group was established with the ambitions of improving the estate, the reputation of young people living on it, and relationships between young and older people. A young interviewee explained that the estate and its young residents have 'quite a bad reputation and it's like we want to make it a better one. Because we have to live here!' Another commented on the negative perceptions held by some adults: 'It was like, horrible, they didn't know what I could bring to the community', and that the group felt driven to change this.

### Intergenerational activities

- **Regular joint coffee mornings with older adults in sheltered accommodation**. Initially, there was some negativity and scepticism on both sides. Only a handful of residents turned up for the first

event – for which the group had made jam from berries they had picked themselves – but it was hugely successful and they 'all got on like a house on fire'. An adult supporter said: 'I always remember when we met with the parish council, one of the lads said "I enjoyed meeting new people" – he didn't say "old people", just "new people". I thought that was lovely.' As a result, interest has grown, and get-togethers are held every few weeks at which both old and young people share their skills and experiences. Typically, a young interviewee said: 'We bring in like cakes and things and make tea and stuff for them … . At Christmas … we went and handed [presents] around, and sang carols and stuff … . They were really touched.'

- **Restorative justice type activities, with concerned young people providing support to older people affected by anti-social behaviour or crime**. Whilst negative press coverage (at both regional and national level) was thought to underpin perceptions of young people in the area, young interviewees suggested the behaviour of a small minority of local young people also played a part. With the group, they were involved in restorative activity to try and counter this. For example, they successfully sought the support of a local garden centre for a project restoring an older lady's garden that had been damaged by young street drinkers.

### *Outcomes and impacts*

A range of positive developments were linked to the group and its work:

- improvements in the local environment and facilities

- reductions in anti-social behaviour and crime

- empowerment of young people

- increased respect, in the school environment, for the young people involved

- recognition from the parish council of the contribution young people have and can make to the local community

- more balanced coverage of young people in the local media

- growing interest, amongst other young people, in joining this group or setting up their own.

Adults in the neighbourhood were thought to be starting to reconsider some of their assumptions about young people, with one young interviewee telling us: 'They know which youths are the good youths, and which youths are the bad ones […]. People I don't know, know I'm in the [group], so they can talk to me and I won't answer back or anything.'

A positive outcome associated specifically with the intergenerational work has been observable changes in the attitude of the older people who have taken part in the intergenerational events, with an adult interviewee telling us: 'The residents' association have said that they feel like they [the young people] are part of their family now.' Some of these older people are now active advocates for their young friends, and will defend them against criticism from other older adults.

### *Monitoring and measurement of perceptions*

Evidence of changes in perception is largely observational or anecdotal (for example, informal direct and indirect verbal feedback). It is strongest in relation to the adults directly involved with the young people in the group.

Proxy indicators of change include the recognition of young people's achievement through the bestowing of awards such as Respect Challenge, Keep Britain Tidy, Footprints Challenge and Lord Lieutenant's Award.

### *Facilitators of success*

Interviewees from this project advised:

- identifying and drawing on relevant expertise (in this case that of the manager of the LA's youth service)

- thinking about the holders of and drivers for negative perceptions (for example, older adults, and evidence of vandalism and neglect) and targeting these for attention

- engaging with 'opinion formers' (for example, the parish council)

- developing good communications strategies (still work in progress for this project) with a view to publicising more widely young people's efforts and achievements.

One young interviewee counselled against letting just anyone join a group, saying: 'Invite them if they're willing to help, not just if they want all the freebie [fun] stuff.' When asked what advice they would give to other young people interested in forming a similar group, another young participant recommended pragmatism and realistic ambitions:

*I'd tell them to … think about what good they* [the group] *could do for the community, and what the community could ask them* [the group] *to do which is reasonable, which they* [the group] *can actually do.*

### Challenges and risks involved in this sort of project

It is clear that the intergenerational work that is the focus of this case study has taken place in conjunction with a range of activities supporting young people's personal and social development.

Whilst young people are capable of assuming considerable responsibilities and achieving great things, a certain amount of adult support tends to be needed, particularly in the early stages. It is important that a suitable adult is able to commit sufficient time, over a reasonable period of time (probably about a year). The adult involved in this project cautioned: 'If you can't give them the time, you shouldn't embark on [the work], because it would do more damage.'

It is also possible that, without sufficient groundwork, intergenerational activities could 'backfire'. It seems likely that some investment in, and commitment to, young people's personal and social development may be an essential precursor to successful engagement with older people.

# Also available from NFER









**1 The impact of 14–16 year olds on further education colleges**

The central aim of this research was to examine the strategies that FE colleges and their staff used to integrate 14–16 year olds successfully into their institutions and to explore the impact that 14–16 year olds have on FE colleges, their staff and older learners.

www.nfer.ac.uk/publications/ICL01/

**2 Widening 14–19 choices: support for young people making informed decisions**

This is a summary of key findings from NFER's recent work relating to 14–19 education in order to understand better how young people of this age group are navigating their way through complex choices of qualifications and locations of study.

www.nfer.ac.uk/publications/SMD01/

**3 Attitudes to reading at ages nine and eleven: full report**

In June 2007 NFER ran a reading survey questionnaire to determine current attitudes to reading. The questions dealt with enjoyment of reading and confidence in reading. This report looks at the results of the questionnaire.
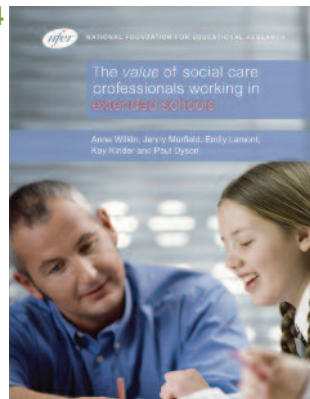
www.nfer.ac.uk/publications/RAQ01/

**4 The value of social care professionals working in extended schools**

As the collaboration between social care and education professionals develops, the question of what role social care professionals can take in school, as well as what should be expected of them, is becoming increasingly pertinent. This report looks at levels of integration and the role of social care professionals.

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