

Reduction in youth reoffending

A PENY for them



Charles Clark, Board Member at the Youth Justice Board and former Deputy Chief Constable, Essex Police, explains how the Police Electronic Notifications to YOTs (PENY) scheme supports a reduction in youth reoffending.



"And, so far so good. The system appears to be working. During 2006-07, 86% of victims were offered the chance to take part in restorative justice, of which 97% were satisfied with the outcome."

Youth crime is always a headline grabber but figures support the fact that the current approach is working with the level of youth reoffending at its lowest since records on its frequency began in 2000. There are many measures that have contributed (and continue to do so) to this trend and youth offending teams (YOTs) and their key partners are at the heart of this drive for improvement. YOTs include representatives from the police, social services, health, education and housing. Their job is to identify the needs of each young offender as well as the problems that make the young person offend, and to measure the risk they pose to others. This enables the YOT to provide and facilitate suitable programmes to address the needs of the young person, so they can be rehabilitated.

Of course, with so many different organisations involved in making these decisions there is an important requirement for information sharing and that is the premise behind PENY – Police Electronic Notifications to YOTs. Here we have a national solution to improve the use and sharing of information between 43 Police forces, the British Transport Police and the 157 YOTs using Criminal Justice Secure Email (CJSM) or other secure routes. This process means all parties now have the opportunity to communicate with each other faster, more securely and more consistently than ever before.

What is PENY?

For those that are unfamiliar with the PENY process, the process ensures that police communicate with YOTs by sending agreed information on under-18s within 24 hours of police disposal or decision. In partnership with the National Policing Improvement Agency (NPIA) and the Youth Justice Board's Wiring Up Youth Justice (WUYJ) programme, the process took advantage of a fast and secure online system, enabling the police to send accurate information about vulnerable young people to professional colleagues in a quick and streamlined way.

Police officers are now advising their local YOTs speedily,

securely and electronically when they reprimand a young person, give them a final warning, charge them with an offence, or give them a penalty notice for disorder. The speed of the process means that the young person has immediate understanding of the consequences of their behaviour and allows quicker interventions to help divert young people from further offending.

This timely access to accurate and detailed police information is central to the work that YOTs carry out with young people who offend, providing supervision and support where it is most needed.

Marcus Beale, Deputy Chief Constable in Staffordshire, comments: "In PENY, the Wiring Up Youth Justice programme has delivered a tightly focused tool, which has allowed the consistent exchange of relevant information between the police and local Youth Offending Teams, helping to deliver appropriate and timely justice."

Positive benefits

Closer working and information sharing between police services and YOTs enables informed decisions on young people to be made earlier, more accurately and appropriately. It also provides greater opportunity for early interventions that may well reduce youth reoffending.

More complete information enables all parties to be better prepared for court appearances and information is transmitted more quickly and securely than previously was the case. Compliance with information security standards ensures that the young person's information is not compromised or lost when it is sent. Furthermore, access to up-to-date and accurate information on all incidents allows for more effective support to be offered to victims of youth crime and opportunities for restorative justice. This is a recognised way to improve victims' confidence in the Criminal Justice System, and at the same time ensure that the young people face up to the effect of their behaviour on others.

For more information visit <http://www.wiringupyouthjustice.info>

Securing sensitive data

The very nature of the information that is sent using the PENY process means that security is paramount. All of this information is sensitive and, therefore, must be safeguarded at all times. Using fax to send documents is no longer permitted as offender and victim information falls within the category of Restricted information. However, the new systems allow for police notifications to be sent between police and YOTs as Secure eMail attachments. This means that the sensitive data is transferred quickly and securely.

Promoting partnership

Through earlier police notification and YOT action, the most appropriate resources can be directed to the young person and victim by the YOT. Early intervention provides the greatest chance of steering young people away from crime and when the YOTs and the police work together they are more able to tackle the problem of youth crime at source, highlighting the underlying causes and giving young people the best possible chance of mending their ways. PENY can contribute in key ways.

The secure nature of the system means that it reduces the risk to officers of information being compromised or lost when it is sent. Also, considering there are more than 56,000 reprimands and 33,000 final warnings given to young offenders each year the administrative burden is significant for police officers. PENY reduces this burden through automating the data input and communications processes so that it requires less time from officers and, therefore, enables them to dedicate more of their time to front line policing. In turn, this promotes public reassurance.

Moreover, PENY complies with the Flanagan review on the future of policing, which calls for a reduction in bureaucracy by using technology to share information across the Criminal Justice System.

For YOTs, the benefits are equally significant. They are provided with timely information which gives them a more complete picture of detected youth crime. This means that they are able to make quick and effective assessments and enjoy greater preparation time for court. Overall, PENY promotes a consistent and improved approach to victims of youth crime.

And, so far so good. The system appears to be working. During 2006-07, 86% of victims were offered the chance to take part in restorative justice, of which 97% were satisfied with the outcome. Also, there were over 9,500 parents who received parenting support from youth offending teams in 2006/07, 74% of whom were satisfied with the support they received.

Counting the cost

You'd be forgiven for assuming that this new system carries a mighty cost, but you'd be wrong. Implementing the PENY process was focussed on changing the way people worked and how they handled information about a young person. The main challenge was to make secure eMail an instinctive process and to change working practices more than technology. Some police forces enabled the successful implementation of PENY through their own IT changes, with the set up and the sending of PENY data to suit their local needs and operating practices.

I am sure the PENY process will bring a vast improvement in working with those young people who offend and their victims. Prior to PENY, often details of offenders were not sent to YOTs or were delayed which meant, at times, opportunities for interventions were missed and work with victims delayed. As it is increasingly important that relevant information is shared to ensure we tackle those children and young people at greatest risk, PENY may be the forerunner of greater co-operation in the future.

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