

Ms Kirsten Davidson
The Scottish Executive
Reducing Reoffending Division
Room GW.15
St Andrew's House
Regent Road
Edinburgh EH1 3DG

25 May 2004

Dear Ms Davidson

Re:duce, Re:habilitate, Re:form – A Consultation on Reducing Reoffending in Scotland

YouthLink Scotland is the national youth work organisation for Scotland. We support the development of accessible, high quality youth work services which promote the well-being and development of young people. We are a national voluntary organisation working with both statutory and voluntary bodies. Our strategic aims are attached at Annex A. YouthLink Scotland welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Scottish Executive's consultation, Re:duce, Re:habilitate, Re:form – A Consultation on Reducing Reoffending in Scotland ("the Consultation"). YouthLink Scotland notes that the remit of the inquiry will focus on reducing reoffending – roles and responsibilities, the purpose of prison, addressing reoffending, reducing reoffending – an integrated approach and effectiveness and value for money.

YouthLink Scotland's evidence focuses on the rehabilitation of young offenders, and is based on our extensive experience of working with young offenders, and of work assisting their rehabilitation. YouthLink Scotland's Outlet Youth Centre at Polmont Young Offenders' Institution ("PYOI") has been working with the Scottish Prison Service ("SPS") since November 1999 to develop transitional support for young people leaving PYOI, and to embed this support within the SPS system. We attach a copy of the joint YouthLink Scotland/SPS briefing paper, *YouthLink Scotland's Youth Work Services at Polmont Young Offenders' Institution*, which is part of the evidence that we wish to submit to the Consultation.

In summary, YouthLink Scotland's main points are:

- **Significant numbers of young people are already within our prison system, and it is widely recognised that young offenders are most at risk of reoffending. The provision of post release support is a crucial element in young offenders' rehabilitation, along with the need to improve their life skills, including literacy numeracy and self esteem, and to improve their access to health, education and employment opportunities.**

- Further consideration should be given to extending transitional support to all young offenders, and not just to those out on licence or subject to a Supervised Release Order (“SRO”) at the time of sentencing.
- YouthLink Scotland welcomes the Scottish Executive’s commitment to include work specifically targeting young offenders, in the second phase of its enhanced throughcare strategy. This strategy, however, must be needs based if it is to be effective, and take into account the often multiple problems faced by young offenders upon release.
- Community-based intervention programmes are effective in helping to prevent youth offending. Funding for such projects, however, is often short term and insecure. The Scottish Executive must address this issue if these interventions are to continue to play an important role in diverting young people from crime.

YouthLink Scotland’s evidence raises a number of general issues which we believe are central to the rehabilitation of young offenders, as well as addressing some of the specific questions raised under the themed headings in the Consultation:

Reducing Reoffending – Roles and Responsibilities

What are the strengths/weaknesses of the current system providing offender services? How could these services be improved?

YouthLink Scotland believes that one of the main weaknesses of the current system is the lack of a uniform level of support provided to young offenders upon release. Significant numbers of young people are already within our prison system, and it is widely recognised that young offenders are most at risk of reoffending. Against this background, YouthLink Scotland considers that, if a greater level of post release support is not put in place to assist young offenders to reintegrate back into their communities, the chances of re-offending (which are already extremely high) will increase considerably. YouthLink Scotland, therefore, welcomes the Scottish Executive’s commitment to adopt a more co-ordinated approach to helping prisoners upon release, and to provide an effective throughcare service for all prisoners.

The need for such support is highlighted by the fact that many of the young people who offend, or commit anti-social behaviour, are vulnerable. This is evident in the Scottish Prison Service’s (“SPS”) survey of young offenders, *Young People in Custody in Scotland, An Occasional Paper (No.3/2000)* which highlights that:

- 76.2% of all young people in custody had a history of regular truancy;
- 43.6% had attended special schools;
- 84% reported having been suspended from school at some stage, and 58.2% reported having been excluded at least once;
- 79.4% reported previous contact with the Children’s Hearing System;
- 45% had been in residential care;
- 63.3% had close friends involved in criminal activity;
- 51.9% had at least one member of their immediate family who had served a custodial sentence; and
- 95.1% admitted taking drugs.

In view of these factors, it should come as little surprise that the problems faced by young offenders upon release are often complex, and that the factors linked to offending and reoffending are variable and usually multiple rather than single. The provision of support for these young people must, therefore, be responsive to their wide ranging individual needs. These needs often require the young people to engage with a wide range of agents and agencies such as social work, local housing departments, the police, and parole officers which can be a time consuming process.

Rehabilitation is further hampered by the lack of support which young people receive upon release. This can be attributed to the fact that no single agency currently has a statutory responsibility to co-ordinate the support for young people when they complete their sentences, unless they are out on licence or are subject to a SRO at the time of sentencing. Significantly, only a small proportion of young offenders fall within these categories. Furthermore, in YouthLink Scotland's experience the majority of young people leaving PYOI would like support on release, but in reality the availability and coordination of support is patchy. YouthLink Scotland, therefore, welcomes the Scottish Executive's recognition that engaging with young offenders who are not subject to statutory supervision is a major challenge in delivering voluntary assistance.

YouthLink Scotland also welcomes the Scottish Executive's commitment to include work specifically targeting young offenders, in the second phase of its enhanced throughcare strategy which will commence this autumn. We believe, however, that the strategy, if it is to be effective, must be needs based, and take into account the often multiple problems faced by young offenders upon release. It should also be recognised that there is a limited window of opportunity in which to maximise the efforts made by the SPS, local authorities and the voluntary sector in preparing young people for release, particularly as the confidence and skills gained by young people through these efforts are quickly lost if there is any delay in providing support at the required level upon release. Against this background, YouthLink Scotland believes that more needs to be done to increase the uptake of support amongst this group, and that further consideration should be given to extending transitional support to all young offenders, and not just to those out on licence or subject to a SRO, as part of the enhanced throughcare strategy. Without such an approach, the danger exists that we will continue to see the 'revolving door' syndrome, where young people reoffend soon after release, and are then returned to PYOI or to adult prison.

The Purpose of Prison

How can an institution which isolates individuals from communities also effectively reintegrate individuals back into society?

With regard to how conditions within prison can contribute to the rehabilitation of young offenders, it was recognised by SPS that the programmes previously provided for young people on the prison wings at PYOI by the youth work sector had a positive effect on the young people in terms of improved behaviour and enhancing their general wellbeing. Against this background, SPS took the decision to provide a dedicated youth work space at the Outlet Youth Centre run by YouthLink Scotland. This has additional benefits as it provides a more relaxed environment for young people to socialise, and in which to have their informal education needs met. YouthLink Scotland would be willing to provide the Scottish Executive with further information upon request about the Outlet Youth Centre

and the services and programmes it provides, and about how conditions at PYOI impact on the effectiveness and effects of rehabilitation during and post custody.

More must also be done to ensure that young people have improved access to work and training opportunities while serving their sentences. Young offenders should also be given increased opportunities to improve their life skills, including literacy numeracy and decision making skills, and to build up their confidence and self esteem. Many of the young people at PYOI have had their formal education disrupted due to truancy, exclusion and family circumstances, all of which can contribute to offending behaviour and to youth crime. The numeracy and literacy work currently being undertaken by YouthLink Scotland at PYOI has been very successful. Increasing such opportunities will help to enhance young people's chances of obtaining jobs upon release, which in turn increases the likelihood of their rehabilitation being successful.

Addressing Reoffending

What kinds of intervention are most successful in tackling reoffending behaviour?

There is strong evidence that community-based intervention programmes are effective in helping to prevent youth offending and reoffending. Early intervention and crime prevention projects often play a significant role in these areas. Successful community based programmes focusing on young people include, for example, East Lothian Council's Youth Justice Team's work with young people, where the latter, having been identified by schools, community police officers and other relevant agencies as being at risk of offending, are given opportunities to allow them to address their behaviour, and to start leading more positive lifestyles.

The emphasis in the Duke of Edinburgh's Award New Start Programme is also on early intervention. The New Start Programme features a wide range of projects, including diversionary activity groups involving The Duke of Edinburgh's Award as a means of accrediting the activities that the young people are doing, mentoring schemes and projects designed to reduce gang related violence. One of the recent recipients of the Duke of Edinburgh's Gold Award included a young person at PYOI whose project, under the auspices of Falkirk Council, focused on sports training and leadership skills. A further example of successful community based interventions is the joint work being undertaken by Fairbridge Scotland and the Venture Trust, which offers week long access courses and a comprehensive follow on programme and three-week cognitive approach courses respectively for young people aged between 13 and 25 to tackle offending and disruptive behaviour.

The Scottish Executive's support for such initiatives, in many cases through the Youth Crime Prevention Fund, is to be welcomed. There is, however, a small minority of persistent young offenders whom existing services are failing to reach. This underlines the need to support, and build upon the success of, existing community-based work, particularly in terms of ensuring that resources are available to proactively reach those who are not currently being engaged by support services. We believe that this approach can make a significant contribution to tackling youth crime and antisocial behaviour, and to reduce the levels of reoffending. Unfortunately, the funding for such projects is often short term and insecure, and YouthLink Scotland believes that this is a major issue which the Scottish Executive must address if community based interventions are to

continue to play an important role in diverting young people from crime and antisocial behaviour.

How can we ensure that offender programmes are effective and consistent across Scotland? What needs to be done to ensure that measures to reduce reoffending are improved?

As previously stated, YouthLink Scotland's Outlet Youth Centre has been working with PYOI to develop transitional support for young people leaving Polmont, and to embed this support within the SPS system. YouthLink Scotland wishes to commend this approach to the Scottish Executive as an effective and appropriate way of promoting the rehabilitation of young offenders, and would suggest that the Scottish Executive should open discussions with the local authorities, COSLA, the youth work sector and other key agencies such as SACRO and the Care Commission to explore how transitional support for young offenders can be extended across Scotland.

Prior to the launch of the Outlet Youth Centre, YouthLink Scotland had been working internally within PYOI offering a wide range of programmes and activities. This programme was evaluated, and the following observations were made in the evaluation report:

- 21% of participants had reductions in positive drug testing
- 34% of participants improved their security category
- 48% of participants had a reduction in observations (at risk of self-harm); *Source: Opening Doors Project, Polmont Young Offenders Institution: Project Evaluation, March 2001.*

While the numbers involved in the project were small, and these indicators need to be treated with some care, the evidence was positive in nature.

In 2002 a pilot was developed to provide transitional support for young offenders leaving PYOI. This support was provided through a partnership between the Outlet Youth Centre, the Aspire Project and PYOI. Following the successful pilot, the transitional support project is continuing to offer young people the opportunity to receive support upon release from a community link worker within their local community. These workers come from the local authority Community Learning and Development Services (the initial pilot was with Glasgow City Council and Inverclyde). The evaluation concluded that the main strengths of transitional support included, for example, the flexibility of the support given, both in terms of types of support and ways in which it was offered, the importance of the link worker having a local connection, the depth and strength of relationship that could be built when the young people had one person to deal with to support their needs and the reduction in recidivism. As previously mentioned, the projects can provide all of these support services, but their efforts may be diluted if there is any delay in arranging support upon release.

Furthermore, there is no uniform provision of transitional support for young offenders across Scotland. Indeed, it has become a 'post code lottery' through which young people from the Glasgow and Inverclyde areas can expect a higher level of support, owing to the involvement of their local authorities in the transitional support pilot, than young people from other local authority areas. In addition to the work being undertaken jointly by YouthLink Scotland and the SPS, a number of other agencies work with those at risk

of offending and with young offenders upon release, including Glasgow City Council, Inverclyde Council, East Lothian Council, Falkirk Council, the Duke of Edinburgh's Award, Fairbridge Scotland, and the Prince's Trust Scotland to name but a few. There is, however, no strategic, holistic approach to support the rehabilitation of young offenders, and reintegration back into their local communities. YouthLink Scotland believes that the Scottish Executive's enhanced throughcare strategy must promote a holistic approach to support young offenders back into the community upon completion of their sentences if it is to break the cycle of reoffending, and if it is to make an effective contribution to the rehabilitation of young people leaving custody.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you require more information about any of the issues raised in YouthLink Scotland's response to the Consultation, or would like to discuss these matters further.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Maureen Mallon', followed by a period.

Maureen Mallon
Head of Development

ANNEX A

YouthLink Scotland's Strategic Objectives

Strategically, we will support the youth work sector to provide effective services to young people

We will do this by:

- being the **voice of the youth work sector** in Scotland, achieving recognition at national and international levels
- influencing policy** which affects the youth work sector and the lives of young people
- enabling the sector to make **best use of resources**
- being a source of **expert advice and information** for youth work practitioners and policy makers
- facilitating innovative youth work through **research and development**
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