

Pathways Through Learning

Improving offenders access to literacy and numeracy



LOTHIAN & BORDERS
COMMUNITY JUSTICE AUTHORITY

In association with

CLAN EDINBURGH

city literacy and numeracy

Lothian & Borders Community Justice Authority, in association with CLAN Edinburgh, hosted a seminar on Wednesday 25th March 2009, to bring together the key agencies who could work together to provide access to adult learning for offenders.

The event was held at the City Chambers in Edinburgh and Keith Brown MSP, Minister for Schools and Skills was the guest speaker.

Mr Brown stressed the government's determination to tackle offending and re-offending by stepping up early interventions which includes ensuring offenders are equipped with the skills they need to develop as individuals and make a positive contribution to our economy.

Mr Brown went on to say that improving offenders' literacy skills is crucial as it will provide the building blocks upon which offenders can access further learning opportunities, get into work, stay in work and break the cycle of offending behaviour.

The one day seminar was a mix of presentations and practical exercises to plan joint working in each local authority area with the opportunity to share knowledge and experiences from a variety of different working examples. The examples were all individual in their design, whilst offering a range of ideas for developing future literacy and numeracy learning opportunities.

The six sharing experience sessions really helped to highlight the good work that is already being carried out and they also demonstrated how literacy and numeracy is part of every day life and every day learning – for example in the decorating workshop in Edinburgh Prison offenders learn not only how to paint and decorate but how to measure the volume of paint required to decorate a room, number of rolls of wall paper required etc. This gives them the opportunity to develop their numeracy skills and learn how they can apply these skills in every day life. This vocational course is provided by Scottish Prison Service with literacies tuition by a Workers Educational Association literacies tutor.



City Chambers



Keith Brown MSP, Minister for Schools and Skills



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= City & Guilds qualification

The two presentations provided the participants with research evidence of the importance of learning for offenders and what works in Scotland.

Dr Fergus McNeill, Professor of Criminology & Social Work, Universities of Glasgow's presentation looked at desistance and the influences of age, life events, social capital and the effect of belief by others has on this process for offenders.

Figure 1 from Dr McNeill's presentation highlights the potential reduction in offending that desistance can achieve if successful at age 19 years. The green area of the graph depicts the offending that communities would not have to put up with, although the amber line/area is seen as the more realistic pattern that would happen.

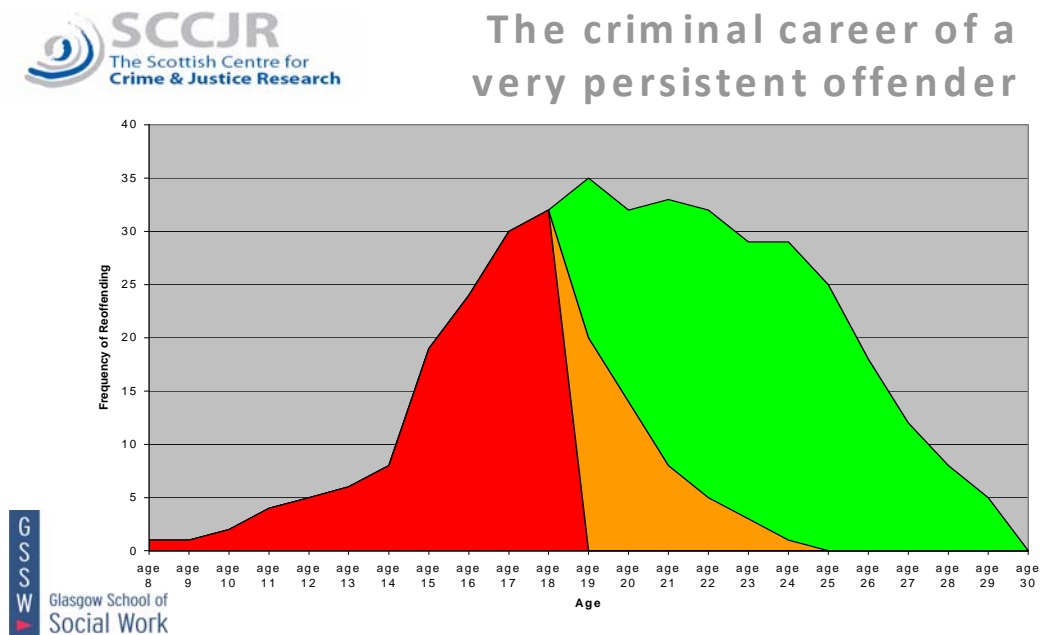


Figure 1: Dr Fergus McNeill, Pathways Through Learning, 25th March 2009

Dr McNeill went on to highlight that for persistent offenders, desistance is partly about re-writing their life about the past, present and especially the future and they are better able to do this if they have opportunities to develop their literacy skills.

As literacy issues can also limit the benefit offenders get from the range of programmes they go on, this needs to be considered in advance and steps taken to develop their literacy skills to allow them to participate fully.

Professor Lyn Tett, University of Edinburgh, talked about the social approach to learning, recognising the complexities of literacies which integrate feelings, values, routines, skills, understanding and activities. Learning should use everyday practices building on what the offenders already know and do and should be provided in a safe and supported environment.

Professor Tett highlighted the benefit that comes from embedding learning in a topic that is of interest to the learner such as football. This was emphasised in the 'Reading the Game' sharing experience session where young offenders in Polmont YOI are integrating reading, writing and numeracy learning based around football. The young people develop their understanding of numbers by looking at the league tables every week and by using computer programmes they develop their computer and art skills to plan their newsletter, 'the final whistle'.

The circulation of this fanzine is providing further learning opportunities, through the inclusion of word searches and quick quizzes, thought up by the young offenders on the programme.



Sharing experiences – ‘Reading the Game’ with Johannes Penman (Scottish Prison Service) and Sally Fawcitt (CLAN)

The Pathways Through Learning seminar’s key objective was to partly achieve one of the key outcomes in Lothian & Borders Community Justice Authority Area Plan 2008-11 which is:

Improved access to literacy and numeracy provision in the four areas of offender’ lives – private, family, community and work

Partnership working is a phrase that is used over and over again, but throughout the seminar it has been demonstrated as the most effective way of delivering services. The action plans that have been produced mean this work is only just beginning and regular updates will be provided to the Community Justice Authority with the first update planned for 6 months time.

Government also recognises the importance of literacies and consultation work is currently ongoing to prepare an Offender Learning Report which looks at three key groups:

- Young Offenders
- 18 years plus in custody
- Offenders in the community

This report will be submitted to Ministers in summer '09.

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The Pathways seminar was the first opportunity for all agencies working with offenders and with an interest in literacy to come together, share examples of good practice and to hear how literacy work fits into an academic context. The level of participation was very encouraging and reflected the importance of professionals working together and agreeing local arrangements to ensure their clients have access to appropriate services.

Not only does this work fit with the local Area Plan and national strategy for reducing re-offending it also ties into the Offender Learning work streams and the Single Outcome Agreement between central and local government.

We hope that the seminar has given the necessary spur for further local development of literacy based partnerships and look forward to the Autumn to see what progress has been achieved.

Chris Hawkes, Chief Officer

If you would like more information on Pathways Through Learning, any copies of the presentations or the materials that were provided on the day, please contact Lothian & Borders Community Justice Authority (see contact details below).

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