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LIVING IT

CHILDREN, YOUNG PEOPLE AND JUSTICE

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YOUTH ADVANTAGE OUTREACH A CHANCE TO CHANGE

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YOUTH ADVANTAGE OUTREACH was formed 14 years ago as an initiative between the Army and the Police. Conducted by the Army's Recruiting Group alongside Police Scotland and other agencies, the five day residential courses provide diversionary activities for young people aged 14-17 who are on the cusp of crime, disadvantaged, disaffected or disengaged from society. The course is also open to young people who have no offending background but may just have an interest in the armed or uniform forces, or who lack self-confidence or esteem. YAO regularly reaches out to over 300 young people per year.

I'm writing this article before my last course as full time staff at YAO, as I am now attending full time education. A nervous anticipation goes through the staff team as we await the young people's arrival. In store for them is an intensive five day residential course which aims to teach the Army Core Values and Standards as a firm foundation and also complies with GIRFEC principles.

I am a civilian worker on the course, alongside police officers, social and youth workers or teachers. The army team delivers the course and together we run Youth Advantage Outreach. The course has evolved massively in the five or so years since I first attended.

Inductions, team games, kit issue, sports and first aid training is delivered on day one. Tuesday is the first of the

full-on structured days with everyone expected to be ready outside the cookhouse by 7am. Physical activities take place predominantly outside: evening activities are less formal and take place in a classroom. The young people do have some time out in the evenings before lights out at 10.30pm.

The intensity of the course can overwhelm some of the young people; it is designed to positively challenge them. Recognising those who are finding it tough who need that extra bit of is a skill for the varied staff team. An effective tool to break down barriers, in particular if the course is staffed by police officers, is for the staff to take part in the activities alongside the young people. At the start of the week many of the young people don't have a particularly good relationship or perception of the police. Come the end of course they admit they have changed their minds - one of the many changes that can take place in just five days.

One of the classroom inputs is a talk from an ex-offender who attends the five day course and also provides an evening input to the young people. It is an emotional talk to inform the young people of the dangers and consequences of alcohol, drug misuse, offending. It highlights the consequences if they continue down the offending route and the long term effects.

Wednesday features adventure training; raft building, abseiling, rock

climbing and so on. Thursday is all about putting into action what they have learned so far and working on army skills needed for the night exercise and sleep out. The young people build their shelter and after dark each section has a mission to get to enemy territory and retrieve property, doing their best to work together and avoid the enemy who are spread out in the area.

The last day signals prize giving; best section, best at sport, most improved student. Despite being exhausted the young people are elated. On Monday they were strangers unsure of what lay ahead, but now they leave with self-confidence, achievement and an optimism they can change. Some do join the armed forces and many go onto a positive destination but there is always more to do. I recall one participant initially was very difficult: with support they were a different person by day three going onto win the Most Improved student. Regrettably change back home was short lived. After seeing their potential for 5 days you always want to do more to prevent young people choosing this lifestyle.

It has been an honour to work with young people, being a small part of their life and I hope I made a difference. Young people need choice, inspiration and the chance to change - this course does that.

Susie Cameron is one of the theme editors for this issue and is currently studying for an HNC in Social Care.

UK Justice Policy Review:

Volume 2

6 May 2011 to 5 May 2012

UK Justice Policy Review:

Volume 3

6 May 2012 to 5 May 2013

By Richard Garside, Arianna Silvestri
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UK Justice Policy Review:

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6 May 2010 to 5 May 2011

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