

The Problem Solving Approach to Youth Offending in Dyfed Powys.

Youth Offending - The National Problem.

Over the past decade or so, successive governments have introduced a variety of responses to youth offending with the one common intention to reduce youth offending.

It is a subject that has aroused strong emotions and given rise to a vast range of proposals and cures - from National Service to family therapy, and from birching to short, sharp shocks.

We have the older generation who remind us of their village policeman and his proverbial 'clip around the ear which never did them any harm', those who have advocated 'back to basics', whilst others believe we should be 'tough on crime, and tough on the causes of crime'. The most recent proposals relate to electronic tagging. No wonder therefore that the many different agencies involved do not always agree on what the main objectives are.

These periodic changes in strategy has done little for the police service, and perhaps even less for individual police officers (particularly those whose service has spanned two decades or more) who have had the responsibility of turning strategies into action. To say that they have caused confusion would be an understatement.

Links between Child Abuse and Offending.

In 1994, whilst in charge of the force's Family Protection Unit I began examining links between child abuse and offending.

Research had shown that there were identifiable influencing factors between certain individuals and their subsequent abuse of children (poverty; social stress; unstable marital relationships; drug and alcohol misuse; lack of education; lack of parenting skills etc.).

There were also identifiable indicators in relation to children who were / may be abused, ranging from attention seeking and poor social skills at an early age, through to depression, overdosing, self harm, drug and substance abuse, and criminal activity as they grew older.

Unfortunately, and due to other commitments I never did manage to progress the intended research or to develop anything of a meaningful nature, other than to highlight to practitioners involved in child protection work basic aspects of the research.

A New Approach to Youth Offending.

In 1996 Dyfed Powys Police, through its willingness to examine new approaches, piloted a small project called 'Conferencing', based on Maori methods of conflict resolutions.

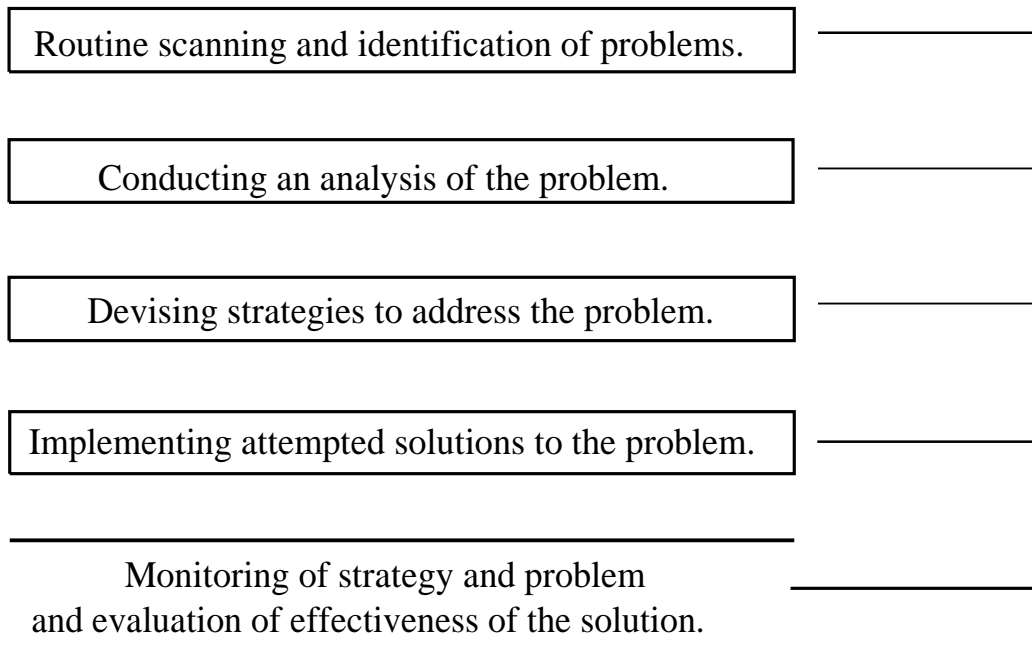
Quite simply, instead of issuing a traditional caution, it is a way of allowing all those who have been affected to meet in a safe environment. It is facilitated by a trained Police Officer who invites all those concerned i.e. victims and their families and friends; offenders and their families and friends, to talk about how it affected them. For the first time, offenders were obliged to hear the details of the harm that their actions had caused.

The Youth Offending Project.

In 1997, on transfer to the Community Safety Department I was tasked with

- (a) examining " youth offending " in Dyfed Powys; and**
- (b) to evaluate the progress of, and further develop the 'conferencing scheme' throughout the force.**

This gave me the opportunity to continue with the work commenced two years earlier. Having had, by that time a favourable introduction to SARA and the Problem Analysis Triangle (PAT) as problem solving methods, I decided that in order for the project to be effective and structured I would adopt the principles of the following process :-



Identifyint the Problem.

The problem was - ` How to develop an effective approach (strategy) for the Dyfed Powys Police in relation to youth offending using ` conferencing ' as a foundation.

Initial Analysis:

Experience and knowledge had already identified that youth offending accounted for a disproportionate amount of offending, so the first considerations were:-

1. How prevalent was youth crime in Dyfed Powys ?
2. How did it compare with other forces/areas ?
3. What were the causes of offending ?
4. What ultimate response/s could influence an identifiable reduction in youth **offending** ?

Analysis of crime in Dyfed Powys identified that offending by 10 – 17 year olds accounted for some 26 % of detected crimes with a similar percentage (20 %) being committed by those aged 18 --- 21 years. This in itself meant that close to half of all our detected crime was committed by children and young adults. If nothing else - it deserved priority attention.

Analysis of the age profile (Appendix A) revealed that the rate of offending rose sharply from 10 upwards, peaking at 17, before showing a stepped decrease for those aged between 18 and 21, with a continuous decline thereafter.

It was therefore clear, that crime committed by young people was our most prevalent problem (at least in terms of resources), and had to be the area which required the greatest concentration of effort.

The pattern strongly suggested that if over the next 3 to 5 years one could influence a reduction in the offending of those aged between 10 and 17 there should be a follow-on reduction in the emerging 18 to 21 year age group.

Research also showed that between 70 and 75 % of first time offenders who were cautioned did not appear to re-offend, at least not for the two or three years that followed.

However, the remaining 25 – 30 % did, and progressed to becoming regular and persistent offenders.

Comparison of Dyfed Powys crime with national statistics showed a similar if not identical pattern.

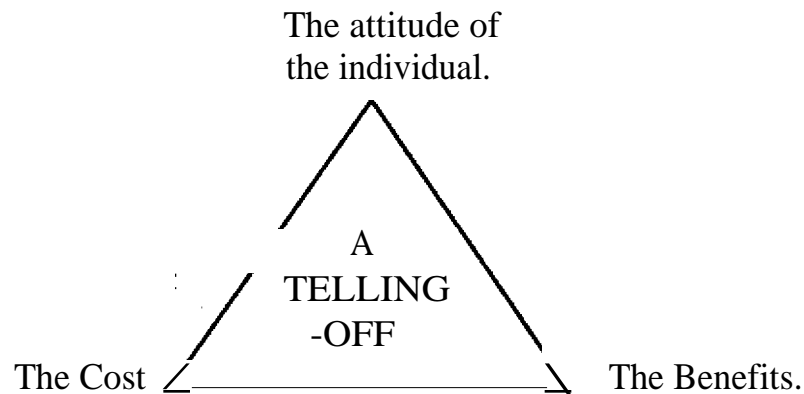
These findings prompted further questions e.g.

Q.1 How effective was the caution process ?

In the absence of any Home Office guidance or in-force training, research with colleagues confirmed that generally, a caution tended to be a telling-off.

Some Inspectors and Sergeants had occasionally tried the 'fatherly' or 'friendly uncle' approach. None could provide any proof of outcome, they simply preferred that approach.

One can assess the effectiveness of a telling-off by using an adjusted PAT triangle as shown overleaf, equating it to a 'telling-off' that perhaps we ourselves may have experienced, and examining the three elements involved.



Attitude

- No-one relates well to the person who is 'telling them off' and therefore the process usually manifests itself into a situation of resentment and indignation against that individual or organisation.

The Benefits

In view of the recipient's attitude, the majority of what is said is lost, and therefore the objective is not achieved.

The Cost

Without an acceptance or acknowledgement of the wrongdoing then there are no quantifiable benefits, in which case it was probably all a waste of time (and resources)

Q.2 Why did the 70 — 75 % of offenders not re-offend ?

Although a positive answer would assist, in reality there was very little that the service really needed to do with them (post offending) because statistics showed that they, for whatever reason, would end their offending, and would no longer present us with any concemable problem.

Q.3 Why did the other 25 – 30 % go on to re-offend ?

Apart from the general consensus of opinion that cautions were fast becoming, or were already ineffective against this group of offenders, perhaps the answer to the next question would assist.

Q.4 Why does someone offend in the first place ?

The `causes of crime' has been researched and commented upon by many eminent individuals, and I would not presume to even suggest to be any authority on the matter save to say that :-

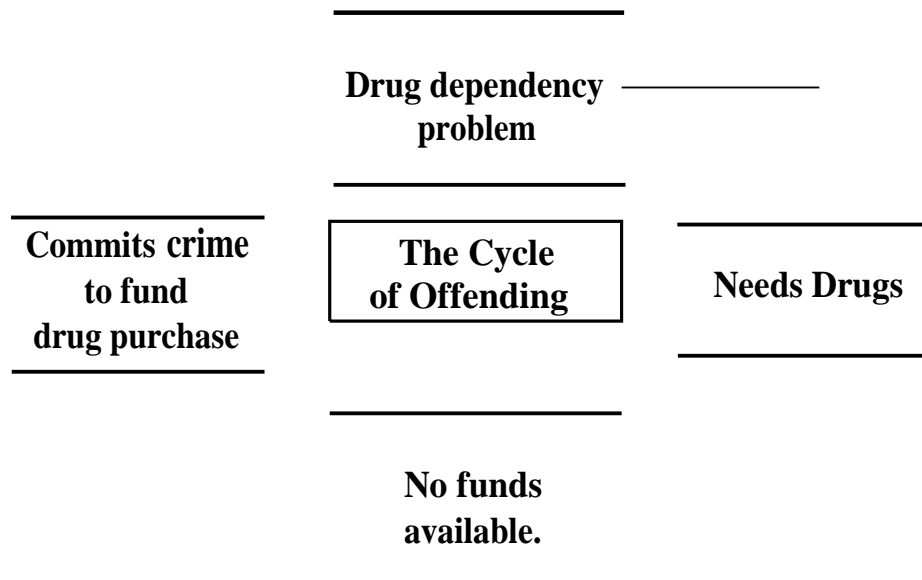
Although there is no way of predicting accurately which individuals are going to offend, young people in certain categories or circumstances are at much greater risk than others.

Factors associated with a high risk of offending are mentioned in detail later in this document. Those who experience many or all of these throughout their childhood and teenage years, are at the highest risk of getting caught up in a cycle of anti-social behaviour, which can lead to offending, which is then difficult to break.

The difficulty for police officers was knowing whether the first time offender being cautioned was one of the 70 % who would never re-offend, or was one of the 30 % who would become a regular or persistent offender.

If we could only ascertain at that early stage, which group a particular youngster belonged to, we might be able to do something to influence their likelihood to re-offend, because if influencing factors are not identified, removed, or reduced, then what probably influenced offending in the first place, would probably do so again.

A typical example of this is a young person who has developed a dependency on drugs :-



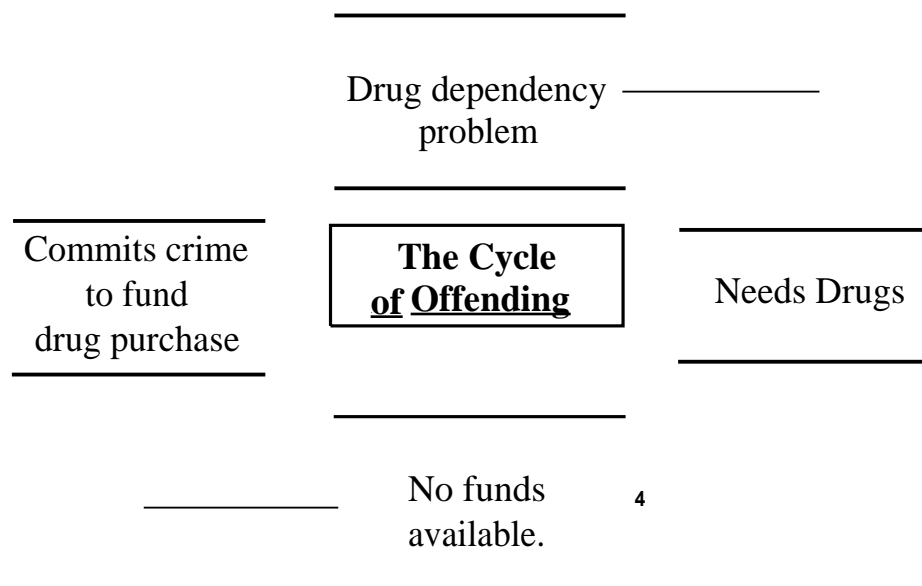
Initially, the young person would purchase drugs using their pocket or dinner money. When that became insufficient he may start to steal cash from his mother's purse or father's wallet, and when that is no longer an option he may as a last (legal) resort, start to sell / exchange personal possessions.

When this option dries-up he / she would invariably turn to crime, and sooner or later, they are caught, which is where we as a service get involved.

If having dealt with that young offender, they leave the police station without their 'problem' being identified, and with no 'problem solving mechanism' arranged, before long they would again be caught up in the 'spiral of offending'.

Traditionally, police officers have tended to focus their attention on the incident / crime only, with little regard being given to the offender or what his / her needs might be.

It may no longer be appropriate for the police service to consider that the 'problem' is the offending. If we are to prevent re-offending, the 'causes' (influencing factors) need to be addressed and the offending cycle broken.



With only having a basic understanding of the causes of crime, and identifying risk factors, we could at least, move towards identifying those who are likely to re-offend, and apply a problem solving approach to them.

Q.5 What is the alternative to Cautioning ?

The only viable general alternative at the time would be to charge, which in most cases would be somewhat heavy-handed, and contrary to the government's aim of diverting young offenders away from the Criminal Justice system_

and finally,

Q.6 What has the court process to offer ?

Any delay in bringing the matter before court, and the impact of what actually happened is usually lost: The degree of loss / injury to the victim is invariably referred to only in its monetary or `visible injury' context, with little regard to the psychological harm suffered by victims and others.

By analysing the participation of offenders in court, and the impact the process has on them, one can see that :-

- (a) they do not have to do anything - not even give an account of why they did it;**
- (b) they will hear an adult, who the court seems to hold in high regard (the defence solicitor) minimising what has happened, and then off-loading responsibility onto others , or other issues;**
- (c) if an apology is offered, it is usually tendered on their behalf;**

and finally, when it comes to the magistrates giving them, for example a conditional discharge (which happens in 20 % of cases), it is paramount to being told :-

" You behave yourself for the next 12 months and we will forget about this little incident "

Has there been any acceptance of responsibility ?

Has there been a realisation of **the harm that has been** caused ?

Has the apology tendered (genuine or otherwise) been conveyed to the victim ?

Has the `offence influencing factors' been identified and addressed ?

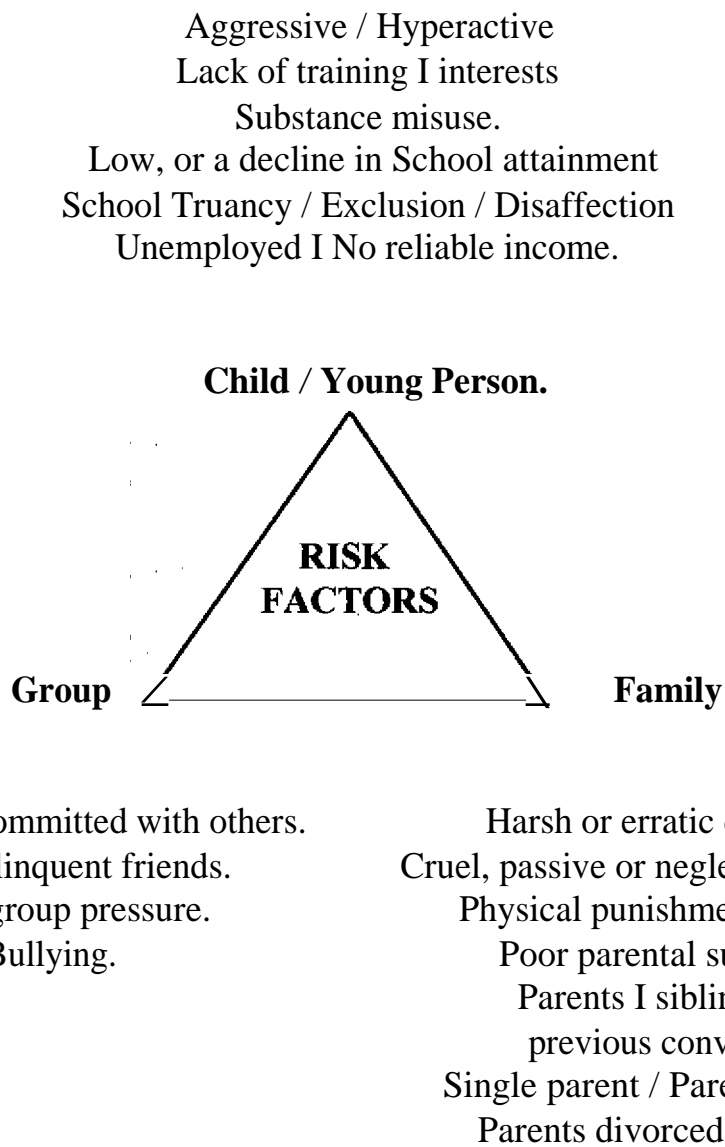
Regretfully not. It is arguable, that even the telling-off style caution would be a better option.

Devising strategies to address the problem.

Rather than responding to incidents on a conveyor belt basis, police officers should apply a problem solving approach, and should in each case ask themselves :-

1. Why did this incident happen ?
2. What can I (or we) do to prevent such an incident from happening again ?

This is where another modified Problem Analysis Triangle can be useful.



Officers would need to examine in detail what factors were identifiable at the time and to use them as part of a risk-assessment process.

They would however need to remember that most young people experience one or more of these 'risk factors' in their lifetime, and their mere existence does not mean that they will re-offend. e.g. simply because a child is from a single parent family does not in itself mean that he I she will re-offend. However, any young person experiencing four or more at any given time must be considered 'at risk' of offending.

A typical example identified during local research, was a boy of 14 whose parents had separated due to the mother's infidelity. The boy, who continued to live with his mother began to resent the 'loss' of his father and blamed his mother for that fact.

Communication between them diminished, and she found it increasingly more difficult to control him. The mother had to supplement her income through some evening work, which meant that he was left to tend for himself two or three evenings a week.

His previous excellent school attainment deteriorated, and more out of spite than anything else, began to associate with delinquent friends that he knew his mother disapproved of. Needless to say, and before very long, he was involved in some anti-social behaviour which led to minor offending.

Research shows that even without any structured formula, parents, teachers, and police officers were often able to accurately predict offending , and would often comment *"I knew this was going to happen. I would **have** put money on him ending up in the police station before long"*.

This being so, surely **then** was the time to react rather than wait for an incident / another incident to happen. The old adage of 'A stitch in time saves nine' still applies .

How could risk factors be identified ?

Police officers have four separate opportunities between arrest and release from custody, when they could easily identify risk-factors.

(a) **Initial Checks** :-

e.g. P.N.C_ I Criminal Intelligence System / Force Crime System / Command and Control system I Family Protection Unit records / Domestic Violence records etc. (these should identify any previous cautions; whether they have featured as part of an incident or child abuse investigation ; or whether the parents have featured in domestic incidents).

(b) **During Interview** :-

As part of the investigative interview to try and ascertain why the incident **happened / what influenced the behaviour.** e.g. an offence committed to fund a drug habit / peer pressure etc.

(c) **Compilation of Antecedents**

When compiling antecedents, the police officer can speak to the offender and parents (ideally separately), ascertaining whether the parents are divorced / separated ; single parent family; parent(s) I siblings with criminal convictions etc.

(d) **Pre or during the Caution Process.**

The Duty Inspector / Sergeant, either during their pre-caution conversation with the parents, or during the caution itself , should try and identify any concerns they may have had. e.g. low, or a decline in school attainment / truanting / recent association with delinquent friends / lacking positive activity etc.

Whilst the police service itself may not have the facilities or the resources with which to address identified influencing factors, there are others, both statutory and non-statutory that can, and by introducing early intervention and support, the risk of re-offending could be dramatically reduced.

One distinct advantage for Dyfed Powys is that the force has never operated any crime 'screening-out' systems which means that by investigating all incidents, including those that some might regard as 'minor', we tend to detect young offenders much earlier into their offending cycle, and therefore any intervention I support can be more impactful.

So what was to be the preferred strategy for Dyfed Powys ?

The evaluation of 'Conferencing' clearly demonstrated that engaging the offender in a discussion concerning their behaviour (with or without the victim being present) was a better way to deal with youth offending. The process was reducing re-offending and seemed to provide all participants i.e. offenders, their family, victims, and police officers with positive experiences – far better than the old fashioned way of issuing cautions.

Having considered all the issues, the most effective strategy had to be 'Conferencing' supported by the problem solving risk assessment process.

Cautions would be replaced by Reprimands, for first time offenders and Final Warnings for second time offenders, or where the first offence was other than minor, but did not warrant a charge. All Final Warnings (whenever possible) would incorporate a 'conference' or at least aspects of it.

The project thereafter was known as :-

The Reintegration of Offender and Community ' (or ROC for short).

When presenting the scheme to Chief Officers and the force Management Board I demonstrated how this new strategy could :-

- (a) reduce youth crime;**
- (b) save resources (less time being spent preparing court files for both Pc's and Support Staff);**
- (c) facilitate spare capacity for patrolling officers to concentrate on other crime prevention initiatives.**

The only 'cost requirement' to the force was the employment of part-time 'Divisional Scheme Co-ordinators' (civilian support workers) to aid the inter-agency risk-assessment process, and to organise conferences. (The ultimate saving from time spent preparing process files etc. would soon off-set this expenditure)

The full R.O.C. process is described at Appendix C & D.

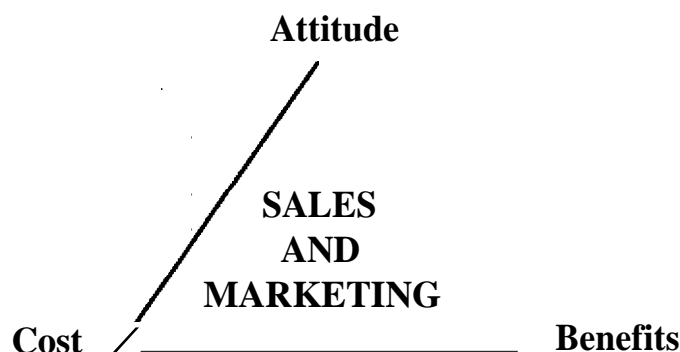
Implementing attempted solutions.

Because the scheme introduced police officers into areas never previously explored, or undertaken by them, it was recognised that a degree of resistance was to be expected because even at the best of times, 'most police officers do not like new ideas and approaches'.

If the strategy was to be successful it would have to be marketed properly. Without a proper footing, it would simply be dismissed and would probably flounder like many other good ideas in the past, never to be resurrected.

If ever I needed a 'Problem Solving Approach' – this was it.

My chosen approach was to use the same PAT triangle referred to earlier, but this time as a 'sales and marketing tool'.



I would need, in relation to :-

Attitude to convince officers that 'conferencing' supported by the problem solving approach was better than the old fashioned conveyor belt system' ;

Benefits

Convince officers that this process :-

- (a) was not a soft option;
- (b) was one that would / could provide them with better job satisfaction ;
- (c) was a process, which for the first time, had benefits for everyone involved - offenders, victims and themselves.

Cost

Convince officers that there were no costs - only savings. e.g.

- (a) It would save them time
(always a real winner with Police officers) ;
- (b) Less paper work ;
- (c) Less process files ;
- (d) Less repeat offenders to arrest, interview etc.

As to Social Services – the approach was exactly the same, and with similar benefits e.g. Less court work ; Less pre-sentence reports ; Less post court supervision and reports; and ultimately (hopefully) less demand for Local Authority secure accommodation (which at £3000 per week would be a big plus). Such was their support and enthusiasm for the scheme, that they offered to match-funded the cost of the co-ordinators.

Training.

The problem solving approach was equally applied to training requirements.

Participants were asked to list each process from arrest to caution, as well as those involving cases that progressed to court, and by concentrating on each individual involved (i.e. the offender, parents, arresting officers, support staff, solicitors, social workers, magistrates etc.), to list all positive and negative aspects of each process from that person's perspective.

As anticipated (and thankfully so) they listed endless negative attributes but were hard pushed to identify any that were positive.

Having described the new strategy, they were asked to repeat the exercise. This time, whilst there was an abundance of positive aspects, they found difficulty in identifying negative attributes_

Without having to use my 'Sales PAT' - a sale was achieved.

Some participants were racing ahead of sessions, and were already discussing how aspects of conferencing, and the problem solving approach, could be applied to all sorts of situations including e.g. neighbour disputes; grievances in the work place etc. (This aspect could create a paper all on its own).

Phase 2 of the project was to apply the system to pre-offending. Again, and without prompting, officers were identifying how, as part of their school liaison work and discussions with teachers, they could apply these principles to identifying those at risk of offending or heading towards disaffection or exclusion, and how the PAT process could be used to tackle such problems.

The basic strategy first adopted by Dyfed Powys, has since been mirrored by the Government's Final Warnings Scheme, but it does not (at least yet) incorporate such a defined problem solving approach.

Monitoring and Evaluation.

Since the commencement of the scheme, over 400 first time offenders have received the new style reprimands, and over the 12 month period since the pilot scheme was launched, only 19 (5 %) have re-offended compared to the 25 — 30 % national average.

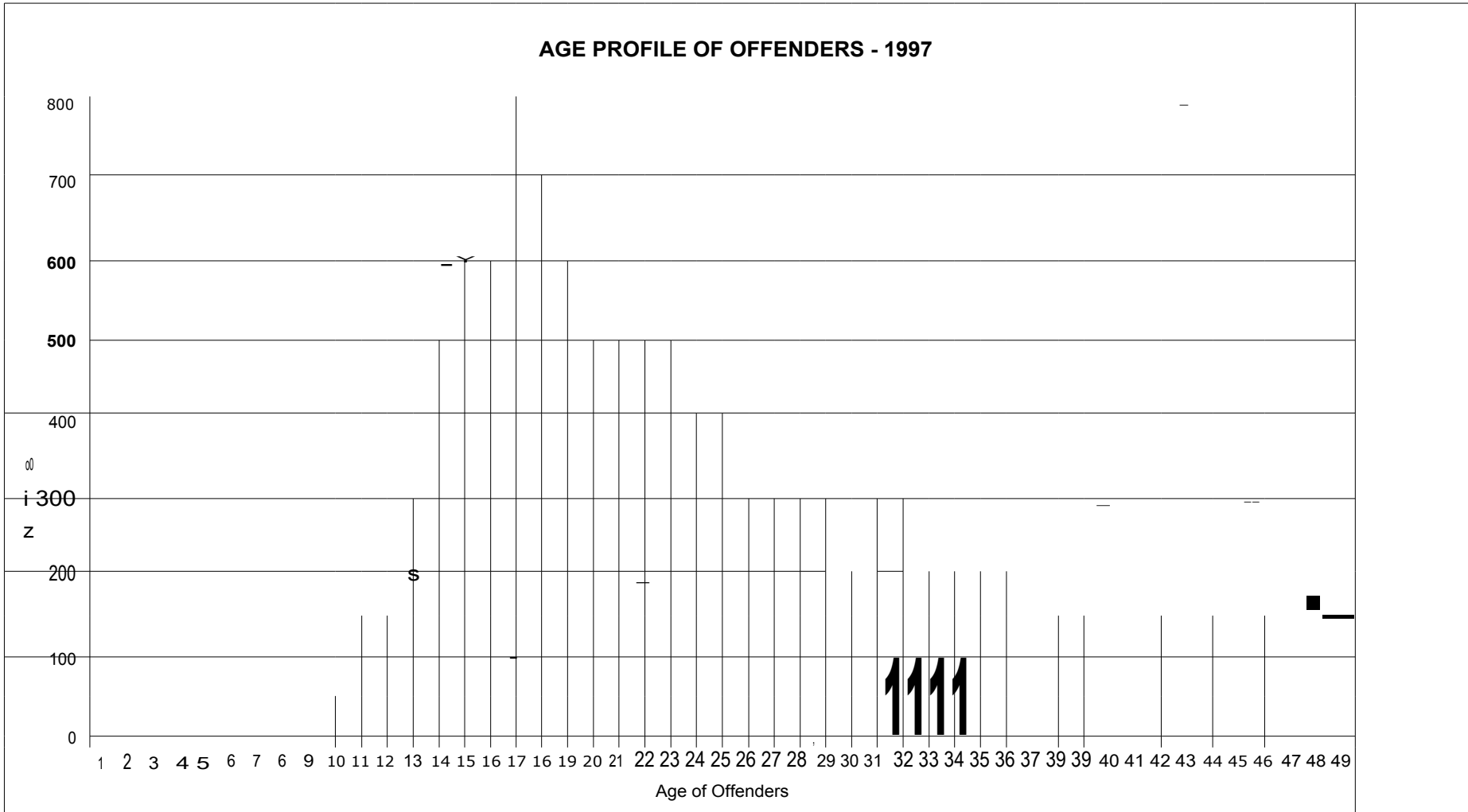
Of those who re-offended and went through the conferencing process none (to date) have re-offended.

The monitoring and evaluation process is, and will continue to be, an on-going process. Early indications are that this 'problem solving approach to youth offending' is effective, and providing we can sustain the momentum, it will without doubt have a positive outcome on re-offending, and will further reduce youth offending in Dyfed Powys.

Police forces may need to direct their attention away from 'processing offenders' towards 'processing outcomes', and whilst the physical 'clip around the ear' may have been effective at the start of the century, I am convinced that our emotional clip around the ear' coupled with risk identification and the problem solving approach, will be far more effective.

Appendices

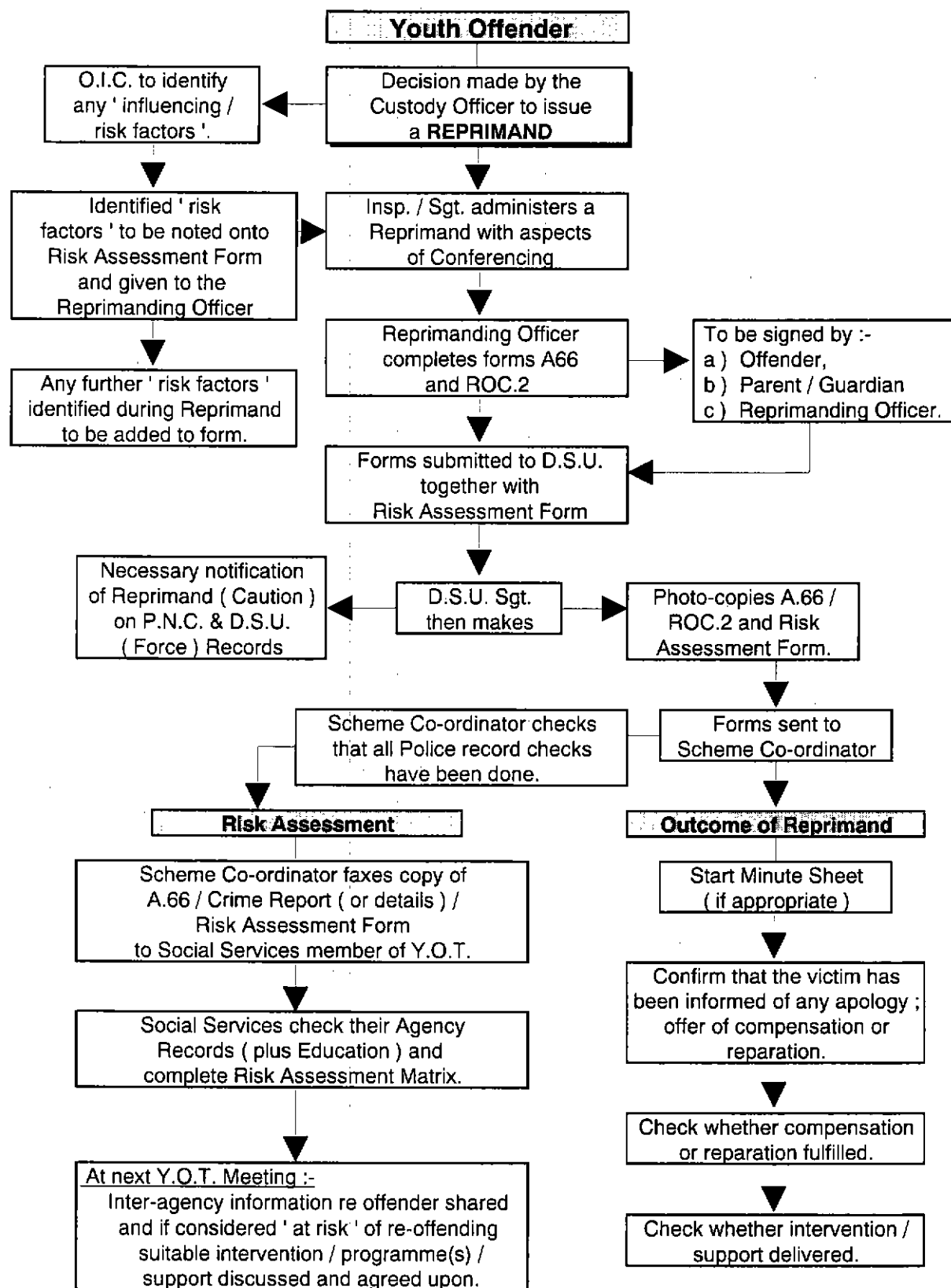
- A. Age profile of offenders in Dyfed Powys - 1997
- B. Crimes per age profile of offenders in Dyfed Powys - 1997
- C. The process of issuing a Juvenile Reprimand.
- D. The process of issuing a Final Warning.
- E. Example of a Risk Assessment Form.
- F. Copy of a Police Review article 12th January 1996.
- G. Copies of newspaper articles re launch of R.O.C.



Age Group	Offences Committed by Age Group		Age Group	Offences Committed by Age Group		Age Group	Offences Committed by Age Group		Age Group	Offences Committed by Age Group	
10	60	2880 Crimes	30	196	1753 Crimes	50	68	335 Crimes	70	7	39 Crimes
11	83		31	229		51	54		71	7	
12	152		32	221		52	44		72	7	
13	257		33	208		53	38		73	5	
14	444	26% of Total	34	182	16% of Total	54	29	3% of Total	74		0% of Total
15	533	2219 Crimes	35	206	817 Crimes	55	30	95 Crimes	75	1	10 Crimes
16	583		36	163		56	13		76	2	
17	768		37	150		57	25		77	2	
18	673		38	111		58	17		78	2	
19	593	20%	39	87	7% of Total	59	17	1% of Total	79	0	0% of Total
20	478	2759 Crimes	40	94	7% of Total	60	11	430 Crimes	80	1	47 Crimes
21	475		41	99		61	20		81	1	
22	434		42	109		62	7		82	1	
23	438		43	105		63	11		83	1	
24	388	25% of Total	44	79	7% of Total	64	9	1% of Total	84	1	0% of Total
25	388	2759 Crimes	45	54	7% of Total	65	5	430 Crimes	85	2	47 Crimes
26	293		46	70		66	13		86	0	
27	277		47	80		67	7		87	0	
28	265		48	60		68	7		88 =	1	
29	276	25% of Total	49	67	7% of Total	69	5	1% of Total	89		0% of Total
									90	2	
Total Crimes		7858	Total Crimes		2570	Total Crimes		430	Total Crimes		47
% of Total		72%	% of Total		24%	% of Total		4%	% of Total		0%

based on L.C.S. data for 1997

The Process of issuing a Juvenile Reprimand.



The Process of issuing a Juvenile Final Warning

Youth Offender

