

## Chapter 5

# Youth work and youth justice in England and Wales: the history of a tense and troubled relationship

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### Introduction

**A**s a starting point, it is important to recognise that through using previous historically documented frameworks such as Coussée, Lorenz and Verschelden (2010), Dugmore, Pickford and Angus (2007), Rose (1997), Davies (1999) and Jeffs (1979) we are better able to establish a sense of identity and a continuity of endeavour for those involved in various youth work organisations and services that have developed working practices to support the lives of young people. In the same way that youth work history can be said to have been dominated by the ongoing “universal work versus targeted work” debate (Davies 1999), so too has the history of youth justice work been characterised by antagonism between two dominant paradigms:

The history of youth justice is a history of conflict, contradictions, ambiguity and compromise in a system that has traditionally pursued the twin goals of welfare and justice. (Muncie, Hughes and McLaughlin 2006: 1)

Moreover, in youth justice there have been attempts to fuse the welfare and justice approaches in the belief that this would form what Dugmore, Pickford and Angus (2007: 28) describe as a “seamless, merged practice”. Similarly, developments within youth work policy and practice have at various times provided opportunities to make a contribution to welfarist approaches emerging in youth justice settings. For many youth work practitioners, however, participation in youth justice system programmes has often been seen as an unwanted and unnecessary departure from a welfarist approach, arguing that its punitive and targeted nature undermines the youth work profession’s core commitment to open-access youth work, voluntary engagement and provision of universally accessible, non-stigmatising facilities (Davies 1999).

For other youth workers, contributions to working within the youth justice agenda have often been seen as a way to influence the treatment and reparation work done with young offenders and, according to Teasdale and Powell (cited in Jeffs and Smith 2002: 90), practitioners can use their experience of participative approaches as a means of enlightening other professionals with regard to more welfarist and youth-friendly ways of working.

## **Historical similarities**

Some interesting parallels can be drawn between the respective developments of youth work and the youth justice system (Barry 2005). Each of the two disciplines can claim to have been born out of a concern for the welfare and rescue of young people (Jeffs and Smith 2002). Early youth work was carried out by Victorian philanthropists like John Pounds (1766-1839), who showed a moral concern for “ragged children” living in poverty on the streets or in the workhouses. This approach was characterised by an emphasis on relationships and voluntary participation and, more broadly, the welfare and education of the children involved. Much of this early welfare emanated from the (mainly) Christian ideal of the church organisations, and crucial to this movement was the formation of the Young Men’s Christian Association (YMCA) by George Williams in 1844, which became the first dedicated youth organisation in the United Kingdom (UK) (Jeffs 1979). The YMCA development was followed by a marked growth in the number of institutes, lads’ clubs, and girls’ clubs, which were established in order to “rescue and rehabilitate” those working-class young people who it was deemed did not have the necessary respect or regard for middle-class order and who were therefore in danger of involvement with criminal behaviour (Rose 1997). Davies (1999) reports on this developing concern towards the behaviour and morality of young people and claims that the welfarist intentions of early youth work pioneers contained “motives which at the very least were mixed”. Entwined with their founding compassionate approach were anxieties about young working-class men breaking the law and the failure of young women to live up to the feminine ideals of the time. Thus emerged a narrative around the control of delinquency, even within early youth work initiatives. For example, the Boys Brigade required that its officers should “promote discipline and obedience, and encourage physical and moral culture” (Davies 1999: 9).

On the youth justice (or what might be called youth social work) front at this time, similar reactions to the mistreatment of children at “risk of” or already engaged in criminal activity led to the emergence of a lobby known as “the child savers”. This included Mary Carpenter, whose aim was to protect children “who are not yet fallen into actual crime, but who are almost certain from their ignorance and destitution to do so” (Horn 2010: 97). Driven by a strong set of religious beliefs, she campaigned on behalf of poor children and in particular for the education and welfare of young offenders in prison. Her work became influential enough to affect parts of the Youthful Offenders Act of 1854, which recognised such education as a possible alternative to prison for younger offenders (Smith 2007). Challenging the dominant (punishment-based) ideology of the time Carpenter claimed that “Love draws with human cords far stronger than chains of iron” (Carpenter 2013/1851: 74). Her lobbying for welfare and education elements within punishment and sentencing was to pave the way for alternatives to adult prison to be considered for juveniles, such as the

Borstal school system of youth detention centres, the first of which opened in Borstal, Kent, in 1902. The “child savers” ideology towards young offenders of Victorian Britain, which emanated from prison reformers such as Carpenter, can readily be compared to the early youth work principles of rescue, welfare and protection (Davies 1999). As has been seen, there is evidence enough during these times of a convergence between youth work and youth justice which sought a welfarist approach. However, the strong commitment to the founding principles of early youth work based on voluntary engagement and universal access for all young people (as opposed to a targeted and punitive approach) had perhaps already become established as early indicators of prospective barriers to any joined-up delivery.

## **The growth of state intervention and strategies**

The early 20th century saw the welfarist lobby in youth justice gain further momentum as the 1908 Children’s Act saw the introduction of juvenile courts where cases involving young people could be dealt with separately. For example, a juvenile could be discharged to the supervision of a probation officer (the Probation Act of 1907 made that possible) or parents could be ordered to give security for a child’s good behaviour (Inglis 1909). The provision of a probation officer whose role was defined as to “advise, assist and befriend”, was an approach to working with young offenders that was not dramatically removed from the youth work being undertaken at the time in the aforementioned youth institutes.

Following the First World War (1914-18), it is worth mentioning the granting of powers to local education authorities to establish “Juvenile Organising Committees” for youth work (Smith 1988). It is also notable that the very title “Juvenile Organising Committees” resonates with the setting up of “juvenile courts” and confirms the use of similar terminology, as well as seemingly common approaches to work with individuals such as the “advising, assisting and befriending” role of the probation workers. In tune with that approach to probation work, the key characteristics of youth work revolved around an emphasis on relationships, a commitment to association, and a belief that practitioners should be approachable (Jeffs and Smith 2002).

Subsequent policies such as the Criminal Justice Act of 1948 attempted to consolidate the shift towards the “rehabilitative ideal”, promising to reduce recidivism through treatment and corrective training (based on modern psychiatry). This act removed the punishment of whipping and introduced the idea of detention centres for young offenders which, while being less severe environments than borstals, were still set up to deliver a short, sharp, shock to offenders. However, the anti-welfarist stance within the criminal justice system was soon looking to counteract the claims of those supporting the “child saver” movement, and supporters of a more punitive approach saw their case strengthened by the fact that subsequently the 1948 act had a minimal effect on reducing crime. In fact, recorded crime increased by 7% between 1930 and 1948 and an even further growth rate of 10% for 1949 and 1950 (Bailey 1987). For young people, post-war prosperity had brought major cultural changes and influences such as American rock music, new fashions and films. These began to create generational differences and later came to be known as moral panics (Cohen 1972). During the 1950s and 1960s they were generally associated with the

rise of the “teenager”, and youth subcultures such as Teddy boys, and later mods and rockers, all distinguishable by their clothes, style and behaviours which were somewhat alien to the previous generation (McDowell 2009).

These behaviours and fashions came to be linked with the deviant behaviour of young people and there followed a predictable anxiety around the growing number of subcultures among young people. Indeed, the sociologist Frank Musgrove warned at this time that young people having widely rejected the authority of the current adult-dominated social order would be “united in hostility against them” (Musgrove 1964: 2). Fuelled by the magnified concern of the media and reports of the 1958 riots in Nottingham and Brixton, the government had ordered a review into the perceived “youth problem” in order to ascertain what role the youth service should have in light of these changed social conditions. This perhaps indicated a potential role for youth work within the youth justice system in the provision of diversionary activity to help restore social order. This review led to the publication of the Albemarle Report (Ministry of Education, 1960) which, according to Davies (1999), heralded a period in the 1960s that was a “golden age” for the youth service. The Albemarle Report established that the concern of the youth service should be with the “whole” young person (in other words, his or her emotional, physical and social development) and the report was a major factor in determining a shift away from seeing the youth service as being solely concerned with leisure pursuits (Jeffs and Smith 1987). This shift therefore surely presented an opportunity for youth workers to contribute to other policy areas such as youth justice, especially given the growing concern about adolescent behaviour and the rising levels of crime among young people which were reported as an annexe to the full report.

Subsequently, however, there were no specific recommendations to assist with youth crime and Lord Hailsham reported that the “youth service is not, and does not like to be thought of as just a more attractive alternative to Borstal” though, in acknowledging the contribution that youth workers might make, Hailsham added that “there might, as a by-product of the youth service be less juvenile crime” (Davies 1999: 41).

According to Jeffs and Smith (1987) the youth service saw itself in competition with commercial leisure activities and chose to adopt a “something for everyone” approach which worked against those who saw a specific role in work with juvenile justice departments. Commentators such as Foreman (Foreman 1987) compares post-Albemarle youth work as being “the development of the redcoat style”, alluding to the famous “redcoats” who organised games and leisure activities while working in the Butlins holiday camps, which became popular during the 1960s. This “jack of all trades and master of none” image of youth work perhaps meant it was under-skilled, ill-equipped and unprepared when intermediate treatment (IT) was introduced following the 1968 White Paper “Children in trouble” and the subsequent 1969 Children and Young Persons Act. Intermediate treatment schemes offered alternatives to custodial sentences with a community-based remit and involved some systematic efforts to draw youth workers into local youth justice teams (Davies 1999). This was done with some initial successes during this period, as some youth workers became involved in delivering IT programmes, and there were degrees of convergence between youth work and youth justice work on a level not reached previously (or, arguably perhaps, since). The National Youth Bureau in Leicester had

an IT Unit during the 1970s and innovative methods of work such as “detached youth work” were put forward by researchers as exemplars of “youth service schemes to reduce delinquency” (Davies 1999: 91). The Unit in Leicester gave priority to working with young offenders, to bridging the youth work–youth justice divide, and working with those deemed to be “at risk”. Several regional youth work conferences were held to talk about the contribution youth work might make to IT programmes locally and two publications of Youth Service IT specials were produced in 1973 and 1977 (Davies 1999: 157). Furthering the progress of convergence between youth work and youth justice at this time, Wales also formed its own Intermediate Treatment Forum which was launched in 1976. This later grew into a practitioner-led group called Cynnydd (translates as “progress” in Welsh) which would go on to collaborate with youth services in delivering schemes such as the Duke of Edinburgh’s Award Scheme in working with young offenders on probation in 1991 in an effort to divert them from crime. This group was supported financially by the Wales Youth Agency via the National Voluntary Youth Organisation grant scheme, giving clear evidence of support for youth justice work from youth work at a national level.

Overall, however, and despite some of the successes of the IT programme, there was resistance among youth work practitioners to move towards what was seen as a “deficit” model for youth work and in the eyes of the majority within the field these steps were considered to be an “unacceptable version of extreme targeting and the pre-labelling of young people” (Teasdale and Powell 1987: 87). Perhaps more importantly, a perceived threat was detected to the core youth work principles and values of voluntary participation and universal access, which became the main defence put forward by proponents of voluntary open-access youth work (Gilchrist, Jeffs and Spence 2003). Teasdale and Powell (Cited in Jeffs and Smith, 2002: 82), in support of the “redcoat” theme mentioned above, also offer another potential explanation for the retreat of youth work from youth justice work in their citing of the apparent lack of specialist knowledge among youth workers of some of the more complex factors related to juvenile delinquency (such as judicial processes, legal status, criminology theories and psychological counselling).

### **The youth worker – Jack of all trades and master of none?**

By the end of the 1970s, youth work had also shifted into the realms of community development following the Milson-Fairbairn report (Department of Education and Science, 1969) and this period saw moves to focus not only on workers as youth workers but as youth and community workers. This requirement for a flexible approach was described as a “potential weakness”, leaving youth work vulnerable to not being “able to colonise a territory of its own” (Bradford 2008: 58).

The mid-1970s saw the emergence of a so-called “underclass” of young unemployed people (Murray 1996) engaged in increasing levels of criminality and juvenile delinquency. Further social tensions and political struggles led to the “winter of discontent” in 1978-79 which culminated in the election of a conservative government claiming that the decline in public morality should be the concern of parents, teachers and the community. The new Thatcher government therefore introduced a new emphasis on the role of youth work to promote “active citizenship” and “community action”

(Goldson and Muncie 2012: 12). This period raised questions for youth work practitioners about whether community organisations were being utilised as “agents of social control as opposed to agents of social change” (White 1990) and unsurprisingly there was again resistance among practitioners to move towards the “social control” aspects of conservative ideologies around law and order. There were calls for an end to the confusing array of overlapping welfare-oriented and punishment-based tariffs at the disposal of the courts. Consequently, under the 1982 Criminal Justice Act specific measures such as Supervised Activity Orders and Night Restriction Orders were brought in to intensify the coercive aspects of intervention (Smith 2007: 3). Here we see a shift from the rehabilitative agenda of the 1970s towards an emphasis on making the punishment fit the crime by restoration of appropriate “offence criteria” as being the basis for sentencing decisions. This relates to what was described as a prominence towards “just desserts, deterrence and control” (ibid.).

Although the tough talking “short, sharp shock” regime of the conservative government represented a victory to those who supported the “justice” rather than “welfare” model of intervention, we should be careful not to assume that this filtered through entirely into practice. Having been elected on a tough law and order stance, the Thatcher government soon found itself facing research which undermined and discredited the “short, sharp shock” approach (Thornton et al. 1984). Subsequently, a combination of academics, practitioners and senior civil servants developed alternative models that were based on research that had indicated that intense early intervention involving removing young people from their home and placing them in custody or care institutions often did more harm than good. The continued debates between the welfare lobbyists and the more punitive-minded government officials became an unlikely alliance but one that led to something of a golden age for community alternatives, described as an “anti-custody orthodoxy” (Haines and Drakeford 1998: 47). This seemed somewhat incongruous with the message from the government ministers of the day. Two distinctive practices emerged which set out to reduce the supposed harmful effects of intervention. One of these was a diversionary scheme through the development of cautioning and the other consisted of community-based initiatives and supervision orders as an alternative to custody (Haines and Drakeford 1998: 32).

In the same year as the 1982 Criminal Justice Act, the “Thompson report into youth work” (Department of Education and Science 1982) was published and its content contradicted much of the victim-blaming, “individual responsibility” agenda brought in by the Conservatives under the act. The Thompson report placed youth work practice parameters firmly within its historic values around voluntary engagement and open access, applauding the youth service for “the freedom young people had whether to participate or not” and (crucially in the context of this chapter) “the *non-authoritative* relationship between workers and young people” (ibid.: 48, emphasis added). The focus on the “non-authoritative” relationship and the promotion of young people’s participation by the report added additional barriers to any possible further convergence with youth justice associations with authority and control.

Additionally, the National Youth Bureau Board (NYB) repeatedly expressed concern over the way that the law and police were dealing with young people, and the National Council for Voluntary Youth Services (NCVYS) detailed their own concerns strongly, by

stating that “law and order could become the altar on which the freedom of young people, their confidence in the police and their trust in youth workers be sacrificed” (cited in Davies 1999: 84). Against this oppositional background, youth work links with youth justice work were confined to relatively short-term inputs such as holiday play schemes for young people which were funded by police authorities. However, as the core funding for youth work contracted in the early 1990s, these partnerships became a way of providing additional youth work activities and supporting youth service programmes. According to Davies (1999) this period had drawn the youth service more formally into crime prevention than had happened previously, although many youth workers had always seen themselves as having a somewhat unseen role in diverting young people from crime as well as other related social problems. This is highlighted by Williamson in describing his own youth work practice during the 1980s: “I was there for the most troubled and troublesome, dealing unsensationally and often invisibly with issues to do with drugs, crime, sexual health and homelessness” (Williamson 2013: 21).

### **Could the imposition of a curriculum finally shape the youth work contribution?**

Between 1989 and 1992 a series of ministerial conferences were held to review youth work policy in the UK. At the first conference (1989), urging youth workers to mirror their teaching colleagues in formal education, the government minister Alun Howarth challenged youth workers to adopt the notion of a “curriculum” which would clearly outline what youth work offered. The service debated the notion of a curriculum and the third ministerial conference (1992) saw pressure from minister Nigel Foreman for youth work to either evidence what it contributed to other policy agendas such as health, careers guidance and crime prevention or risk funding for the service if it failed to do so. The youth service needed to respond to the changed political situation and new managerialism ideologies around accountability, set outcomes, target setting, monitoring and evaluation. The subsequent shift to a focus on differing curriculum areas around work with young unemployed, health promotion and support for formal education perhaps further distanced any statutory youth work from any national youth work policy drive around crime prevention or strategic relationships with youth justice.

However, in 1996 the Audit Commission report “Misspent youth” (Audit Commission 1996) suggested that youth work could play a significant role in diverting young people from criminal activity and cited a number of endorsements from practices which had demonstrated a degree of success. These short-term convergences between the police and youth work were seen as sufficiently credible to perhaps make an impact on reducing crime in communities but a lack of any “hard” evidence left the government unconvinced from a value-for-money perspective. Evaluations from a youth work perspective conveyed the difficulties attendant to reconciling the tensions between person-centred youth work methods and the hard-line law and order expectations of youth justice (Davies 1999: 87).

The significance of a priority towards youth work support for other policy areas, including schools, was further embedded by the Labour election victory of 1997,

which was won on the mantra of Labour's big idea to tackle social exclusion with a focus on the three priorities of "Education, Education, Education".

The Home Secretary, Jack Straw, also launched the newly elected Labour government's White Paper "No more excuses: a new approach to tackling youth crime in England and Wales", promising a "root and branch reform of the youth justice system" (Home Office 1997). The central premise was that to prevent offending and reoffending by young people, it was necessary to stop making excuses for youth crime and accept that young people above the age of criminal responsibility are generally mature enough to be accountable for their actions and the law should recognise this. In order to provide "more strategic direction, set standards and measure performance", the government set up a new Youth Justice Board for England and Wales under the Crime and Disorder Act 1998. The proposals also included a new national network of youth offending teams (YOTs) providing programmes to stop offending behaviour. The YOTs consisted of practitioners from education, health, social care services, the police and probation, and sometimes youth work, although the developments across the regions were again piecemeal in terms of levels of involvement by youth services.

A government-commissioned audit of the youth service in 1997 reported that while much of the work going on was of high quality, any distinctive and unique contribution that the youth service provided for young people's development remained unreliably embedded in its practice (Davies 1999). An inability to produce quantitative research detailing the impact that youth work had on areas of social policy became a sticking point in convincing politicians about the value and validity of its role. A governmental Green Paper produced to review youth work in England in 1998 focused mainly on how youth work could contribute to formal education and to the work of other policy areas, including youth unemployment, rather than seeing any direct contribution of youth work in its own right outside of formal delivery settings.

A more positive view of the youth work role emerged in relation to a paper being produced for Wales where the newly devolved National Assembly for Wales gave full recognition to the role of the youth service in its flagship policy *Extending entitlement: Supporting young people in Wales* (National Assembly for Wales 2000). The Welsh policy envisioned a much more prominent role for youth services than did the reductionist view of youth service policy in England and therefore, potentially at least, a closer partnership with youth justice work. Further guidance to local authorities in Wales issued in 2002 required each of the 22 local authorities in Wales to set up local Children and Young People Partnerships; each partner was required to draw up a Young People's Strategy informed by other local strategies such as those dealing with crime and disorder, and youth offending. Defenders of the traditional role for youth work again wrestled with the new realities of the shift towards targeted work while trying to retain practice which offered the more person-centred, democratic forms of youth work. Howard Williamson, himself involved in the writing and production of *Extending entitlement* (National Assembly for Wales 2000) in his capacity as vice-chair of the Wales Youth Agency, and a board member of the Youth Justice Board for England and Wales, encouraged the youth services of both England and Wales to broaden their outlook in terms of accepting the realities of delivery and partnership work with agencies such as youth offending teams. He had previously argued that in order to survive, youth services should embrace the work that contributed



to wider-ranging social issues including crime, training and health, while “simultaneously arguing forcefully for the first step requirement of open access traditional youth work” (Williamson 1998).

In Wales, these arguments contributed to the philosophy of the All Wales Youth Offending Strategy (Welsh Assembly Government/Youth Justice Board 2004) in which there was a degree of ideological convergence between youth work and youth justice work. Williamson, with one foot in the youth work camp and eyes firmly on young people’s rights, was able to insist on inclusion of the wording that young offenders are “children first, offenders second” and key elements of the strategy were focused on community-based alternatives to custody that were in the best interests of the child. The “children first, offenders second” mantra paved the way for future youth justice initiatives to adopt similar youth work ideology within youth justice policy frameworks (see Case and Haines, 2015).

### **A parting of youth-work policy waves between England and Wales**

In England, *Transforming youth work: resourcing excellent youth services* (Department of Education and Skills 2002) embraced the “Connexions” strategy, a new youth support service launched in 2000 delivered by so-called personal advisers drawn from education welfare, the careers service and some parts of the youth service. This firmly positioned youth workers in the hybrid role of youth work/careers advisers and working on an inclusion agenda with young people not engaged in education, employment or training (NEET). The scale of the shift, for example towards work with young people who were NEET, and a stronger focus on curriculum delivery and young people achieving accredited outcomes, has tipped the balance significantly away from the forms of relationship and approach that have been central to the development of youth work for well over a century.

Recent policy developments in Wales have similarly steered youth services more towards the education and employment agenda, to the point where there are perhaps less striking differences between youth work policy in England and in Wales. This is highlighted by the introduction of the Youth Engagement and Progression (YEP) Framework (Welsh Government 2013), which identified youth workers as being particularly suited to the lead-worker role in working with young people designated as NEET and, similarly to England, working alongside careers advisers. Additionally, the National Strategy for Youth Work in Wales (Welsh Government 2014) embraces the YEP framework and prescribes clear outcomes required by youth work with regard to its contribution to formal education.

Resistance by youth workers to the instrumental frameworks and clinical assessment processes such as ASSETPlus in the work undertaken by YOTs has been partly tempered by the fact that youth workers in England and Wales now find themselves completing similar Common Assessment Forms (CAFs), taking on casework, and recording curriculum activities undertaken by young people that they are working on, rather than with. And so we are witnessing the erosion of the professed distinctiveness of traditional, young-person-centred, process-led youth work as it becomes instrumentalised and its values compromised by neo-liberalism and the new

management revolution across the past 30 years. Neo-liberalism has engendered a more adult-centric and compliance-focused professional youth work characterised by increasingly prescriptive managerialism, inflexibility, enforcement-led and individualised target-driven approaches visited upon “at risk” populations.

England has now seen the relegation of youth policy to local level and in many regions its most recent youth policy statement “Positive for Youth” (UK Government 2011) requires outcome measurements and social impact evidence from any funded provision. The youth justice contribution from youth work has now shifted from the treatment and intervention approach in the 1970s to prevention by economic means in 2016 – that is, getting NEETs a job or formal accredited training opportunities means they are less likely to fall into criminal behaviour. For youth-work policy in Wales, there is still hope for a less reductionist and more entitlement-based approach for youth work than that evident currently in England, particular as the current Welsh Government minister responsible for youth work has made a commitment to refreshing *Extending entitlement*. The National Strategy for Youth Work in Wales (Welsh Government 2014) still recognises and emphasises the positive role that universal, open-access youth work can have on the lives of young people. In trying to embrace both ends of the open access-targeted spectrum there is also the additional purpose for open-access youth work to recognise that “it is vitally important that open-access provision is used to effectively connect young people with more targeted or specialised support where this is appropriate” (Welsh Government 2014). Additionally, part of the more optimistic approach in Wales includes the fact that it became the first devolved nation in the UK to incorporate the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (United Nations General Assembly 1989) into domestic legislation. Moreover, in 2011, The National Assembly for Wales voted in favour of the general principles of the Proposed Rights of Children and Young Persons (Wales) Measure, which places a statutory duty on local authorities to demonstrate how they are incorporating the Convention on the Rights of the Child into their service delivery. Other recent initiatives include a youth “offer” for young people through the Wales Charter for Youth Work (Welsh Government 2016), which sets out minimum expectations for youth work at a standard that should be adhered to across Wales.

## **Future relationships for youth work and youth justice**

For current practice, it is worth exploring what the youth justice system and future models of delivery might adopt from youth work principles and purposes. New research emerging from the work of youth justice academics is promoting and campaigning for what is being proposed as a new model of delivering youth justice, known as “Children First Youth Work” (CFYW), for youth offending teams to adopt (Case and Haines, 2015). This will again open up possibilities for a renewed commitment from youth work to assist youth justice in helping those most in need and at risk of exclusion from society. Case and Haines claim that the CFYW model offers an alternative to the adult-centric, system-centric and compliance-focused elements of both youth justice and youth work that can limit children’s capacity to contribute to and participate in voluntary and meaningful supportive interventions. It will be interesting to see how youth workers respond to the inclusion of the term “youth work” in the title of a proposed delivery model for a seemingly oppositional

professional practice. As we have seen, the history of youth justice legislation and policy tells us that a merger of the two has, until now, been practically impossible at both political and professional levels. Perhaps the CFYW model offers a new opportunity for youth work to contribute to a more person-centred approach to our young people in the criminal justice system.

## **Final thoughts**

In concluding this historical overview, it is worth noting that there have been many opportunities for youth work to contribute to and help blend the justice and welfare debate into some symmetrical equilibrium – a vision of future practice where the justice seekers and the welfare bringers can find a mutually agreed pathway to supporting the lives of young people, particularly those proclaimed by others to be troubled and troublesome. If this can be achieved, then what emerges is the “perfect practice” model that we all seek. However, in the quest for this “holy grail”, consecutive youth justice and youth work administrations have at different times favoured either side of the welfare versus justice debate and the pendulum has periodically swung from one side to the other as attempts have been made to generate a union between the two ideologies.

As has been reported throughout this chapter, the adherence to the voluntary engagement principle has been a consistent barrier to aligning youth work with youth justice work. It is contended that if youth work is ever to be effective in the youth justice arena, it then perhaps needs to do what Jon Ord (2009) referred to as “thinking the unthinkable” and to reimagine what we mean by the voluntary engagement principle. If we accept that young people in targeted provisions or those on compulsory attendance in youth offending teams still have an element of choice as to whether to engage or not with the worker, then can we not redefine voluntary engagement as being whether the young person is continuing to be engaged with the process or not? While recognising the undoubted value of the purist version of voluntary participation as a dynamic of practice, can we any longer insist that it is a necessary condition of youth work? Proponents of the traditional approach to youth work, such as the organisation In Defence of Youth Work, find it difficult to accept the notion of young people being “confined” to a place by youth workers. For them, the targeted and youth justice agenda removes youth work from its traditional ethos. Yet is there not a counter argument in this lesson from history, which evidences the perennial targeting of young people ever since the youth work within the “ragged schools” of Victorian times?

## **Conclusion**

We are therefore presented with the perhaps familiar and uncontroversial conclusion that a youth work role in the youth justice system becomes dependent not only on political priorities of the day but also on the extent to which youth workers are willing to embrace the apparent oppositional philosophy of youth justice work and abandon current definitions of the “voluntary engagement” principle and the “universal, open-access” agenda. This demands that youth work has to, following Howard Williamson’s often used phrase, “distinguish between its cherished values

(to be defended) and its sacred cows (to be slain)". Until such a debate is resolved around whether the voluntary engagement principle is a "cherished value" to be defended at all costs or a "sacred cow" to be slain in the acceptance of the "targeted" youth work that takes place within some youth justice teams, then tensions around partnerships and collaboration with youth justice will inevitably always remain.

The proposed Children First Youth Work model above goes beyond youth justice into all areas of the young person's life, relating to them in holistic terms and normalising a positive approach to them when they offend. Case and Haines (2015) assert that a systematic expansion of the principles established in relation to youth justice into wider spheres of work with children and young people is possible. There is now, more than ever, a strong case for a move from punitive youth justice systems towards the more positive Children First Youth Work model for youth justice settings and youth work in England and Wales, thus providing the opportunity for practitioners to again contribute to the revival and survival of the welfarist approach within youth justice work.

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