

# Volunteers make a difference to the YOT

The Calderdale YOT volunteers get involved for many different reasons but what they have in common is that they all find the time they invest very rewarding and worthwhile. They also makes a big difference for many of the young people they work with. The volunteers have been able to make a contribution across a wide range of the YOT's activities. In many instances volunteers live in the area in which they are working and their links to the local community provide a valuable resource. Volunteers can sometimes appear less threatening to a young offender than professionals working in the criminal justice system and they may be able to offer a more flexible approach. The volunteers support Calderdale YOT in three key roles:

## *Appropriate Adults*

Appropriate Adults were introduced with the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 (PACE) which states that young people cannot be interviewed without a parent or other Appropriate Adult being present. Sometimes parents are not able to attend which is where a volunteer provides an invaluable service. Their role is to ensure that the young person's welfare needs are met and that the interview is conducted fairly. They are not a legal representative but provide support and information for the young person.

## *Mentors*

Volunteer Mentors provide positive support and encouragement to young people aged under 18 years, who have been charged with an offence. The Mentors meet regularly with a young person for a specified period and try to engage with them. The volunteer Mentor's overall aim is prevent that young person re-offending, encourage compliance with bail conditions and build their social and educational abilities.

## *Referral Order Panel Members*

Panel Members co-ordinate meetings that have been ordered by the Youth Court. Any young person aged between 10 and 17 years, who pleads guilty to an offence, and who has not previously been to court, will have to attend a Youth Offender Panel meeting. The Panels bring together members of the local community, parents and victims. The Panel Members talk, listen and agree a plan of action designed to put right the harm they caused, and to prevent any further offending.

## *Susan Milne - Volunteer Co-ordinator*

Susan has been the Volunteer Co-ordinator at the Youth Offending Team for more than two and a half years. During this time she has recruited many volunteers to undertake various roles, mainly as Appropriate Adults, Mentors and Referral Order Panel Members.

Susan said, "Volunteers are a vital resource to the team and, as well as the time volunteers offer, they bring with them an array of different qualities and skills that assist the work of the team."

The role of the co-ordinator is very demanding with almost fifty volunteers on the team, and potential new volunteers requiring interviews. They all need training, a function that Susan helps with, and managing to ensure the right people are in the right role. Susan added, "Volunteers are committed to their work with young people and have provided reliable support on a regular basis. Working with such dedicated support from volunteers makes the position of Volunteer Co-ordinator an enjoyable role."



Calderdale YOT currently have **50 active volunteers** with a further **15** in the process of being interviewed and trained. The current group comprises **30 panel members**, **6** working as appropriate adults and **14** as mentors. **Jannine Dowling**, a volunteer mentor since January 2003, has recently been recruited to the team as the new Drugs worker. The team also welcomes **Adele Hodgson**, recently recruited as the Volunteer Project Support Worker. Adele will be dealing with most enquiries regarding volunteering and supporting the current volunteers.



## ***Case Study - Dennis Marigold***

Dennis has been part of the volunteer team since November 2002, after answering a local advert. He had recently been made redundant and felt he needed to do something positive for the community. After the induction and training he felt the role of Appropriate Adult, supporting young people in custody, was one best suited to his experience and situation. It's a role that he has become very committed to. He said, "There is no typical day or routine to the role - I can go ten days without the 'phone ringing then have to support two young people on the same day. It's certainly never dull."

Being an Appropriate Adult brings Dennis into close contact with young people in a potentially stressful and difficult situation. He commented, "It's important that the young people can clearly differentiate me from the police. I'm in a position of authority but I'm not there to be judgemental. I make this very clear but also inform them that I don't want to know anything about any of the alleged crimes they may have committed, otherwise I'm obliged to pass that information on to the police. My focus is to make sure they're treated correctly whilst in custody and understand clearly everything that's happening to them."

Dennis has had to adapt to changes in the justice system. "When I started, most of the decisions about how the young person was dealt with was made by the Custody Sergeant but now every case goes to the CPS for a decision. My role in the process ends at this point."

Dennis feels part of the team and gets to meet up with other volunteer Appropriate Adults on a regular basis, for training and updates but also just to keep in touch. He believes being an Appropriate Adult isn't as daunting a job as it sometimes seems, adding, "There are simple procedures to follow and I've built an understanding with those I work with."

He concluded, "It can sometimes be a little frustrating that there's no 'end product' with the work that I do but I recognise it is a valuable and important job. That's the satisfaction that I get."



## ***The Volunteer Training Process and Accreditation***

Each of the three key volunteer roles has a different training requirement. The Appropriate Adults have a day and an evening at the Police Station with the Custody Sergeant and a Solicitor. The Mentors attend three days and an evening whereas the Panel Members have a four-day programme. This provides the essential information they need about the roles and prepares the volunteers for their work with young people.

The YOT is also committed to providing national recognition for the volunteers as well. To achieve this, as part of a Youth Justice Board initiative, Susan is working with the Open College Network to achieve formal qualifications and accreditation for the volunteers. She said, "They are working in a responsible role and take it very seriously. Many have built up a high level of knowledge and experience and we feel it appropriate that this is formally recognised."

Using a portfolio of evidence, built up through their work with young people, it is hoped the volunteers will achieve the award which is equivalent to a GCSE, with options to take it to 'A' level 'standard'.

## ***Interested in being a volunteer?***

If you feel you have the qualities, and the time, needed to become a volunteer for Calderdale YOT, or if you know someone else who does, call Susan Milne on:

**01422 368279**

or e-mail her at - [susan.milne@calderdale.gov.uk](mailto:susan.milne@calderdale.gov.uk)

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