

Keeping In Touch...

The format of the conference proved very successful - the keynote speeches and presentations in the morning sessions provided a great deal of food for thought, and the afternoon 'market place' enabled all the delegates to discuss the issues raised and make useful contacts and relationships. However, Wallace Wilson made the point that the knowledge of where the parenting support services are and how they can be accessed is vital. One way of doing this is to build on those contacts made at the conference and develop partnerships.

To help with this process Bradford Youth Offending Team are developing a website which will act as a one-stop directory of Parenting Support in the district. The intention is to create a valuable resource for professionals and parents alike who want to make contact with partners or providers.



The website will also contain a full list of all the agencies represented at the Parenting Conference including contact details. Anyone wishing to be included should e-mail [contact@parentingsupport.co.uk](mailto:contact@parentingsupport.co.uk) with details.

This new site can be accessed at: [www.parentingsupport.co.uk](http://www.parentingsupport.co.uk)



The exhibition demonstrated that the knowledge and expertise is out there - it's a question of making the contacts and sharing the information.

Attendance at the Conference

The conference was attended by 282 people from across West Yorkshire. The total was made up of the following:

Bradford	116
Calderdale	24
Kirklees	31
Leeds	75
Wakefield	36
<b>Total</b>	<b>282</b>

The following organisations and agencies were present at the afternoon 'Market Place' session of the conference, providing information and advice for the almost 300 delegates attending the event:

- Abbey Green Nursery School
- Barnardo's
- Bradford South & West PCT
- Calderdale Parent Partnership
- Calderdale Women's Centre
- Children's Community Support Team
- Children's Fund
- City PCT - School of Nursing
- Connexions West Yorkshire
- Information Shop For Young People
- Kirklees MDC
- Leeds Transition Service
- North Bradford Primary Care Centre
- On Track
- Parent Partnership Service
- St Edmunds Nursery School
- Social Services Support Care
- Staying Put Project
- Sure Start Plus Teenage Parenting
- Sure Start Barkerend, Manningham & West Bowling
- Travellers Education Service
- Turning Point - The Mill, Wakefield
- Turning Point - Base 10, Leeds
- YMCA
- Family Service Unit (FSU) Bradford
- School Health Team - Horton Park
- Bradford SS - Children Services
- Bradford YOT
- Leeds YOT
- Calderdale YOT
- Kirklees YOT
- Wakefield YOT

# Parenting Conference



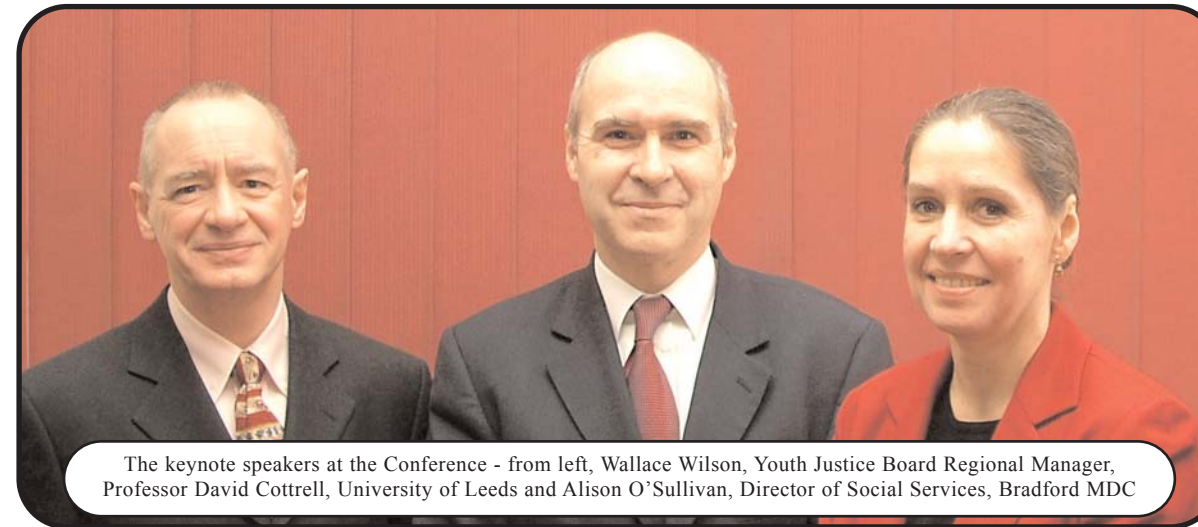
Wednesday, March 3rd, 2004 - Bradford City Football Club Conference Centre

## A First for West Yorkshire

West Yorkshire's first Parenting Conference and Exhibition, hosted by the region's five Youth Offending Teams, addressed the key issues facing all agencies and organisations working with parents, particularly parents of young offenders or those at risk of offending.

Paul O'Hara, Bradford YOT Manager, said, "Supporting the parents of young offenders is a high priority for all West Yorkshire Youth Offending Teams. We recognise the importance of developing close links with all our partners in this vital area of our work. We are very proud to be hosting this high profile event and firmly believe it will increase co-operation and understanding between the many agencies working in this field."

He and his fellow YOT managers in West Yorkshire were pleased to welcome a variety of speakers to the Conference, contributing a wide range of knowledge, experience and expertise. As well as senior professionals and policy makers, the speakers included parents, case workers and those working first-hand with young people and their parents. The event was attended by over 300 representatives from sixty organisations across West Yorkshire. The Exhibition part of the event featured stands from over thirty different agencies and organisations.



The keynote speakers at the Conference - from left, Wallace Wilson, Youth Justice Board Regional Manager, Professor David Cottrell, University of Leeds and Alison O'Sullivan, Director of Social Services, Bradford MDC

### Key Conference Messages

The key to delivering effective services to parents and young people is multi-agency partnerships.

We need to become smarter at engaging with parents - specifically how, when and where we work with them.

There is a need to share knowledge of where resources are located and how to access them.

The key is a change in culture and a recognition of the importance of prevention and early intervention.

We need to ensure that the needs of young people are at the centre of all interventions.

## The West Yorkshire Youth Offending Teams



Sponsors of the Parenting Conference, the managers of the 5 West Yorkshire Youth Offending Teams. Left to right, Jim Hopkinson (Leeds), Stephen Crofts (Wakefield), Stephen Toye (Calderdale), Paul O'Hara (Bradford) and Richard Smith (Kirklees).

The West Yorkshire YOTs are committed to developing and implementing an effective crime prevention strategy, in partnership with other agencies. There is growing evidence that supporting parents can play an important part in this process, particularly in reducing re-offending rates amongst young people.

The sponsorship and promotion of the Parenting Conference by the YOTs is indicative of their support for parents. It is hoped that the event has raised the profile of the issues and brought agencies and professionals together to promote co-operation and communication.

The YOTs, formed in 2000, are at the heart of youth crime prevention strategies in England and Wales. Working in partnership with the police, youth courts, health and social services and other local agencies they ensure that the needs of young people are at the centre of all interventions.

### Introduction - Wallace Wilson, Regional Manager, Youth Justice Board

Wallace Wilson opened the Conference with the question: What makes parenting so important? The answer is complex but it can be summarised, as in the Youth Justice Board guidelines by, "Parenting is a challenging job. Helping parents to develop good parenting skills is an effective way of ensuring that problems in a child or young person's behaviour or development are not allowed to grow unchecked into major difficulties for the individual, their family and the community." This is why parenting is becoming a key issue for Youth Offending Teams, and other agencies working with young people, in meeting objectives for the reduction of youth crime.

Parenting is one of the key risk and protective factors in young people's offending or anti-social behaviour. Dealing with the behaviour of children is vital in restoring relationships that provide structure and support. It is important that parents recognise that parenting skills can be learned - and that agencies working with parents are equipped to develop those skills.

There is no doubt that parenting is high on the political agenda. This can be seen with the introduction of Parenting Orders and Anti-Social Behaviour Orders. In response to this, and to influence the agenda, the Youth Justice Board has set demanding targets for YOTs. They have to ensure that 10% of young people with Final Warnings supported by intervention and community based penalties receive a parenting intervention, and that 75% of parents participating in parenting interventions are satisfied. This has guaranteed that YOTs are prioritising resources to deliver effective services to support parents.

Central to this process is assessment - a tool should be used to identify risk and protective factors. Referral is equally important - everyone involved should understand the criteria for referral. Parenting programmes should have clear aims and objectives and material should be relevant to each individual's background, culture, ethnicity, literacy levels, family structure and gender. Programme structure and content needs to be flexible, whilst maintaining the overall consistency of the programme. Special care should also be taken in explaining parents' legal rights and responsibilities regarding parenting orders. It is important that parents should be given space and encouragement to express their views within programmes and have them taken into account.

Wallace went on to identify the key elements of Effective Practice in Parenting. Firstly, what parents are offered by way of programmes or one-to-one support should be determined by their needs and circumstances. Secondly, programmes should be delivered in places that are easy to get to, at convenient times and where childcare is available. Thirdly, all YOT staff should be trained in identifying parents' needs and conducting assessments. The training of staff is crucial in this respect. In addition, there should be a clear, written policy on parenting services and staff should be given clear guidance on the delivery of voluntary and statutory support. It is clear that pro-active, local reference groups have a key role to play in the development and support of parenting services. It is also important that parents' experiences of the service should be sought, analysed and fed back into the YOT and the parenting service.

He concluded with the message that we need to become smarter at engagement - specifically how, when and where we work with parents. There is a need for an almost infinite variety of services - or at least the knowledge of where they might be located and how to access them.

The Conference itself proved to be valuable in this respect - a great many contacts and links were forged during the day. It is hoped they will increase the pool of knowledge and support available for parents in West Yorkshire.



The provider's exhibition held in the afternoon was a great success, being a forum for much useful networking.

The Conference was supported by a grant from the Home Office to support parenting support to families, to reduce offending and anti-social behaviour.

Parenting Support - Now and in the Future

Alison O'Sullivan, Director of Social Services Bradford MDC, gave a wide-ranging overview of Bradford Social Services' approach to the provision of support to parents and children. She highlighted the importance of partnership in developing a coherent response to their needs.

As a background to Bradford's approach Alison gave a brief history of recent legislation and developments. The Children Act (1989), which was implemented in 1991, established the importance of supporting children at home and introduced the concept of family centres. These measures were strengthened in 1995 by research which identified the value of working alongside families and the involvement of parents - measures aimed at producing better outcomes for children. In 1977, the newly elected government put three priorities at the heart of its policies - life chances for children, tackling social exclusion and the importance of stability of family life. There was also the creation of several new organisations and initiatives including Quality Protects, Sure Start, Children's Fund, Safeguarding Children and the "Every Child Matters" - Children's Bill.

In the context of parenting support, the Bradford Social Services are tackling this on three fronts - through Parenting Support, Family Centres & Partnerships and Commissioning. Alison stressed the importance of establishing Parenting Support as part of the 'Core Business' of providers. In this context she described the concepts of 'retention', 'rehabilitation' and 'permanence'. Retention is provision of services which retain children within or in contact with their natural families. Rehabilitation is the return and rehabilitation to their natural families, unless it is unsafe to do so or there are other firm reasons why this is inappropriate. Permanence is to place children with a permanent substitute family when the identified needs of the child cannot be met within their family, whilst recognising that some children have specific needs requiring a residential placement.

There are several general assumptions in Family Support underpinning the approach to family support. There is a belief that it enhances family life but that life events, such as, bereavement, serious illness or unemployment may cause particular stress. However, families who are supported cope better with stress and this can empower members of a family. There is evidence that the experience of positive Family Support promotes self-esteem, self-reliance and resilience.

Alison went on to say that family support can be informal or formal and that families should experience services as being supportive. The service should include formal support to parents and provide a range of skills and resources in partnership with voluntary/community agencies. The guiding principles that influence the planning of parenting support provision are Best Value, partnership, the identification of need and the safety and welfare of the child. This involves ensuring that the child is heard and engaging the active participation of families and communities. It is equally important to ensure equity of access and flexibility in the provision.

To illustrate these principles Alison focused on the role of the Farcliffe Family Centre in Manningham, one of six Social Services family centres across the Bradford district, and described the range of provision it is able to deliver through its partnerships which demonstrated the breadth of community and local business involvement.



Farcliffe has partnerships with the local community, local nursery schools, Early Years, Sure Start, Children's Fund, Health, Police, Shipley College, Local Upper Schools, Single Regeneration Budget (SRB), New Opportunities Fund (NOF), Radio Leeds and Barclays Bank.

These partnerships have generated a large number of initiatives designed to support parents and children in a variety of ways. Early Start is a 20-place pre-nursery

provision catering for 60 children set up in response to long waiting lists for local nurseries. It provides a service to the local community to improve language and social skills so that children move on to nursery school in a way which enables them to maximise the benefit of Nursery Education. Early Start has also had a positive impact on educational attainment in the community, providing training opportunities to NVQ 2/3 for local people, as well as development and employment for Asian girls. Another initiative is Post Riot Support, which was a response to a community request facilitating meetings between the Family Centre, Police and a group of local women. Children were encouraged to talk and express their feelings and fears, which has helped them deal with what was a traumatic event for the whole community.

The Farcliffe centre also has a team of family aides providing preventative service to families in need and offering practical support to improve parenting skills. They have a focus on health, social development and play. In addition, due on-stream in 2004, there will be the Neighbourhood Nursery Initiative providing a 50-place nursery for children 0-5 years old. Other initiatives include Summer Playschemes, Sure Start, Classroom Assistant courses and nurse training placement. The local business community also contributes through the Bradford Cares initiative and Barclays Bank staff help maintain the Family Centre's grounds.

This paints a very clear picture of a vibrant, responsive and community-focused centre delivering a genuinely diverse range of services for parents and children alike. It is a positive example of how services can be delivered through partnerships.

In conclusion Alison identified a number of future challenges facing everyone involved in this area of social provision. There had to be an understanding of need based on an accurate picture of current services. There was still work to be done on identifying gaps, prioritising investment and monitoring results but it had to be done across the whole system.

She believed the likely commissioning model would be for 'Children's Trusts' in areas with complex service delivery arrangements. The key was a change in culture and a recognition of the importance of prevention and early intervention.

Delivering on the government's "Every Child Matters" policy requires shared vision and strategy, the safeguarding of children's needs and the delivery of targeted services embedded within universal services. At core of all of this is the voice of the child.

Family Group Conferencing

Pat Kalischer, from Safe On The Streets in Leeds - a project supported by The Children's Society - gave an insight into what a family group conference is and how it works.

She explained that family group conferences are decision making forums that focus on the welfare of the child. They are a mechanism that enables the formal state systems to work in partnership with informal family and community systems, recognising the knowledge and expertise of both the family and professionals.

Family group conferences put families in charge of the decision making; the process strengthens families and respects and affirms each family's unique cultural experience.

They also operate very differently because they are not dominated by professionals who tend to take away the responsibility for decision making from families and the community. Family group conferences make sure that power and responsibility is more evenly shared between the family/community (informal) and professional or agency (formal) networks. They provide a framework for families, the community and agencies to work collaboratively safeguarding and promoting children's welfare.

FGCs comprise four stages:

**Stage 1 - The Referral**  
The family agrees the need for an FGC and an independent co-ordinator is appointed.

**Stage 2 - Preparation for the Meeting**  
The co-ordinator, in conjunction with the child, young person and their immediate carers identifies the family network which can include close friends.

**Stage 3 - The Meeting**  
a) Information Giving - Staff from agencies give the family the information they have about the child or young person and about services, resources and support that may be available. The family provide information and can clarify the information and ask any questions they might have. This part of the meeting is chaired by the co-ordinator

b) Private Family Time - The co-ordinator and professionals withdraw, leaving the family to agree a plan that meets the needs of the child/young person; to agree contingency plans; and to agree how to monitor and review the plan.

c) Agreeing the Plan - Once the family have agreed a plan, the co-ordinator, the referrer and the key professionals meet again with the family to hear the plan and negotiate resources.

**Stage 4 - Reviewing the Plan**  
The success of the plan will depend upon the family and professionals working together, and informing each other about the progress of the plan.

For more details on FGCs, go to the Family Rights Group website at:

[www.frg.org.uk](http://www.frg.org.uk)



There was also an opportunity for delegates to demonstrate their own parenting skills with two virtual babies! Many realised it wasn't as easy as some claim...

The conference was closed by Richard Smith, YOT Manager for Kirklees, who highlighted the benefits of investing in the early years of a child compared to the huge cost of dealing with them when they enter the criminal justice system.

Richard believed YOT staff needed to increase their work with parents - he suggested that they needed to get out more! This was not a reflection on their limited social life but a plea for them to view contact time with parents as a worthwhile investment. However, he agreed that YOT staff alone would not be enough and that multi-agency working is the way forward.

The Parent's Perspective

The most powerful presentation of the conference was made by Linda, the mother of a young offender who spoke honestly and openly about her experience of family support. Joined on the stage by Christine Lyons from Calderdale YOT and Beryl Spink from Bradford Family Service Unit, she described the difference this support had made to her life.

There was no history of offending in Linda's family, so when her son got in trouble she was shocked, emotional, angry and confrontational, which caused friction and made a bad situation worse. She admitted, "I believed I was a bad parent and punished myself. I couldn't see a way forward and my relationship with my son was rock-bottom. I just didn't know how to cope - what the Parenting Group did was give me a new way of communicating with him and dealing with my problems." She went on, "I think we need Parenting Groups, like the one I attended, because they help parents to share good things as well as bad. It's a bit like Alcoholics Anonymous. I know my group saved me from a nervous breakdown." Since completing her programme Linda has asked to go on another. She made the audience laugh when she said, "It sounds awful but I felt better when I discovered other parents had experienced worse problems than me!"

Beryl described how very often parents have no mechanism within the family to talk openly about their fears and concerns. There is often no understanding of the problems being faced. The Parenting Groups can be a real outlet for views and, because the staff are supportive and not directive, parents can express themselves openly and resolve a lot of issues themselves.

Christine added that Linda had grown as a person by being part of the group. "Linda has faced up to her problems and re-evaluated her relationship with her son. Things are much better now and there is no doubt the Parenting Groups can really help in these situations,

**Linda's honesty and bravery in talking about her experience impacted hugely on the audience and she received very warm and heartfelt applause. Her contribution was genuinely appreciated by everyone present and brought home to many the real reason they are working in this demanding area - the satisfaction of seeing a family get through a crisis and coming out stronger on the other side.**



Linda (left) with Beryl Spink and Christine Lyons

Effective Interventions in Reducing Offending Behaviour

Professor David Cottrell, Professor of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry (Associate Professor of Psychology, School of Psychology) at the University of Leeds, gave the keynote address of the conference. He described the current research on effective interventions targeted at reducing offending behaviour in young people, with particular emphasis on family-based interventions.

What are the possible causes of offending behaviour in young people? They can be grouped into 3 areas - social, family and individual. The social causes can be peer group pressures, alienation, labelling, schools and poverty. The family causes can be parenting skills, family size, family disruption and moral development. The individual causes can be low IQ, male gender and genetics. Many young people may well be at risk of offending due to several factors from all three categories.

There has been a wealth of research into these areas and Professor Cottrell has been undertaking meta-analyses of the findings. A meta analysis is the process or technique of synthesizing research results by using various statistical methods to retrieve, select, and combine results from previous separate but related studies.

What these meta-analyses showed was some interventions were ineffective but some were not. Seen as ineffective was deterrence, shock incarceration, 'boot camps' or a transfer to criminal court. Many of these measures may be thought of as appropriate but there is little evidence to suggest that they have any positive impact on offending behaviour. The meta-analysis of current research suggests that what is most effective, offering an overall reduction of 10% in re-offending rates, are interventions which are behavioural, skills oriented and multi-modal in design. This means they are active, participatory, problem-solving, and are aimed at the genesis of the offending behaviour - with a focus on proximal goals. The key here is that they are of sufficient intensity and duration, and rigorously administered.

At the heart of these interventions are parent training, functional family therapy and multi-systemic therapy. Professor Cottrell suggested that parent training had limited effectiveness in the adolescent age-range but functional family therapy was effective in reducing re-offending and that benefits were maintained after the interventions. However, the most effective measure was multi-systemic therapy (MST).

This approach required detailed individual assessment with a combination of therapeutic interventions. These could include strategic/structural family therapy, parent training, marital therapy, supportive therapy for interpersonal problems and social skills training. Importance was placed on individualised/flexible interventions with regular supervision to ensure treatment integrity. This makes MST intensive and time-consuming, with average caseloads of 4-8 families. Workers need to be available 24 hours a day and 7 days a week with sessions in the family home and in community locations over a period of some months. However, this leads to reduced behaviour problems in repeat offenders and significant and maintained improvements in recidivism. In the USA the costs were \$2,800 per adolescent for this approach against \$16,000 for custody. There was also a lower drop out rate from MST and reduced levels of substance misuse.

What else is available? The research shows that adolescent-based interventions such as social skills and problem solving, anger management and moral reasoning training are not effective alone in reducing offending, although they may be in combination. School based interventions such as alternative education programmes have a small positive effect on school performance, attitude to school and self-esteem but no demonstrated effects on delinquency. Equally, community based programmes have no demonstrated effects on delinquency. Group homes run on behavioural lines reduce offending and can cost less than ordinary group homes but beneficial effects tend not to be maintained. Therapeutic foster care is effective at reducing behaviour problems and offending.

Medication has a part to play in the process but is not the answer in isolation. Stimulants such as methylphenidate, reduce antisocial behaviour if the young person has Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). Lithium can be used to control severe, explosive aggression and neuroleptics can reduce aggression but sedation and other side-effects are not desirable. It has been shown that ant-convulsants and ant-depressants are not effective

Professor Cottrell concluded that interventions which are behavioural, skills oriented and multi-modal are proven to be the most effective in reducing offending behaviour. If the methods are active, participatory, problem-solving, and aimed at the origins of the offending behaviour they are more likely to be effective. The critical factor is the intensity and duration of the interventions and how rigorously they are administered. The evidence strongly suggests that multi-systemic therapy, in conjunction with functional family therapy and therapeutic foster care, is the most effective means of reducing offending behaviour.

The social policy implications are the costs but the approach is cost-effective in the long term.

There is no doubt these are difficult and complex problems but effective interventions are available. These require services to work together.



Service providers from across West Yorkshire were represented at the exhibition, including staff from the Base 10 project in Leeds, above, who offer drugs information and support.