

Street Weapons Commission – Liverpool

Darren Hulse

Cherie Booth

Hello, Darren.

Darren Hulse

Hi.

Cherie Booth

Darren, you've been working what for seven years now with young people.

Darren Hulse

At Fairbridge.

Cherie Booth

With Fairbridge and with young people here in Liverpool. Can you tell me what sort of things do you do with your clients and what sort of people are they?

Darren Hulse

Well, last year we worked with over 200 young people aged 13 to 25 who aren't accessing any form of education or employment. My job role is basically to try and source the young people, find out where they're coming from - that's...It's goes through a range of statutory and voluntary organisations, such as Social Services, Youth Offending Teams – and hopefully inducting them on to a tailor-made course to suit their needs with you know the goal to hopefully get them back into mainstream provision, be it employment or a training course for the future.

Cherie Booth

And how do you tailor these courses exactly?

Darren Hulse

Well initially it's my job to get these young people to come through the door. And what we do

is provide a safe environment for these young people. So try and get them out of the gang cultures or the territorial areas of where they live in the city centre and provide some challenging courses that offer, hopefully, some basic vocational support and qualifications along the way.

Cherie Booth

But what can you possibly offer to these young people that's more glamorous than being the leader of a gang?

Darren Hulse

I mean, yeah, well it's a double-edged sword in a way. I mean you know we're realistic in terms of what we can work with. Hopefully though, the sense of achievement for a young person in a kind of social aspect is a lot greater than say money, for being with a gang, for dealing drugs, for the gun culture. And I think a lot of young people haven't really had the kind of insight to look into things. Basically the kids that I work with have been constantly told, "No, you can't do this." They're disinfected, disengaged and they think what you do is build a rapport with these young people to hopefully engage them into something that they enjoy.

Cherie Booth

But how do you actually hook them in in the first place?

Darren Hulse

Well, my lecturer always said to me to be friends with a young person is to empower them to make decisions themselves. My job role is to hopefully build a rapport with some of these young people. Be it if they were taking the Mick out of me or you know wanting to spend some time, I'm there to listen to them. Hopefully build on that rapport that I'm a friend there that can support them along the way.

Cherie Booth

Mark.

Mark Johnson

I'm interested to know what sort of role the mentors play at Fairbridge?

Darren Hulse

Yeah, well we work closely with learning mentors throughout the schools, as I say with statutory services; both Youth Offending Teams, Social Services and schools. I have links with all of them. I do tend to look towards working closely with the learning mentors for the young people who are risk of leaving mainstream provision. So an alternative, they would come to Fairbridge, do

some courses with us and then over a six-month period we've hopefully re-engaged them back into the school system. Also we're realistic in terms of some of the young people that might not be the goal straightaway, it might be more long-term. But again working on their social skills through Personal Development Plans and one-to-ones with myself, we hopefully in time re-

engage them back into some form of mainstream provision, be it going back into school or some form of college.

Mark Johnson

So you said about one-to-one. Do you work on like a deeper level? So what happens if a young person comes and presents say a drug and alcohol problem or child abuse or...?

Darren Hulse

Yeah, well I mean I work for a voluntary organisation so I've gotta be realistic in terms of what work I can actually do there. However, as part of the Outreach Development Worker, if that was highlighted in the PDPs, the Personal Development Plans, for that young person I would look towards using other statutory services to you know help with holistic approach with the young person. I think our main goal at Fairbridge is to offer that safe environment to which a young person can come and access us, say what the problems are and hopefully have built a rapport good enough for that young person to get them involved with the place that they need.

Cherie Booth

But what do you actually do with them? I mean I'm a young person, I think you look quite cute

so I think 'Oh right I'll come along and chat to you for a bit. It'll be better than going to school and learning about geography.'

Darren Hulse

Yeah. I mean that's one of the arguments that could be fielded out there in terms of you know they're coming along and doing abseiling or rock climbing or they're doing that they'd enjoy more. However, the young people that I am working with are disengaged from the national curriculum, they're not attending school. You know to get them through the door is a massive challenge in itself with this gang culture; everything's so territorial. And I think it is breaking down them initial barriers. Admittedly sitting there and saying, "I can offer some basic vocational qualifications along the way, some ASDAN qualifications," but again you know that's not realistic. In a way it's not gonna get you all the GCSEs, all the A-Levels in the world, but it's a stepping stone in a sense to re-engage back into some form of mainstream provision.

Commissioner

Can I ask you, Darren, I mean I used to be a big sceptic about Fairbridge and I've become more positive about what it does in recent years. But the paperwork says that you offer a unique combination and I read that from every organisation that is doing this re-engagement work.

Darren Hulse

Mmm hmm.

Commissioner

And it's a crowded field.

Darren Hulse

Yeah.

Commissioner

So, one issue is how you define your distinctive contribution as opposed to other, the Prince's Trust or the Western Spirit or Drive For Youth or Youth At Risk or whatever? And the second question is the temptation of cherry picking; in other words you actually don't get to the really sharp end of young people because there's so much pressure to achieve targets within certain timescales that those are the most challenging difficult kids to work with and they'll take longer than you can afford literally.

Darren Hulse

Yeah. I mean I think we've gotta be realistic in terms of the young people that we're working with. I mean to sub-categorise them, you know the majority of which that I work with, are disaffected and disengaged from mainstream provision. Again some of them it does take a longer time for the hardest to reach young people and at times we've, with the money and the funding,

we've got to think of the majority and not the minority, which is a shame. The way that Fairbridge excels itself, I think it offers a tailor-made programme to each individual really, in terms of they come to us on an access course initially after seeing myself. Now that's over a four-week period. After which they leave with three credits towards a level of award on the ASDAN. And

that's four weeks out of their lives. That's...Over a 10-day programme they can leave with a basic vocational qualification or a starting point. Now they can access afterwards myself as a PDP that'll sit down and action plan them. However, again it's just a sense of achievement that that young person has got a qualification under their belt in such a short space of time.

Mark Johnson

So you've said about and mentioned gangs and sort of crime quite a lot. How big is the problem in your view in Liverpool?

Darren Hulse

I mean well the seven years I've worked there, worked in Liverpool, I'd say you know it's, it's massive. It's got worse five years onwards now. If you look over 15 years there's, I mean there's over ... an increase of unemployment you know and all these young people, the learning mentors themselves, it's just a massive number. The young people I'm working with

I'd say 90

percent are affected by drugs. The gang cultures, you know it's, it's obvious, it's on the streets. And I'm not saying that Fairbridge can change any of that, but what I would say it does offer that stepping stone to try and re-engage some young people back into some form of mainstream provision that would help them along the way.

Mark Johnson

I think that's quite a contrast to the other guests we've had on earlier to what you're saying. They're saying the problem's quite small and you're saying it's quite large.

Darren Hulse

No, I, I would say it's massive.

Mark Johnson

Mmm.

Darren Hulse

And you know with the young people that I'm working with. It's getting easier. You know from what the media is, the computer games that are out there, everything has become more desensitised. Everyone thinks it's the norm to read these things in the papers of you know the violent attacks that are happening. Young people that I'm working with constantly they think it's the norm to carry guns under their beds and hold 'em for other people, because of the money that they can make from that.

Cherie Booth

And are you saying that, of the young people that work with you, that most of them have access to guns?

Darren Hulse

I wouldn't say the majority have, but there is a few young people that I've had from medium one-to-one work with that have experienced you know this gun culture, which to me is a scary thing for a 14 and a 15-year-old to come to me and say, "Well, I've had this gun under a bed

and I'm gonna get £2,000 for it if I hold onto it." You know they come from socially disorganised backgrounds that are not gonna see that sort of money. And I think the scary thing is, you know, how do we get in front and change that? And hopefully Fairbridge has got kind of a place that they can come to and talk about these feelings, that's a safe environment, that we can hopefully try and tackle this.

Cherie Booth

And how do you go about doing that though?

Darren Hulse

Well, hopefully by setting their confidence, working on their interpersonal and social development. You know I can't change anyone's behaviour; that's the individual themselves. The only thing that I can hopefully do is plant a seed in someone's head and then think down the line 'Actually this isn't the place I want to go. This isn't the right way'. And hopefully from there they'll make their decisions and do the right thing.

Cherie Booth

But what is it that you're doing to plant a seed in this young person's head that his teacher didn't do or his social worker didn't do?

Mark Johnson

Probation.

Darren Hulse

Well I think I can ... The easier thing for me working for a voluntary organisation I can go more hands-in if you like, in a sense of I can be more actively as a friend of a young person. So I can work on their interpersonal social development a lot easier I think. In terms of Fairbridge itself, I think it's a bit flexible in terms of what it can work with with young people. You know the courses that we provide, be it go on DJing courses, or graffiti, expressive art, you know there's a whole host that we can do and change, we don't have to stick to a specific kind of

structure like schools do. Importantly schools have to do that, but we're quite flexible in dealing with the kids themselves.

Mark Johnson

So what's the average time that Fairbridge works with a young person then?

Darren Hulse

On average I'd say with my caseload it would be about six months before we can re-engage them back into mainstream provision. But I've gotta be realistic, the doors are always open. We work with 13 to 25-year-olds, and obviously with some of this interpersonal social development there is no quick fix, you're right. We can offer some basic vocational qualifications, but that young person's got to be willing to make that change themselves.

Cherie Booth

We heard from one of the earlier witnesses the discipline that you know you have to help young people understand the importance of discipline and self-discipline. Do you agree with that and how do you engage young people in understanding the importance of discipline and responsibility?

Darren Hulse

I think initially hopefully by building a rapport with the young people to get in there really, because there's no sense of me going in to say a learning mentor's office, or out on the streets, and saying to a young person, "Well you shouldn't be doing this," or "you shouldn't be doing that." It's trying to give them informed decisions of you know how they can benefit themselves; get out of this socially disorganised kind of background that they're used to. And I think with a lot of kids the self-esteem and the confidence, if you work in areas like that then I think that's gonna work tenfold than any money can offer.

Commissioner

Help me out cos I sort of vaguely know about your organisation. So your job is you go onto

the streets and you walk along the street and there's a gang standing outside the off-licence getting pissed...

Darren Hulse

Yeah.

Commissioner

...and you walk up to them and you say, "Hey... I mean..."

Darren Hulse

The Outreach role, the Outreach role...

Commissioner

...how's your self-esteem? I can help?" How does it work?

Darren Hulse

The Outreach role used to be like that. But, however, me going with this haircut into that kind of gang environment...

Commissioner

You would get stabbed [INAUDIBLE].

Darren Hulse

Yes. Yes, I would. Again it's working with statutory services and other voluntary agencies to provide more of an holistic approach.

Commissioner

Could you stop saying the word holistic and say ... I don't know what the means.

Darren Hulse

Yeah. I mean, well, getting the right people involved. I mean they might have a YOT worker, a Youth Offending worker, that I can go with to introduce myself. It's again finding the right environment for these young people. I don't go out...I have been out on the streets, but in terms of you know the numbers as said before you know, realistically we wouldn't meet the targets.

So I have to look to other agencies to help me; learning mentors, the schools, the Social Services.

Commissioner

So he's a Social Worker, he's ... I have got to see him because I'm scallywag hanging out on Smithdown Road or whatever, and he says, "Ooh, you should talk to this guy from Fairbridge."

Darren Hulse

Mmm hmm.

Commissioner

You come in, if we get on you'll befriend me, try and convince me to come on to this course and...

Darren Hulse

Yeah.

Commissioner

...feel better about myself, and then at some point decide I don't want to go back to hanging out on the street, I wanna go and do something else with my life. Is that the way it works?

Darren Hulse

I know it seems basic and a bit salesman if you like, but you know it's trying to hone in on what that young person wants to do. There's a certain activity that Fairbridge can offer that

young person; then at first say it was abseiling, rock-climbing, then I would offer them programmes out to that young person.

Cherie Booth

But what if the young person says, “Look what I really want to do is to have a good time with very little effort”?

Darren Hulse

That’s the majority of the young people that I work with.

Cherie Booth

Yeah well, exactly. Well clearly you know that’s not the way ahead is it. So how do you change, how do you engage and say to them, “Well actually to have a really good time you have to put in effort”?

Darren Hulse

I think it’s a slow process in itself. I mean it’s like secondary socialisation; they’re just used to what they see, the computer games...

Cherie Booth

What’s secondary, what is secondary socialisation?

Darren Hulse

Well I think their friends, the media influences of what they’re used to, you know the change. It’s gonna be a hard thing to make kids just change their minds [CLICKS FINGERS] just like that. But I’m just trying to tap into something that they enjoy doing, and then hopefully incorporate the plan, do, review kind of Personal Development Plan.

Commissioner

What’s the success rate? I mean what’s, you know, six months down the track what’s the kind of proportion you’ve re-engaged in educational training?

Darren Hulse

Last year we worked with over 200. We engaged with...

Cherie Booth

That's you in Liverpool?

Darren Hulse

In Merseyside, yes. And we had a retention level of 80 percent ... No, 80 percent staying on the course.

Commissioner

Those who stay at your course?

Darren Hulse

Staying on the access course and getting...

Commissioner

Yeah. Yeah.

Darren Hulse

...some form of basic vocational qualification...

Commissioner

Yeah. And re-engagement in learning?

Darren Hulse

From that I'd say over 60 percent re-engaged back.

Commissioner

Of the 80 percent?

Darren Hulse

Yeah. Back into the schools.

Commissioner

Thanks.

Darren Hulse

Or some form of other provision. So it's quite...

Commissioner

And at what point do you say this has worked?

Darren Hulse

Well, a school itself or a college course.

Commissioner

Okay. Yeah, yeah. Okay.

Commissioner

When do you say it's worked? After three months back at school or six months, a week?

Darren Hulse

I'd say the majority of cases it would be about six months for a young...

Cherie Booth

So six months back at school or in college?

Darren Hulse

Yeah. And that could be a lot...

Commissioner

So that's when you've hit your, that's when your boss will say, "Well done, you've hit your target"?

Darren Hulse

No, my retention is to, you know my number is to work with over 160 young people a year. Now I'll have a backlog, a caseload of young people that have still got their Personal Development Plans to work with. It might be a slow process. Within six months I might have a young person that has gone back to school for a day. The other days are spent with us. But you know the main thing is we've got them in school for a day doing the maths and English. And that might just be for a morning, but if you've worked, you know, if they've done that that's a massive achievement in itself for some of these kids.

Commissioner

We had the total police force here earlier on and they gave a very, you know, a very impressive about one hand total war on the criminal tale of gun carriers we know who you are, we're gonna do you within the law obviously, and on the other side the kind of go down there and there are the people that will feel your pain and work on your self-esteem and all of that. What's your view of the 200 young people you worked with last year about their view of the Merseyside Police?

Darren Hulse

To be honest with young people it's quite negative in a way. But you know you've only gotta look at you know what...

Commissioner

Because they're trying to stop 'em doing something illegal or what?

Darren Hulse

Well I think it's that but it's a cultural thing in a way as well. You know I think with these kids today it's like again it's the computer games that they play, you know it's how they hang out, it's the music that they listen to. You know they see the police as some sort of...

Commissioner

You sound about 60.

Darren Hulse

I know.

Commissioner

That's what I say.

Cherie Booth

But that...

Darren Hulse

It has got a negative approach. I mean there has been a few police officers that have worked closely with us in the street crime kind of thing. When they do come to the centre, when they do take part with the young people and they do get to see a person face-to-face, then you know relationships can be built that way I think.

Cherie Booth

Well, Darren, I think you've told us that it takes a long time to change life around. There's not a quick easy fix, so thank you for coming and for the work you do with...

Darren Hulse

Well thank you for having me.

Cherie Booth

...here in Liverpool.

Darren Hulse

Thanks a lot.

Commissioner

Thanks.

Commissioner

Cheers, Darren. Thanks.

Darren Hulse

Cheers.