

# Shelter

## Back on track

A good practice guide  
to addressing  
antisocial behaviour



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# Foreword

Antisocial behaviour is at the top of the Government's agenda, and increasingly it is choosing to deal with the problem through punitive measures. However, many experts fear this approach leads to the erosion of rights and scapegoating of vulnerable groups.

Many of Shelter's clients suffer because of antisocial behaviour, so we want an effective solution to the problem. But we believe the best approach is to identify the support needs of perpetrators, and then help them. By working to solve the root causes of antisocial behaviour we can avoid eviction and the pointless scenario of moving the problem on to another neighbourhood. We can also help young people to re-engage with their neighbourhoods and have a positive influence on their communities.

The Vodafone UK Foundation is supporting Shelter's work with and for young people, enabling Shelter to provide young people with the information they need, when they need it. The Vodafone UK Foundation and Shelter are working together to tackle youth homelessness and social exclusion in the long term.

This guide is an example of Shelter's work in supporting local authorities and organisations with policy ideas, examples of good practice, and campaigns to support local initiatives. It aims to be clear, practical, and easy to use. We hope that you will find it a valuable resource.



Adam Sampson  
Director, Shelter

# Introduction

Communities that suffer from antisocial behaviour (ASB) are desperate for a solution to the problem. However, groups such as children's charities and advocates of young people's rights have serious concerns that the kinds of action being taken against the bad behaviour are creating, rather than solving, problems.

These groups have expressed alarm at powers the police now have to disperse groups and put young people under curfew. They also worry that children could end up in the criminal justice system for breaching an Anti-social Behaviour Order (ASBO) – even though they have committed no crime. Measures targeting families, such as demoted tenancies and Parenting Orders, could also lead to increased eviction rates.

There is very little research about the causes of ASB, but what evidence there is suggests perpetrators often come from vulnerable groups, are 'socially excluded', and have a range of complex support needs. As more punitive measures are introduced, there needs to be an accompanying realisation that, to work effectively with targeted individuals and families, we need to address these support needs.

Shelter believes that a more rehabilitative approach to dealing with the problems associated with ASB will lead to longer-term solutions. Individuals, families, and communities need more than 'quick-fix' remedies, which may punish behaviour but fail to address the underlying causes of that behaviour.

# What is 'antisocial behaviour'?

The phrase is one we hear more and more. In *The Times* newspaper it received 134 mentions in 2002, as opposed to 16 in 1992. But this does not necessarily mean such behaviour is a new, or even a growing, phenomenon. In fact it is hard to judge the occurrence of ASB because the phrase is both too vague and too all-encompassing. It has become a catch-all for actions ranging from the mildly annoying to the decidedly criminal.

## Young people and families

Two groups in particular have become associated with this type of behaviour: young people; and families or individuals who would formerly have been termed 'nuisance neighbours'. In many reported cases the two are inextricably linked, with young people from 'nuisance families' being subjected to measures such as ASBOs.

Sometimes this link has been explicitly recognised, as in the *Evaluation of the Dundee Families Project, Final Report*,<sup>1</sup> which states:

'Anti-social behaviour has 2 main meanings:

- Behaviour by families (adults and/or children) which causes difficulties to their families and/or landlords (See, eg Scottish Office 1998)
- Behaviour by young people which threatens or harms other people. This includes crime and other actions like aggression and disruptiveness in school...

In some cases, the second type [of ASB] contributes to the first, as when young people threaten or attack neighbours.'

It would seem that what was once termed 'juvenile delinquency' – implying that the behaviour is something normally grown out of – now counts as ASB too. Four-year-olds, 14-year-olds, and 40-year-olds can now all be described as behaving 'antisocially', with little distinction being made between the various stages of development that these individuals may have reached.

## Different definitions

But as former Secretary of State David Blunkett, himself, states in a Home Office document: 'Antisocial behaviour means different things to different people.'<sup>2</sup> In the same document he describes various acts, ranging from dropping litter and carrying out graffiti, to threatening people with air guns and running crack houses, as ASB. Another Home Office document<sup>3</sup> even includes prostitution and drug dealing as examples of this behaviour.

There can be, and should be, no denial that many individuals and communities suffer serious disturbance to their quality of life because of criminal, violent, or threatening behaviour. But there were already laws in place to combat these problems before the Anti-social Behaviour Act 2003. The difference is that, under those previous laws, evidence must be gathered by the police and cases must be taken through the criminal courts. The individual would then be tried, and only convicted if the evidence is seen to be 'beyond all reasonable doubt'.

Today, the imprecise nature of what actually constitutes ASB inevitably causes confusion, and the risk is that perfectly normal (if annoying) behaviour is being classified as criminal.

1 Jennifer Dillane, Malcolm Hill, Jon Bannister and Suzie Scott, University of Glasgow, September 2001

2 *Respect and Responsibility – Taking a Stand Against Anti-Social Behaviour*, Home Office, March 2003

3 *A Guide to Anti-Social Behaviour Orders and Acceptable Behaviour Contracts*, Home Office, November 2002

# Risk factors for young people

It is clear that the line between what constitutes criminal behaviour and what constitutes ASB is blurred. Even more blurred is the line between ASB and the mild juvenile delinquency that many young people indulge in at some stage of their development. This is reflected in the subjects covered in a MORI Youth Survey, which describes itself as ‘...the annual survey of young people, both in and out of school, that explores the prevalence of offending among young people, gauges any links between truancy and offending, investigates alcohol and drug taking behaviour, assesses young people’s ethics and fears and measures the proportion who have been victims of crime’.<sup>4</sup>

Some of the activities that young people were asked about in the survey are clearly criminal (assault for instance), but others, such as fare-dodging, seem to fit more neatly into the ASB agenda.

## Communities that Care

There has been a certain amount of research into why some children are more likely to become seriously involved in crime and ASB than others. Communities that Care is a project set up in 1997 by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation to provide guidance to communities that want to support and protect their young people. The content of its community programmes is based on detailed research from this country and the US on what causes young people to become involved in crime and ASB.

The programmes run in England, Scotland, and Wales, and are based on a ‘risk and prevention’ model. Essentially, this means identifying factors that make young people more susceptible to problem behaviour,

and also the factors that help to protect them against this behaviour. Risk factors fall under four separate headings.

- **Family risk factors** include poor parental supervision and discipline, family conflict and low income, and poor housing.
- **School risk factors** include low achievement, beginning in primary schools, and truancy.
- **Community risk factors** include living in a disadvantaged neighbourhood, community neglect, and a lack of social investment.
- **Risk factors relating to individuals/peers** include alienation and friends being involved in problem behaviour.

Protective factors identified by the project are defined as those giving children resilience in adverse circumstances.

- **Social bonding** means the strengthening of bonds between children and family members, friends, teachers and other socially responsible adults.
- **Healthy standards** refers to having parents, teachers, community leaders and others who lead by example, and have clearly stated expectations for children’s behaviour.
- **Opportunities for involvement** is about giving children the chance to feel involved and valued in their families, schools, and communities.
- **Social and learning skills** entails equipping children with the social reasoning and practical skills they need to take advantage of opportunities on offer.

<sup>4</sup> MORI Youth Survey 2004 (full report), Youth Justice Board, July 2004.

Nacro, the crime reduction charity, also advocates a similar approach to prevent young people becoming involved in disorder and crime.<sup>5</sup>

Current research clarifies that there is a significant proportion of ordinary young people for whom delinquent behaviour is a stage in their development. And, there is also a core of underprivileged and unsupported young people who are predisposed to crime and ASB simply because of the circumstances they are born into and live in.

<sup>5</sup> For details, visit their website: [www.nacro.org.uk](http://www.nacro.org.uk)

# The role of the environment

The effect of the built environment on the way people behave is well documented, including the fact that certain environments either encourage or deter crime and ASB. The established theory of crime prevention through environmental design, as discussed in Timothy Crowe's book,<sup>6</sup> argues that crime can be 'designed out' of urban spaces. This is a useful consideration for organisations such as the police and local authorities.

The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) produced a guide in 2004 called *Safer places: the planning system and crime prevention*. It provides examples of places, such as city centres and bus stops, that have been made safer by good planning. There is general agreement that certain design elements can reduce crime and ASB, namely:

- good street lighting
- well-maintained roads and pavements
- formal and informal surveillance of areas
- areas that are active and busy
- well-maintained areas
- areas that are free from litter and graffiti
- well-designed housing with good visibility all round.

Local and national crime surveys often cite 'teenagers hanging around' as one of the biggest problems in communities. For instance, in a recent Fear of Crime Survey undertaken by Woking Borough Council, 54 per cent of local residents said that this was an issue in their neighbourhood. With young people being the most likely group to be victims of crime,<sup>7</sup> they too are fearful of other young people out on the streets

– even when they do not present a direct threat.

There is now a stereotype attached to young people in groups, and it is further perpetuated by crime surveys repeatedly featuring the question about fear of 'teenagers hanging around'. Normal behaviour in young people is effectively being criminalised by the media, politicians, and society.

Tim Gill, outgoing director of the Children's Play Council, has said: 'There is growing hostility to children in public space. Behaviour that would a few years ago have been "larking about" is now labelled antisocial.'<sup>8</sup>

Gill has also drawn attention to the fact that what public space is available to children and young people is often of very poor quality. With the decline of our parks and open spaces, and the lack of park-keepers or any other kind of surveillance, these places can turn into 'no-go' areas where young people are afraid of being bullied or attacked. Often there is simply no space where they can just 'be' and socialise out-of-doors without incurring disapproval.

Attempts to improve facilities on offer for young people often meet with an outcry, frequently through local newspapers. And, although the environment has such a crucial influence on young people and how they behave, they are rarely involved in any planning or consultation about their neighbourhoods.

Sometimes efforts are made to get their views and opinions, but these are often limited and tokenistic. This means that built environments very rarely meet the needs of children and young people, which can

6 Timothy D. Crowe, *Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design*, Second Edition, Elsevier, 2000

7 2002/03 British Crime Survey, Home Office

8 *The Guardian*, 20 September 2004

cause them to feel alienated from their communities, and resentful of a landscape that seems to offer no place for them.

If people have some influence over how their neighbourhoods look and function, and if they feel a sense of investment in an area, they are much more likely to care for and maintain them. It makes sense to educate and involve young people in contributing to their surroundings from an early age.

# How landlords can work with young people

Social landlords, including both local authorities and housing associations, are being enabled and encouraged by the Government to use new legislative powers that are designed to combat ASB. The Anti-social Behaviour Act (2002) has given them powers to make applications for Anti-social Behaviour Orders (ASBOs). Social landlords have also been in the forefront of devising new approaches; Acceptable Behaviour Contracts (ABCs) were first piloted by social landlords and the police in Islington, north London, before being rolled out across the country.

There seems to be a realisation in the sector, however, that a purely punitive approach has little effect in changing long-term behaviour. 'Problem' families and young people can be moved on, but this often just shifts the problem to another area. It is in the interest of landlords to support families and young people who display problem behaviour, and to provide an environment where that behaviour is prevented or minimised.

## Housing Plus

Housing Plus is an approach that involves the landlord in trying to improve the quality of life for their tenants. Although a guide to housing terminology defines Housing Plus as 'a concept which promotes the adoption of a society-wide perspective in the planning of new housing association developments',<sup>9</sup> it can also be applied to existing developments. The approach involves landlords making partnerships with other local organisations and providing, or facilitating, extra services for their tenants. These may include:

- debt counselling
- advice and information

- organising community activities
- organising community forums
- organising youth activities
- providing play facilities
- providing training for tenants.

Many landlords, who do not officially offer Housing Plus, may nonetheless offer short-term youth programmes in an effort to combat ASB, improve environments and retain tenants. Some seek funding from the Housing Corporation for these initiatives, while others enter into partnerships with other organisations or put bids into programmes, such as the Neighbourhood Support Fund (NSF).

## Case study: Paintbrush Initiative

Richmond Housing Partnership's Paintbrush Initiative is one such example of a non-Housing Plus project. This scheme gives high-street vouchers to young people living in the area, in exchange for them cleaning up and taking care of their estates every Saturday. The aim is to tackle the effects of ASB, such as graffiti and litter, and also deal with it at source by encouraging neighbourhood responsibility.

Young people who do well on the scheme are offered training and the chance of eventual employment with Richmond Housing Partnership. Those invited to participate have been identified as 'troublemakers' by other residents, although none of them has been the subject of an ASBO. The chair of the local community association said: 'Normally the younger ones see the older ones misbehaving, so I think Richmond Housing

<sup>9</sup> Simon Hooten, *A-Z of Housing Terminology*, Chartered Institute of Housing, November 1996

Partnership is absolutely brilliant for changing that here for the kids.<sup>10</sup>

### **Case study: Market Estate Youth Works programme**

This project was launched in 2003, and operates in the Market Estate neighbourhood in Islington, London. Young people aged from 8 to 25 years are its target audience, and the project's main aims are to tackle the causes of youth crime and offending, and to improve employment and training opportunities. The programme works with a broad range of young people in the neighbourhood and also provides targeted support to 50 young people known to be offenders or at risk of offending.

Local registered social landlord Hyde Northside and Hyde Plus (the community arm of the Hyde group) have been key in helping to develop and facilitate the Youth Works programme. They are part of a multi-agency steering group that also involves the local Youth Offending Team (YOT), Islington Council, Connexions, voluntary and community groups, the local residents' association, the police and probation services, and neighbourhood wardens.

The project takes a community development approach to the work it does with young people, and is able to be flexible in the services it provides. These include after-school programmes, sports activities, and art and environmental projects. Families in crisis are also given support, and young people in need can receive one-to-one support, such as mentoring.

### **Detailed case study: Count Me In**

SHAP is a supported-housing provider that has been providing services for young and vulnerable people since 1981. It offers almost 300 units of accommodation across the Merseyside boroughs of St Helens, Knowsley and Halton, and also provides a range of tenant and community support services.

In 1999, it took over the management of 58 properties on the Lickers Lane Estate from Knowsley Metropolitan Borough Council. At that time, 20 per cent of the properties stood empty, and it soon became apparent that a group of young people on the estate were perceived as causing harassment to other residents. Complaints included general vandalism, 'joyriding', broken windows, cars being set on fire, noisy drinking sessions, and fighting and aggressive behaviour.

This case study takes a detailed look at how the housing association intervened, and managed to set up and run its own youth and community programme, to deal with the ASB on the estate.

#### **Setting up and funding the project**

An opportunity to engage in some positive work with the young people on the estate emerged when SHAP heard about the new NFS community-based programme funded by the Department for Education and Skills. This fund was aimed at re-engaging the hardest-to-reach 13- to 19-year-olds living in the most deprived areas in England. It directly supported local voluntary and community organisations to provide innovative projects aimed at this group, with the objective of laying the foundations to facilitate progression into education, employment and training.

<sup>10</sup> 'Blitzin' Squad', *Housing Today*, CMP Information, 30 April 2004

Phase 1 of the NSF programme ran from September 2000 to September 2003. SHAP made a successful funding bid, and its Count Me In project received three years' funding from October 2000. Funding amounted to £20,000 a year over three years, and this covered the cost of one full-time worker. SHAP supplied the rest of the core funding, which covered sessional workers' fees, project materials, and associated costs. Various bids for one-off expenses were made to other agencies over the lifetime of the project.

#### **Who did the project focus on?**

The Count Me In project needed to be responsive to the needs of the young people living on the Lickers Lane Estate, as well as fitting in with NSF objectives.

SHAP decided to target the young people involved in disorder and ASB in the locality. This group of people fitted the NSF agenda, with most of them meeting the 'NEET' (not involved in education, employment or training) criteria. Their ages ranged between 13 and 19 years, and participants were encouraged to take an active role in the direction of the project.

The young people who were mainly responsible for the disorder and ASB on the estate were well known to both residents and local SHAP workers, and it was decided that they would be approached in a low-key way. From this small beginning, with eight young people attending the first meeting organised by the project's co-ordinator, the group grew until it eventually numbered 24.

#### **How it works**

A trained and experienced youth worker was employed to be both co-ordinator and key worker on the scheme. When

the project started up in October 2000, it operated from the SHAP office on the estate, and later moved its base to one of the estate's vacant flats. Its objectives were devised to reflect the interests of SHAP, the NSF, young people and other residents of the estate.

Objectives for the youngsters involved included:

- involving them in positive and outcome-related activities
- providing them with a bridge to training or employment opportunities
- significantly reducing ASB among them and lessening the effects this behaviour had on the wider community
- reducing the incidence of pregnancy in local young women
- involving the wider community in the programme.

The objectives for the community included:

- reducing vandalism and damage
- reducing the number of empty properties (or voids)
- making residents feel safer
- improving the level of community well-being.

#### **Ways of working**

From the outset participants were involved in recruiting new members, running the project, suggesting activities and deciding how they, and the project, should progress. The workers (including the co-ordinator and some sessional staff) used a variety of methods to engage and work with the young people, including:

- outreach work

- brainstorming and decision-making
- getting the young people to lay down ground rules
- working with local agencies and organisations
- group activities
- discussion sessions
- outings and visits away from the estate
- residential trips away.

### **Evaluating the project**

Count Me In was evaluated continuously by both the NSF and SHAP. As a result of the evaluation by NSF, SHAP was invited to bid for Phase 2 of the programme. This invitation clearly indicated that the NSF felt the scheme was successful in reaching its targets and objectives.

At the end of their time with the project, significantly more than half the group were either employed or involved in education or training. This marked a substantial change from the beginning of their involvement with the project, when all fitted into the NEET category. Of the young people who were unemployed when the project finished, several had had temporary jobs, so had not been continuously unemployed.

There were many 'soft' outcomes too, particularly a growth in the young people's self-confidence and self-esteem, and their willingness to become involved in new and unfamiliar activities. Comments that the young people, themselves, made about the project included:

***'We don't waste time standing about on the streets no more – we've got better things to do.'***

***'It improved the estate. It improved the atmosphere.'***

***'[The project was good because it was] just having something to do that we wanted to do.'***

Lickers Lane Estate also experienced tangible benefits. By the time the scheme finished, there were no longer any voids on the estate and windows weren't broken as frequently as they had been before the project started. Various 'clean up days' that had been organised, together with the local Community Service scheme (which involves compulsory attendance on a placement, bringing tangible benefits to the wider community), improved the physical appearance and general tidiness of the area. And incidents of 'joyriding' and vandalism had decreased due to all the worst offenders being involved in Count Me In.

Residents who had complained about the young people in the past got in touch with the co-ordinator to comment on how they felt things had improved:

***'I'm not saying that things have changed overnight, but in the past two years there has been a great improvement... the appearance of the estate has greatly improved... [the project] has brought a sense of pride back to this community.'***

***'The estate has been much tidier and quieter over the past six to nine months... I feel much safer living here... '***

### **Project highlights**

Particularly successful elements of the project were the residential trips away from the estate, and the music activities that were organised, bringing DJs and musicians on to the estate to share their skills. For some of the young people, a residential in Wales gave them their first opportunity to excel at anything.

*'Ski-ing, that was the best, that. I'd never thought of trying it on me own, but I loved it. It gave me confidence, made me feel I could do other things.'*

Count Me In participant

The residential also gave participants the opportunity to talk about how where you live influences what you do – leading them to reflect on how their own local community and environment shaped their lives. One group member talked about the need to 'get out of Whiston and see other ways of living'.

A number of young people involved were either young offenders or at risk of offending. Several were involved in Community Service schemes, which had started before they joined the project. A young person, who asked the co-ordinator for advice after being breached for non-attendance on a scheme, wanted to know if Count Me In could run a Community Service programme. And, other youngsters in the project were equally enthusiastic about the idea.

Following discussion, it was decided that SHAP would provide such a scheme, because it would not only benefit the young people involved, but also the estate and other residents generally. The idea was that the scheme would complement Count Me In's work, with the emphasis on cleaning up the estate, repairing fences,

and dealing with the other effects of vandalism.

To begin with, some of the young men involved viewed carrying out their Community Service locally as an easy option. But it soon became apparent that carrying out their punishment in front of friends and neighbours was not going to be easy – joking remarks from their peers, or approving comments from other residents, proving equally unwelcome.

However, with the exception of one young man, they all turned up on time and completed their hours. This helped to give Count Me In a positive profile on the estate. One young participant in the scheme commented:

*'It was good for people to see the ones who had smashed windows and broken fences having to mend them.'*

### **Key factors to its success**

SHAP identified several key factors that contributed to the impact of the project. The NSF also noted most of these in their own evaluation.

#### **The relationship between the young people and the workers**

The NSF recognised that probably the most important factor in the success or failure of the projects they funded was the quality of the relationship young people developed with the key worker (or workers). Young people involved in Count Me In were able to analyse what was special about their relationships with the worker:

*'He really sticks up for you... he's good with people... he made you feel he was really on your side.'*

*'You couldn't ask for a better person than [the worker]. He just... he never judged anyone on what they had done in the past.'*

*'I'd not long started college, and [the worker] was always saying to me, go on, go ahead, go for it.'*

#### Young people involved at every level

From the very beginning of Count Me In, SHAP was committed to the young people's participation in every aspect of the project. It was considered important that they:

- make their own decisions
- develop their own strategies
- define their own agenda
- access information
- speak for themselves.

This approach paid off because the young people felt real ownership of the project, and took pride in its achievements. As one of them said:

*'It was good – [we] decided where we wanted to go and what we wanted to do. We were given choices.'*

#### Flexibility

In order for the young people's participation to be meaningful, the project had to be flexible and responsive. This approach enabled the co-ordinator to set up the Community Service scheme that the young people wanted, which was viewed as such a success by residents.

#### Community involvement

The number of complaints SHAP received from residents was one of the factors that

led it to go ahead with the project. After Count Me In began, residents were kept informed that it had been set up partly in response to their complaints. Local people became very supportive of the group, and were kept up to date by a newsletter produced by the young people and the worker on the scheme.

All the young people involved in Count Me In lived no more than 5 to 10 minutes away from both bases used for the project. The close proximity of projects to where young people lived was identified as a key factor to success across all NSF projects. In particular, a worker on the Count Me In project noted its obvious benefits:

- accessibility
- local knowledge on the part of the workers
- easier for young people to drop in
- young people feel more confident on their 'home ground'
- timing of activities can be more flexible.

#### Length of project

Unlike many community development and youth work projects, Count Me In had guaranteed funding for three years. This meant there was time for a relationship to develop between the worker and the young people, and also time for the group to bond and learn to work together.

The relatively small number of young people involved enabled the worker to build up a relationship with each individual. Many members of the project had multiple problems – a significant number were both long-term truants and young offenders. They needed one-to-one attention, as well

as the opportunity of being listened to in a group situation.

### **The project's impact**

All members joined Count Me In within the first year of the project and this gave it consistency as a group, helping to bind it together. The young people learned, shared, and progressed as a group, and were able to provide each other with support and help. The project was relatively cheap to administer, and extremely cost-effective in the benefits it delivered to the estate and to the young people involved. The physical appearance of the estate was improved, levels of harassment and annoyance reduced, and it became a more desirable place to live. Not only did project members gain new experiences, but they also worked on influencing their local environment in positive ways. Their confidence and self-esteem increased, as did their ability to take advantage of opportunities on offer to them.

# Working with families

Government guidance on families engaging in, or alleged to be engaging in, ASB may seem to be becoming more hard-line. However, there are some encouraging examples of projects operating under a completely different ethos that are being supported and encouraged by the authorities. The first and best known of these projects opened in Scotland in the mid-1990s.

## Detailed case study: Dundee Families Project

When the Dundee Families Project opened in 1997, it became the first scheme to work intensively with families accused of ASB. Social landlords have traditionally used punitive measures to deal with the worst examples of ASB in housing – the ‘nuisance neighbours’ who disturb and harass other residents and make properties hard to let. However, eviction can be a slow and difficult process, and can often simply move problems from one area to another. Also, many landlords recognise that ‘problem’ families have complex problems of their own – that many are struggling without adequate resources or support.

### How it works

This project works with families by helping them to first identify the issues and behaviours that have caused problems in the past, then providing support and guidance in order to help them manage these issues better in the future. It was established with money from the Urban Programme (a European Union Community Initiative) to help families who were either ‘homeless or at severe risk of homelessness because of antisocial behaviour’. It is run by NCH Action for

Children in Scotland, in partnership with Dundee City Council’s housing and social work departments.

One of the project’s most innovative aspects is that it provides residential accommodation for up to four families, with daily support offered to them. Other families are supported by outreach workers, either in their own accommodation, or in dispersed flats that are used as move-on accommodation from the core block.

An Admissions Panel decides which families should be offered a place at the project, and also reviews cases, and provides advice and support to staff. It is made up of representatives from the project, NCH, and Dundee City Council. Families who refuse places risk eviction or police action.

When staff and families were asked about factors that had led to ASB in the past, they identified:

- poor anger control
- alcohol and drug misuse
- social exclusion
- lack of parenting skills
- low self-esteem
- isolation
- mental health problems.

Most families had more than one of these problems. Such problems tend to be interrelated and create a complex web of needs that is impossible to deal with without comprehensive help and support. The Dundee Families Project offers:

- one-to-one counselling

- group work
- youth activities
- parenting courses
- budgeting and financial skills
- cookery classes
- anger-management courses.

Help is available to families 24 hours a day, and those clients who live in the residential block have access to an extremely high level of intensive support.

An evaluation of the project completed in 2001<sup>11</sup> found that:

- slightly more than half the referred cases were accepted and worked with
- 59 per cent of active cases grew better at managing their behaviour
- the core block and dispersed services had a considerably higher rate of success than the outreach cases
- almost all families involved felt they were helped by the project
- local residents' views about the project were almost all positive, despite initial misgivings.

### **The project's influence**

The project has been widely recognised as a successful example of intervention with struggling families, and the Home Office White Paper on ASB identifies the project as an 'innovative' model of good practice. Charities and voluntary organisations, local councils, and the Government have studied its work and tried to replicate its success. Six projects, run along the same lines as the Dundee Families Project, are being independently evaluated by Sheffield

Hallam University – an interim evaluation was published in 2006.<sup>12</sup>

Researchers found that across England and Wales only eight such projects existed, one of which (the Shelter Inclusion Project) was already being evaluated independently. The only other project not to be part of the study was in the very early stages of development. Five of the six projects studied were developed by NCH in partnership with local authorities: Blackburn with Darwen, Bolton, Manchester, Oldham and Salford. And, the sixth project included in the evaluation was established by Sheffield City Council.

### **Positive impact**

The researchers found that the projects, all of which were under two years old, had already had a positive impact on the families they worked with. The findings include:

- 82 per cent of families, about whom data had been collected, had achieved a reduction in the level of complaints about them; in a further 15 per cent, behaviour had stabilised
- 95 per cent of families had either maintained their tenancies or made a planned move
- 80 per cent of families had managed to reduce the threat of possession action
- of families where information on school attendance was recorded, 84 per cent showed improvement.

A significant finding from the report was that the majority of referrers were reluctant to term families as 'antisocial', because they felt that 'labelling families... was counter-productive in achieving change'. Instead, they preferred terms such as

<sup>11</sup> Dillane, Hill, Bannister and Scott, *Evaluation of the Dundee Families Project, Final Report*, University of Glasgow, September 2001

<sup>12</sup> Judy Nixon, Caroline Hunter, Sadie Parr et al, *Interim Evaluation of Rehabilitation Projects for Families at Risk of Losing their Homes as a Result of Antisocial Behaviour*, Centre for Social Inclusion, Sheffield Hallam University, 2006

'problematic', 'vulnerable', and 'in need of support'.

### **Detailed case study: Shelter Inclusion Project**

One scheme inspired by the Dundee Families Project's way of working is the Shelter Inclusion Project. This was set up in October 2002. It was developed by Shelter in partnership with Rochdale Metropolitan Borough Council to tackle ASB and address social exclusion. The main principle behind the project is the belief that behaviour deemed to be antisocial is almost always due to unmet support needs. The project has three key objectives:

- to reduce ASB
- to promote social inclusion and community stability
- to prevent eviction and provide a route back into settled housing.

Unlike the project in Dundee, the Shelter Inclusion Project does not have a residential unit. However, it does offer intensive support and practical help to struggling families. And, in contrast to the Dundee Families Project, it also works with lone adults and couples without children. The project attempts to deal holistically with a family's or individual's problems, seeing them as part of a bigger picture.

#### **How it works**

Most households referred to the project have received a formal warning from their landlord (in all cases a social landlord) linked to alleged ASB. Any punitive measures the landlord might be planning to take are put on hold while the family is engaged with the project. They are given a

comprehensive assessment to determine their needs and a support package is devised. A range of support is available to clients receiving the service. This includes:

- help liaising with the council and other agencies including solicitors, health visitors, counselling services, schools, and training or employment services
- support to address alleged ASB complaints, as well as help dealing with problems caused by neighbours and unwelcome visitors
- assistance with running a home, including help with managing household finances, and practical support with tasks such as gardening and decorating
- support with children and young people, including creative play sessions
- parenting advice and help with managing children's behaviour
- emotional support in the form of someone for people to speak to when difficulties arise.

An independent evaluation of the project was commissioned, funded by the Housing Corporation and undertaken by the Centre for Housing Policy at the University of York. The evaluation was published in January 2006. The project assisted 74 households from its inception in 2002 to the end of the evaluation period in June 2005.

#### **Support needs of service users**

Most households were found to have high support needs. Asked about their health problems on referral, more than half the households (57 per cent) said they contained an adult suffering from depression. Roughly one in four households (23 per cent) contained an

adult who was drug or alcohol dependent, and just under one-third (28 per cent) reported that their household included an adult with a limiting illness or disability.

The children in the households generally had better health status and fewer support needs than the adults. Eighteen per cent of children were described by their parents as having a behavioural problem, while 12 per cent suffered from asthma and eight per cent had a disability or a long-term limiting illness. Just under one-quarter of the children (24 per cent) were experiencing severe problems at school or were absent from school.

### **The project's impact**

In the final evaluation report published in January 2006, there is clear evidence that the project prevented eviction for many of the families it worked with. Project workers assessed 84 per cent of closed cases as being no longer at risk of homelessness, and evidence from landlords also corroborated this.

Seventy-one per cent of closed cases were reported as either having ceased being involved in ASB or as showing improvements in their management of ASB. Formal tracking of 10 cases showed that it takes a sustained amount of work, over a considerable period of time, to make a difference to more severe ASB.

Over all, the Shelter Inclusion Project met with considerable success over the period covered by the evaluation. It enjoyed good inter-agency support, and users felt that their involvement with the project had been very positive.

# The future for support projects

Although the Government is hardening its stance against ASB, there is reason to remain positive. In February 2005 the Home Office announced that intensive family support would be offered to 'problem' families in 50 so-called TOGETHER action areas. Parents who 'persist in letting their kids run wild, or behave like yobs themselves' would face 'intensive rehabilitation'. Despite the punitive language in the announcement, it is clear that something very much along the lines of the family-support projects was envisaged. Support being offered included 'courses in parenting skills, financial management and anger management'.

This approach was re-emphasised in the Respect Action Plan produced by the

Home Office in January 2006. By 2007 all local authorities will have to ensure that intensive family-support projects are in place 'where they are needed'. The plan also states that sanctions in the form of financial penalties are being considered for families who are 'evicted for antisocial behaviour and then refuse to take up offers of help'.

Work in family-support projects, in which Shelter and NCH lead the way, has shown that the reasons for ASB are complex. But, to those people working in the fields of housing and homelessness and family support, the answer seems obvious: an effective and lasting solution can only be achieved by supporting families so they are able to keep their accommodation.

# Appendix A

## The legal context

This appendix lists recent legal measures that have significantly affected children, young people, and families accused of ASB.

### Crime and Disorder Act 1998

#### Acceptable Behaviour Contracts

An Acceptable Behaviour Contract (ABC) is a voluntary written agreement between a person who has been committing ASB and one or more local agencies (eg police, housing, school). It defines certain behaviour that the person promises to change. For example, it might include these two promises:

- I will not threaten or abuse residents or passers-by. This includes swearing.
- I will not climb on rooftops or enter lift shafts or other prohibited areas.

ABCs were designed to be used with 10- to 18-year-olds, although they can be applied to an older age group. In cases where a child is younger than 10, parents could be asked to sign a parental responsibility order, accepting full responsibility for their child's behaviour.

An ABC is not legally binding, but if it is breached the breach can be used as evidence to support an ASBO application.

#### Anti-social Behaviour Orders

ASBOs were introduced in Section 1 of the Crime and Disorder Act, and were first used in 1999. The Police Reform Act of 2002 extended their use. In England and Wales, ASBOs can apply to anyone older than 10. They are typically used to deal with problems such as harassment, vandalism, and neighbour nuisance.

Although an ASBO is a civil order, a breach amounts to a criminal offence and carries

a custodial sentence. Unless a local Youth Offending Team (YOT) gets involved, young people can now end up in custody for breaching an ASBO.

#### Child curfews

The Crime and Disorder Act 1998 gave the police powers to impose child curfews on children younger than 10, and the Criminal Justice and Police Act 2001 raised the age limit to 16. A local authority can apply to the Home Secretary for a Local Child Curfew Order where children are causing 'alarm' or 'distress' to others living in a particular area.

A local child curfew can last for up to 90 days and applies to children and young people under 16. The curfew requires all children younger than 16 to be in their homes by a certain time in the evening.

#### Parenting Orders

These orders are designed to guide parents when their children get into trouble. A court may issue one to a parent or guardian of:

- a juvenile (10- to 16-year-old) who is convicted of an offence
- a child of 10 or older who is made the subject of an ASBO or a Sex Offender Order, or a child younger than 10 who is made the subject of a Child Safety Order.

The parents or carers of children who regularly play truant may also be given a Parenting Order. Any parent, carer or guardian (including a step-parent), who lives with a child, can also be given one. A non-resident parent, if they are having regular contact with the child, may be issued with one separately.

A Parenting Order requires parents and carers to attend regular guidance and counselling sessions, covering such subjects as parenting skills and managing young people's behaviour. Parents and carers may also have conditions imposed on them, such as attending their child's school, or not letting them visit particular areas unsupervised. An order lasts for no longer than three months, but a second element, ordering the parent or carer to exercise control over their child's behaviour, may last 12 months. A failure to fulfil the conditions can be treated as a criminal offence, and the parent/carer can be prosecuted.

### **Child Safety Orders**

Any local authority department can apply to the family proceedings court for one of these. It is only relevant to children younger than 10 years old. The order places the child under the supervision of a social worker or an officer from a YOT. The order will normally last for three months, but could last up to 12 months. In many cases, the child's parents will be placed under a Parenting Order at the same time.

Child Safety Orders are intended to be used in cases where a child:

- commits an act, which, had they been older than 10, would have constituted an offence
- behaves in such a way as to suggest that they are at risk of offending
- behaves in such a way as to cause, or be likely to cause, disruption or harassment to local residents
- contravenes a ban imposed under a local child curfew notice.

Penalties for failing to comply with a Child Safety Order are potentially harsh. In the words of the Youth Justice Board: 'If the child fails to comply with the requirements of the order, the court will have the option of considering whether the child should be taken into care.'<sup>13</sup>

## **Anti-social Behaviour Act 2003**

### **Dispersal Orders**

Under Part 4 of the Anti-social Behaviour Act 2003, police were given the power to use Dispersal Orders for groups of two or more people. Once in place, these are effective 24 hours a day for a prescribed period of time. Either the police or the local authority can instigate the process of applying for such an order, which can cover an area as small as a car park or as wide as an entire local authority area.

However, the area to be covered should be one where there is evidence of persistent ASB and groups causing a nuisance. Anyone who refuses to obey a dispersal instruction will be considered to have committed a criminal offence and can be fined or imprisoned for up to three months. In practice, it is more likely that under-16s will be considered for an ASBO. Where unsupervised under-16s are found on the streets after 9pm within the area designated by the order, police may escort them home.

Although any age group can be liable for a Dispersal Order, media coverage and political rhetoric associates the measure firmly with young people. The legal report commissioned by the coalition of 13 children's charities expressed unease about how these powers would be used.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>13</sup>For details, see Child Safety Orders under Pre-Court Orders on their website: [www.youth-justice-board.gov.uk](http://www.youth-justice-board.gov.uk)

<sup>14</sup>Anthony Jennings QC, an independent legal report.

**Anti-social Behaviour injunctions**

Section 13 of the Anti-social Behaviour Act repealed sections 152 and 153 of the Housing Act and introduced new provisions to allow social landlords to apply for injunctions to prohibit ASB. Housing Action Trusts and registered social landlords can now apply for injunctions, where previously these powers were only available to local authorities. An injunction prohibits the person concerned from behaving in a way that is defined within the injunction. For example, there may be a requirement not to commit harassment of neighbours, not to make excessive noise, not to use a property for drug dealing, or not to commit vandalism.

Breach of the conditions of an injunction can result in up to two years' imprisonment and/or an unlimited fine for contempt of court.

**Demoted tenancies**

This is a less secure tenancy that removes a tenant's Right to Buy and security of tenure for at least one year. Social landlords are now able to apply for Demotion Orders in cases of ASB. This power was introduced in sections 14 and 15 of the Anti-social Behaviour Act. If a council or registered social landlord is seeking an ASB statutory injunction against a secure or assured tenant, they can also apply for a Demotion Order.

**Proceedings for possession**

Under Part 2, section 16, of the Anti-social Behaviour Act, courts must 'give particular consideration to the actual or likely effect which the antisocial behaviour has had, or could have had, on others, when considering whether it is reasonable to grant a possession order on the grounds of nuisance or annoyance'.

# Appendix B

## Further reading

*Communities that Care – a guidebook*,  
New Edition, David Utting and Anne  
Fairnington, Communities that Care, 2004

*Does Communities that Care work?*  
*An evaluation of a community-based  
risk prevention programme in three  
neighbourhoods*, Crow, France, et al,  
Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2004

*Interim evaluation of rehabilitation projects  
for families at risk of losing their homes as  
a result of anti-social behaviour*,  
Nixon, Hunter, Parr et al, ODPM, 2006

*Respect Action Plan*,  
Home Office, 2006

*Respect and Responsibility – Taking a  
Stand Against Anti-social Behaviour*,  
a White Paper, Home Office, 2003

*Shelter Inclusion Project: Evaluation  
of a new model to address anti-social  
behaviour*, Jones, Pleace, Quilgars and  
Sanderson, Centre for Housing Policy,  
University of York, 2006

*Shelter Inclusion Project: two years on*,  
Shelter, 2005  
(download from [www.shelter.org.uk](http://www.shelter.org.uk))

*The Edinburgh Study of Youth Transitions  
and Crime: Key findings at ages 12 and  
13*, Smith, McVie et al, Centre for Law and  
Society, University of Edinburgh, 2001

*The Youth Manifesto*,  
National Youth Agency, 2004

*Youth Matters*,  
Department for Education and Skills, 2005

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