



# YOUTH CONFERENCING – Making It Work In Northern Ireland

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Chief Executive

Youth Justice Agency

# Background



- Established 1 April 2003
- Criminal Justice Review
- Executive Agency of the Department of Justice
- Overview of the Agency and our ethos
- Youth Conferences

# Mission Statement



*Our aim is to reduce youth  
crime and to build  
confidence in the  
youth justice system*



# Values

1. Children
2. Victims
3. Our staff
4. Public Safety
5. Inclusion
6. Equality & Diversity
7. Integrity
8. Continuous Improvement

# Key Business Areas

2010/2011 Business Plan



1. Reducing Offending
2. Increasing Confidence in the Agency
3. Developing restorative justice
4. Delivering positive outcomes for young people
5. Ensuring safe and appropriate use of custody
6. Managing resources



# Directorates

- Community Services
- Youth Conference Service
- Custodial Services
- Corporate Services



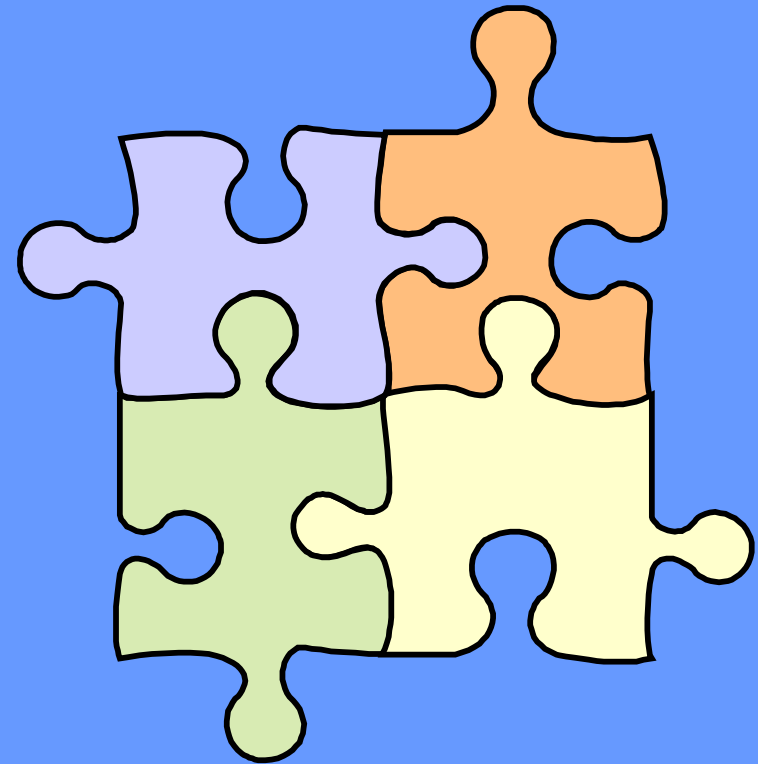
# Youth Justice Agency



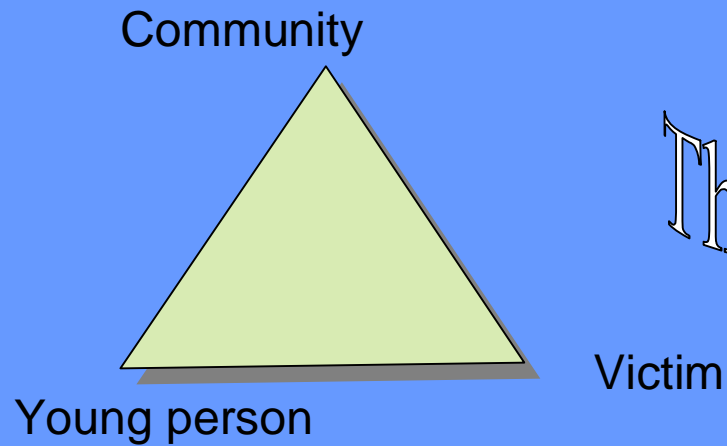
# A New Understanding Youth Justice



- Restorative not traditional
- Shifting Tariff Justice
- Devolving decisions







## *The balanced approach*



A Youth Conference gives young offenders the opportunity to understand and make amends to their victims for the effects of their offences and to take steps to stop offending. It involves families, victims, community and the young person in making a decision on what can be done to put right the harm caused.



# LEGISLATION: JUSTICE (NI)ACT 2002



PPS

COURT

**YCS co-ordinator, young person,  
appropriate adult, police officer,  
lawyer, victim, victim  
supporter, appropriate others**

On completion of a Conference a young person will be subject to a Youth Conference Plan (PPS) or a Youth Conference Order (Court).



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# The Plan

- Requirements:

- Apologise

- Make reparation to the victim, any person affected, or to the community

- Make a payment to the victim not exceeding cost of replacing or repairing any damage

- Submit to the supervision of an adult

- Perform unpaid work or service in or for the community

- Participate in activities to address her/his offending

- Submit to restrictions on conduct or whereabouts

- Submit to treatment for a mental condition or for alcohol / drugs dependency

# Programmes for Young People



## Victim awareness

- Inter-generational placements (Age Concern)
- Anti-racist programme (NI Council for Ethnic Minorities)
- Public services victim programme (Translink, Fire Service)
- Individual victim awareness programme (Victim Support)

# Programmes for Young People



## Preventing Offending

- Business crime prevention (Business in the Community)
- Substance misuse / anger management
- Offending behaviour (e.g. Car Crime)
- Education / employment
- Mentoring programme (Choices and Opportunity Youth)

# Post Conference



- The co-ordinator encourages, motivates and enables the young person to keep to their Conference Plan.
- Incidents of non-compliance are dealt with (if needed engaging the family in a Family Group conference to resolve the difficulties).
- Ultimately a young person may be returned to Court / referred back to the PPS if fails to comply with the plan.

# How Effective is the Youth Conference?



- 7,608 youth conferences since the system was introduced.
- Over 44,000 people have participated
- 2 out of 3 (67%) had victim representation.
- Satisfaction rate among victims is 89%. 91% of victims prefer it for young people.
- 93% of conferences lead to a negotiated plan that is successfully completed.



# Re-Offending Rates



- Among young offenders diverted from court or sentenced in 2006, one-year reoffending rates were:
  - 38% for those who attended youth conferences (28% for 'diversionary' and 47% for 'court-ordered') compared to 52% for conventional, community-based sentences and 71% for custody.

## SOURCES:

Tate, S + O'Loan, C (2009) Northern Ireland Youth Reoffending : Results from the 2006 Cohort  
*Belfast: Northern Ireland Office*

# Re-Offending



- For those with no previous convictions who take part in youth conferencing, the one-year reoffending rate is 16%.
- This increases to 41% for those with up to 4 convictions, and 72% among the very small number who have more than 9 previous convictions.
- The proportion of young offenders sentenced to custody declined from 8% in 2004 to 5% in 2006.
- Just over 1% of young people referred have gone through 10 or more court ordered conferences.

# Challenges for Youth Conferences



- Early days - preparation, training and resources
- Persistent Young Offenders
  - PYOP
- Diversionary youth conference plans
  - proportionality



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## Woodlands Juvenile Justice Centre

- Opened January 2007



# Policy Update



- Youth Justice Review June 2011
- The Hillsborough Castle Agreement included a commitment to a “Review of how children and young people are processed at all stages of the criminal justice system, including detention, to ensure compliance with international obligations and best practice”.

# Youth Justice Review



*"As part of my agenda to reshape the justice system, it is important to take a critical look at where we are and what we need to do to further refine and improve our approaches to addressing youth offending."*

Justice Minister, David Ford, November  
2010 Northern Ireland Assembly

# THE FUTURE



- Recommended as a world class service by the Prison Reform Trust UK 2009 and the Independent Commission for Youth Crime and Anti-Social Behaviour
- England and Wales - **Green Paper**, 'Breaking the cycle: effective punishment, rehabilitation and sentencing of offenders'



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**Further information can be  
obtained from:**

**[www.youthjusticeagencyni.gov.uk](http://www.youthjusticeagencyni.gov.uk)**