

Street Weapons Commission

Ian Bell

CHATTER

Commissioner

Ian Bell from Includem, welcome.

Ian Bell

Thanks.

Commissioner

Thank you very much for coming in and giving us the benefit of your experience and your 2 colleagues as well, Liam McKemison and Gary Wilson who I'm sure you'll allow me to say have both had substantial involvement with the police in the past and with the criminal justice system. And are now seeing life from as it were the other side of the fence, and you're here to give us a little bit of an insight into that as well. But could I start with Ian Bell and ask you Ian exactly what you do with Includem, what is Includem and how it differs if it does differ at all from any of the other organisation in the field?

Ian Bell

Sure Geoffrey. My current role is head of quality assurance standards in learning and development and I've been with them for almost 8 years. We are a voluntary sector charity organisation and essentially we were brought into being in 2000 by 3 very senior ex social staff with the key aims of reducing offending behaviour in a specific age group, 14-18 year old young people and the second key aim being that we would increase social inclusion across a wide range of factors. And essentially what we do, we take referrals from social work departments, primarily that's where 90 percent or so of our referrals come from. And the young people that we work with are

identified as the top end of range of need if you like, high tariff young offenders, persistent young offenders. These are the young people who may have been excluded from other projects who are most certainly at risk of a custodial sentence or security placement. And our role is to get involved with the young person, get alongside. We have 8 key elements to our approach and I won't bore you with all 8. Primarily we, everything that Includem does is rooted in the What Works agenda. Nothing's new, nothing's exciting. What makes us a bit different from other organisations is our non rejection policy. We don't throw young people off a project, we don't give up on them. One of our key phrases is stickability. We stay with the young people regardless of the circumstances, regardless of their presentation, and we get alongside and the central plank to everything that we do at Includem is the relationship with our young people. And that can take a little while to sort of galvanise, to develop. But once we've done that and you've got the relationship I don't want to get jargonistic, we take a pro-social role modelling approach to...

Commissioner

You said 'he', nearly always he? Or are there any women...?

Ian Bell

Oh no we have young girls, yes we have young girls as well.

Commissioner

Roughly the percentage of that?

Ian Bell

It's 60:40 in the favour of the young men.

Commissioner

Yeah yeah.

Commissioner

So my question would be, what happens when somebody doesn't engage, cos you mentioned you don't give up? What do you do with the people that don't engage or respond to your services?

Ian Bell

I'm pleased that we have 2 young people along today who they'll probably be able to better answer that at a later stage. We develop if you like a sense of accountability. For example we have a weekly plan for our young people. We have a long term support plan, but on a weekly basis our young people will know when we have a contact with them. So when we arrive and nobody's there we'll leave a small card, we'll maybe speak to mum, dad or carer or a friend and neighbour. And through time you start, you just continue to go back, you don't give up. One of our key elements in the organisation is we believe that every young people every young person deserves their place in society, regardless of their presentation in the community. And we just continue to return. And you develop eventually a sense of accountability. The young people know that we're gonna come back regardless. And in some instances it's maybe taken a month, 2 months, 3 months, to get hold of the young person. But the idea is you know they may not have the ability to process information and think about the consequences for themselves if they don't engage. And historically there is evidence that they haven't engaged previously with other projects, we just keep going.

Commissioner

And do you predominantly outreach or do you have a centre that you work from, or...?

Ian Bell

Everything that we do is one to one. We don't do group work. With the presentation, the characteristics of the young people that we work with, group work would be very difficult. So everything that we do, it's in the community, it's one to one. We do have different office bases throughout Scotland. We started off in the year 2000 we worked in 2 local authorities with 30 young people and 5 staff. We now have 700 young people in 17 local authorities with nearly 300 staff.

Commissioner

And who are the staff?

Ian Bell

The staff predominantly they are very passionate about the young people that we work with, we recruit on the basis that they see through the presentation of the young person. And that can be very difficult at times. Our minimum qualification is an HNC and and SVQ in social care in Scotland. We employ ex social workers, we have community education degree qualified, we have social work qualified, we have ex factory workers, ex prison workers. The key qualities that we look for are resilience, you know this stickability that we talk about, the values and beliefs which is absolutely crucial to the characteristics of the work group, the young people that they work with.

Commissioner

You say you get most of your referrals from social services, do you get referrals from the courts, from the youth justice system?

Ian Bell

It's predominantly through the social work. The courts at the moment there's no provision for the courts to make a direct referral, that's the social work, our

social work colleagues have the statutory responsibility to do that.

Commissioner

Mmm, so you therefore would provide what I suppose could be called part of a young person's sentencing plan?

Ian Bell

Absolutely, we're clearly very much an alternative, a direct alternative to custody. In many cases and I'm sure Liam and Gary can reinforce this in due course, it is last chance saloon for our young people. They may have been engaged in similar projects that might not have the same tolerance levels that we do. We have a very specific, I don't want to sound arrogant because there are a lot of excellent voluntary sector organisations who do similar work to what we do. We have a 24 hour service, we are a very responsive service and the non rejection bit as far as I know is fairly unique in Scotland. And regardless of what happens with the young person we still work with them, that's unless they get a custodial sentence. And even then if it's a short term custodial sentence we remain involved with a view to working them back out of prison, you know, still with some hope.

Commissioner

So to what extent are you able to influence how prisons do offend the management?

Ian Bell

I don't think we can influence in any sort of way, we work in partnership with Pullman for example or with our secure units. That we're not able, we're not in a position to influence policy within the prisons. But we can help in relation to making sure that the young people maintain links in the community, that they have something to come back out to. Especially in a short term

sentence.

Commissioner

Ian I very much like everything you've said and like the philosophy, the value base, the commitment. But as you say there's a lot of other people out there who would probably speak pretty much the same sort of stuff. So if I can turn to the people on your right and left, I don't know who wants to go first, out of you 2, Liam?

Liam McKemison

Oh I'll go first.

Commissioner

And give us your view, I mean you've been involved for coming up to 4 years or 3 ½ years.

Liam McKemison

Yeah.

Commissioner

Or something like that.

Liam McKemison

Well it'll be coming up to 5 years now.

Commissioner

OK.

Liam McKemison

And I [INAUDIBLE] through social work, the social work up till I was 16 and

the social work I was getting, I was getting through social workers like hot dinners. I was getting all these students. And I wasn't able to build up a relationship, a rapport with the social workers. I wasn't getting to know them, I was getting to know their first name and that was it, but kind of [INAUDIBLE]. But I got put onto Includem through a man I'd met in the social work, he put me onto Includem and yes it was my last chance, and I went, I've got nothing to lose, I've lost it all. So I gave Includem a chance and what Includem does provide, seeing I met my first Includem worker when I've met her it was a lady at first and I've met her and I'm 'This isn't gonna work.' And I didn't [INAUDIBLE] know her or anything, I didn't speak to her and tell her how I felt, but she kept plugging away. She didn't know what I was going through, but she was interested enough to find out and that actually meant a lot to me.

Commissioner

Yeah.

Liam McKemison

So as I told her our relationship got closer and closer and closer and she was like the big sister I never had and it was brilliant because she wasn't there to tell me, 'Oh you're doing this wrong, you're doing that wrong.' She was telling me what to do right. And that meant a lot to me and that's how Includem, Includem does help and they don't give up. And I'm a good example of that cos I was gone and Includem brought me back and I can't thank them enough.

Commissioner

And that same worker is still supporting you, or...?

Liam McKemison

But I'm...

Commissioner

Or has she moved on and you're still there?

Liam McKemison

...I'm on a different part of Includem now.

Commissioner

OK.

Liam McKemison

When I went to Includem I was seeing them 7 days a week. Now I'll see somebody once or twice a week.

Commissioner

Yeah.

Liam McKemison

And that's me, that's...

Commissioner

Because that's all the support you need now?

Liam McKemison

That's all the support I need.

Commissioner

Yeah.

Liam McKemison

And it's a fantastic organisation.

Commissioner

And can I ask Gary, can I bring you in?

Gary Wilson

Aye, I was pretty much the same as Liam. I worked with Includem when I was 15 but the first couple of months I couldn't be bothered with it.

Commissioner

Yeah.

Gary Wilson

Just [INAUDIBLE].

Commissioner

Would you agree with Ian it's 2 or 3 months to win you over, right? In my experience it's 2 or 3 years sometimes.

Gary Wilson

Aye... it was about 3 or 4 months before I started opening my door to them and letting them in the house.

Commissioner

Yeah.

Gary Wilson

And then once I started letting them in the house I got to know them and we built a relationship up. And it feels as if you could, I could talk to my Includem worker more than I could talk to any of my family. And any problems I've got,

if I've had any problems, Includem's always been there to help us through it. And it's pretty much just the same as what Liam's been saying. It's a great organisation and they've helped me a lot.

Commissioner

So can you just, sorry Gus, can you just either of you or both of you, you say they've helped you a lot. There's a lot of young people who benefit from the individual giving a back up, interest, commitment.

Gary Wilson

Aye.

Commissioner

But basically it doesn't get you a job necessarily, it doesn't help you with the drugs, it doesn't help you with the crime.

Liam McKemison

Includem have helped me get a lot of jobs, but I've just had a problem with keeping the jobs.

Commissioner

Yeah OK.

Liam McKemison

I cannae hold down jobs but any time I'm looking for a job there's always somebody there to go and take me, to look for jobs. And come in, come to my house, pick me up and take me and go on the computer and that. And there's always somebody there to take me to job interviews.

Commissioner

And that 24 hour sort of round the clock, complete holistic is this trendy silly word that we use these days, but, that's important to you?

Gary Wilson

Aye, you can certainly keep going like that right, but with a fresh person it takes longer to join, but Includem keeps getting in there, but when a fresh person doesn't come, and you can sit and have that argument all night. Seeing you're the worker and you're that person, you've only realised how when you've got that bond, that bond's really really strong. So you can sit and have that argument all night or what if the person doesn't join up right away, well Includem's going to be there all the time. And that's what people have to realise. They won't give up on you and you won't get passed about, you know what I mean?

Commissioner

Yeah yeah OK thanks. Everyone dive in now.

Commissioner

You said about the social worker and you went through 'em like hot dinners.

Liam McKemison

Oh you'd better believe it ha ha.

Commissioner

What, who, why?

Liam McKemison

It was just I kept getting hit with all the students, it was just students come in, oh we'll palm them off to Liam. Or another student, oh we'll palm him off to Liam. That was fair enough, that's the way they done it, but it didn't help me

at all.

Commissioner

Mmm.

Liam McKemison

You know what I mean, fair enough, they brought they do help out certain people, but I was just one of the unlucky people that fell through the net. And actually in a way I'm thankful because if it wasn't, if the social work had helped me then I wouldn't have met Includem and I wouldn't still be with Includem right now.

Commissioner

You say Includem, how much do you think's Includem and how much do you think it's the significant person, that you know the woman who you said is a big sister?

Liam McKemison

[INAUDIBLE]

Commissioner

Just liking her?

Liam McKemison

No it's... oh I liked her a lot but I also hated her a lot. It's 50 50 all the way.

Commissioner

Yeah.

Liam McKemison

You know what I mean, I'm just sitting giving you the good points of her. But she got on my nerves so many times, but that's what I liked. She was there, it's because she was pushing me and pushing me and pushing me. And that's when I hated her, you know what I mean, when she kept pushing me. But once she did keep pushing me I'm going to go like that, oh she was right after all weren't she? You know what I mean? That's good for me to sit and realise that, cos I've only realised that, I've just got that and pushed everything out of my life. And then I met her and she was, she, I'd fall out with her, she'd go away and then she'd come back and I'd be like that, oh thank god she's come back. Cos I kept thinking, oh she's away this time I'm not gonna see her. But no, always there for me.

Commissioner

And have you got somebody like that Gary?

Gary Wilson

Yeah I used to, the person I worked with to start with I've been transferred to the offenders team to the relapse team. And it's only, I'm only 1 visitor, once a week I see them now. And unless I need any help with him. And somebody comes to see me and takes me for a job but the worker I used to have, he used to be about 7 days a week making sure I was keeping myself on track, and I wasn't going out and getting into trouble, none of this stuff. But any time I was in trouble he was always still there trying to help us out.

Commissioner

And the relapse prevention, it says here you've done a relapse prevention course. What good's that done for you?

Gary Wilson

Well it's made me see sense about a lot of things. It's made me think different about the way of life that I want to, I wanted to live. The work I've done with relapse is work that's helped me see sense basically. And they just go through your things about alcohol and how to help you if you've stayed off it. I've had a lot of problems with alcohol in the past. And I've had a lot of help through Includem to stay away from alcohol and drugs altogether. And I've not drunk for nearly 2 year now.

Commissioner

Well done.

Gary Wilson

And I've not touched drugs for round about the same time as well. So in my eyes it's Includem that's helped me do that, cos no, all the rest of my life nobody else has helped me. Nobody else. I've had social workers and that since I was a wee boy. And they've only come out to see me when my mum's had trouble. And they was only coming out to make sure we were alright basically. But apart from that that's the only time we heard from the social workers. But Includem you hear from them every day and they're always phoning up to make sure you're alright and to make sure things have gone alright for you and that.

Commissioner

I've got 2 questions for you. One is you both have spent some time in prison. While you were there to what extent did the education you received help you to catch up on what you missed out at school?

Liam McKemison

In prison?

Commissioner

Mmm.

Liam McKemison

What education?

Commissioner

OK well that...

Liam McKemison

The prisons are too over crowded and say they're gonna go and build more prisons, then there's more space for everybody then that's that. But why? Cos they're just gonna get even more over crowded, you need to sit and spend time with the prisoners and get to realise what their problems are outside. Because when they come in it's just, right, in, bed, out, whatever you're gonna do and that's that.

Commissioner

So being in prison didn't help you to get over whatever problems you had?

Liam McKemison

No but I never really done a long enough sentence to get into more education and all that. But while I was there it never helped me cos I still went back and done all these short term sentences. And that's what I think they need to concentrate on.

Commissioner

Same for you?

Gary Wilson

Yes I was the same, the first time I went in, I didn't [INAUDIBLE] I came back out and just started drinking, taking drugs and all the rest of it. And within 2 or 3 months I was back in again and it just kept going on like that up until the past 2 year. And ...

Commissioner

So what then, given your experience with Includem, what do you feel either of you that can tell other young people who have been on the same path as you've been?

Gary Wilson

Well I would say any advice I've got to say to 'em I'd say to them that don't try and ding Includem, know what I mean. They're always there to help you and they do help you whenever you need help. So don't just put it down as something you don't want to do, at least give it a shot before you before you knock it.

Commissioner

Ian what do you think of um, Liam?

Liam McKemison

Don't give in to peer pressure, cos that's what it was for me. It's trying to fit in with a certain group but then you fit in with that group, that's when you just, you get caught in this vicious circle that, oh he's done something so I need to do something bigger. And it's just ... I know what it's like trying to fit in. Because I was staying in Clydebank and then moved to nearer Glasgow, had to fit in again, then had to move back and fit in. And it's just it's too much pressure to fit in on young people and I'd go and fight King Kong before I'd say no to my pals, know what I mean? I couldn't say no to my pals. I could say no to my mum but not my pals, cos my pals were cooler.

Commissioner

Mmm.

Liam McKemison

My mum grounded me, my pals never. Know what I mean and it's, it is hard and a lot of people to go just say no, just say this and that. But you can't. It's not that simple. Know what I mean. I wish I could sit here and give you all the answers right away, but I cannae.

Commissioner

Sure.

Liam McKemison

And I've been there and done it know what I mean?

Commissioner

Sure sure.

Liam McKemison

I have done it and I haven't got all the answers.

Commissioner

Mmm.

Liam McKemison

I mean it is an uphill struggle, and it's just as long as your feet are still going then...

Commissioner

Well I really wanted to go back to Ian and about the organisation. What you do and the way you do it is pretty brave, courageous and sensible. But it doesn't fit with all the kind of political, governmental frameworks for funding, turn these kids' lives around in 24 hours, that sort of stuff. It takes time and there's no easy answers as Liam has just said. How do you kind of find that path between keeping the project going in the way you want to keep it going, and getting the money to actually be able to do it?

Ian Bell

It's a really good question. And like many other voluntary sector organisations, we wish we could spend the majority of our time focusing on our young people rather than vying for funding. Worrying about which government might be in charge, which administration might be in charge. But essentially there is no other, there is no other way to approach this other than just keep plodding on so to speak. But I'm really keen the commission, I'm glad you asked the question, but I'm keen the commission are quite clear Includem is not an easy option. It's not a befriending organisation. And both Liam and Gary I think they've alluded to that earlier. It's a very intensive, and in the first 8 to 10 weeks of a young person's participation in the programme we see them every day at different times of the day, we want as big a picture of the young person's life as we can. We already have ...

Commissioner

Ha ha.

Ian Bell

...risk assessment information. But it's certainly not an easy option. We're not befrienders, we are very challenging; an appropriately challenging organisation, our workers are challenging appropriate behaviour, inappropriate attitudes. We're unravelling a young person's previous 10-15

years, the values that they've accrued. It's a very difficult task, but we are in a fortunate advantageous position but an extension of social work. Our social work colleagues, there's no way they can see 4-5 young people in a day, that's what we expect from our staff.

Commissioner

Mmm.

Ian Bell

Our staff might carry a caseload of between 8-10 young people so that's like, that's a great feeling. And in the past we've had young people who have said, 'Ian I'd rather go to prison than work with not you personally,' they've very polite, 'not you, don't take it personally, I'm not meeting you twice a day, you're not intruding in my life and getting to know who my friends are, what I'm up to and what I'm doing.' And that's essentially what we're trying to do within a very structured support plan that we have identified what the needs are of the young people. There's predominant alcohol issues, there's drugs issues, relationship issues, there's accommodation, there's employment, and when you work with a high tariff young offender group that we do, who may have robbed 10 or 15 houses, broken into cars, who's going to give them a job? Who's going to keep them in a job? That's the, we mentioned relapse earlier and I was keen to let you know that we...

Commissioner

On a particular point, in finding employers as this case study progresses, getting into work is obviously one of the prime objectives. I mean how do you sell this concept to an employer? Is it easy?

Ian Bell

With enormous difficulty, to be honest. It's so, and I can empathise with many

employers but I think government have to sort of, and I think they need not an employment or training, not an education or employment in training, that made some inroads to it. But with our particular group the rationale behind the community thinking if you like is, you know, you've got young people who are law abiding young citizens, they're completing standard grades in school, they're not getting into trouble, so they should have first call on jobs. And maybe that's right, maybe that's right. So in places that's a more difficult predicament as to how we get young people like Liam and Gary into employment. And all we can do is to persevere, make good personal local links, look out for the values and beliefs driven businessmen in the community, which is really quite a difficult task. And it is one of the most important. Research will show that gaining employment is a huge you know indicator that the likelihood of re-offending will reduce.

Commissioner

Settled address, settled employment and settled relationship.

Ian Bell

Mmm.

Commissioner

With the man or the woman [INAUDIBLE].

Ian Bell

Absolutely.

Commissioner

It's getting those 3 in place isn't it? And all the figures say if you've got those 3 then things are going pretty well.

Ian Bell

Absolutely.

Commissioner

Very difficult to get.

Ian Bell

Now we mentioned relapse earlier, the relapse aspect of the Includem service is towards the end of a young person's Includem career if you like where the research has shown the wash out effect. Regardless of all the gains that young people have made in a year or 2 years. And we are very much a long haul organisation, you don't change young people like Gary or Liam overnight. But the gains that have been made, if we sort of work with Liam for 2 years and said, 'OK Liam that's great, you've stopped offending, we've helped you become more socially included.' Let him go, very quickly those gains are, they call it the washout effect. So the relapse aspect focuses on [COUGH] employment, leisure opportunities and the social inclusion aspect of what we do, which is very very difficult.

Commissioner

Yes I mustn't hog this, Mark I think, did you want to come in? Yes I mustn't hog this, Mark I think, did you want to come in?

Mark

Yes I just wanted to say so the 24/7 phone line I mean that must be quite sort of take up a lot of resources to sort of fund that and deal with the responses from it. But I was thinking, what about if I'm a young person, that was engaged with another like say offender management or you know children's service and I wanted help, what's the sort of response that you'd offer there?

Ian Bell

Because social work pay for the service you know you made the point it's not a cheap option. We would love to open it up to any young person, but sadly that's just, you know it's just not a possibility. We need to look after the 700 young people that we have. But the helpline is such a key aspect of the Includem service. As you could imagine you know some people might take the view it's inconsiderate that young people don't offend 9-5. You know they do offend on a Friday night or a Saturday night. And the way our helpline works, and it's an integral you know aspect of our model, and it's a proactive aspect of the model, we can predict you know if Liam's had a bad couple of days we'll let the helpline know. What happens on the helpline is a project worker who has worked a full day, they've worked their 8 hours, at 5 o'clock at night they take responsibility for this phone and between 5 and 9, 5 at night and 9 the next morning, they respond to the helpline calls. And it sounds quite twee but the use of the helpline from a worker's point of view, it maybe that you know there are no crises, there are opportunities to engage, to get to know the young person. And that's the first opportunity normally that the worker has to sort of get to know the young person, when they've no accommodation for example, they're roofless, they have nowhere to stay, it's a Friday night, it's 1 o'clock in the morning, it's cold, it's wet, which sometimes happens in Glasgow, then the Includem worker would be called, they would respond and we would go out and meet the young person. And it's an invaluable tool in our armoury in relation to affecting change in our young people.

Commissioner

Do you do prison visits as well?

TALKING OVER EACH OTHER

Commissioner

Must be the last question of yours.

Commissioner

What...?

Commissioner

I've got 2 last questions huh.

Commissioner

What impact then have you had on rates of re-offending?

Ian Bell

We're really proud, yes we have in one recent project in Glasgow the re-offending rates were around 17 percent which is just a phenomenal re-offending rate. If you take into consideration the national average. And...

Commissioner

17 percent?

Ian Bell

17. In the last 8 years or so Glasgow University independently evaluated the work that we've been carrying out and we have reduced offending and we have increased social inclusion. We've kept our key aims and objectives very simple. For very obvious reasons. There's a lot of softer objectives you know increasing the young person's ability to think consequentially, to problem solve, increasing their moral reasoning skills, increasing their victim empathy awareness, their knowledge. But essentially we do reduce offending and we do increase social inclusion. And the fact that we have grown, a previous chief executive worked out that over a 5 year period our growth rate was

1,000,000 percent. And I mentioned earlier in 2000 we had 5 staff and 30 young people. Some 8 years on we have over 700 young people, so very obviously we're doing something right.

Commissioner

And that 17 percent is as compared to a national rate of about what, 55 percent?

Ian Bell

Yeah around 55 to 65 yeah.

Commissioner

So Liam, Gary, it's been a tough life for you and a tough life for the people round you. 2 or 3 years hence, looking forward, where do you want to be and where do you think you'll be? Rotten questions eh?

Gary Wilson

I'd rather just be settled down with my girlfriend and my daughter. And just hoping I'll be not going back down the same road.

Commissioner

That's what you want, yeah. Which is what most people would want.

Gary Wilson

Aye.

Commissioner

But do you think that'll happen? Confident it'll happen?

Gary Wilson

Aye, aye, I think it will happen.

Commissioner

Yeah?

Gary Wilson

I know it will happen.

Commissioner

You know it will happen.

Gary Wilson

Mmm.

Commissioner

Good for you, good luck.

Gary Wilson

I'll stick to it.

Commissioner

Liam?

Liam McKemison

I only want one thing. I just want to be free. Cos all I'm dealing with this stuff I've done in the past right now. And ... now that I'm dealing with that I'm coming through all the feelings and emotions that I couldn't feel when I was a teenager, cos I didn't feel them then. I was a man and I could fight King Kong but don't talk to me about emotions and that. And now that I'm starting to realise it's helping me. And once I deal with all that then the world's my

oyster. That's all I can say.

Commissioner

Keep thinking.

Liam McKemison

Oh you'd better believe that.

Commissioner

Well on behalf of all of us, can I wish you both good luck, to Ian thank you very much for what you're doing, and good luck to the organisation.

Ian Bell

Thank you indeed, thanks a lot.

Commissioner

And particularly thank you all 3 of you for coming today.

CHATTER

APPLAUSE

CHATTER

CUT