

NORTH LANARKSHIRE COUNCIL

SOCIAL WORK DEPARTMENT

Social Work Committee : Operations and Services Sub Committee 9th November, 1999.	Subject : Young People at High Risk
From : Jim Dickie, Director of Social Work Prepared by : Sandra Paterson, Principal Officer, Child Care	

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to advise Committee of the circumstances of some young people at high risk and steps which the Social Work Department has taken jointly with Lanarkshire Health Board and the Primary Care Trust to address this issue.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 In the latter part of 1998, following the suicide of three young people who had formerly been looked after by North Lanarkshire Council discussions were initiated at a senior level with Lanarkshire Health Board and the Primary Health Care Trust to consider what inter-agency measures could be put in place to minimise risk to vulnerable young people.
- 2.2 A number of issues common to all the young people were identified. Young people within the care system because of their past experiences often have low self esteem and for many much of their behaviour is self destructive. It is characterised by increasing social isolation and often associated with problems of substance misuse. Because of their often unpredictable behaviour they experience difficulties in finding and sustaining a settled place in which to live and consequently develop nomadic lifestyles. This can take them further away from their home locality and whatever familiar and stabilising influences as they may have had in their lives.
- 2.3 Social work staff in many cases have great difficulty developing constructive relationships with these young people and monitoring contact with them. Very often young people are mistrustful of any stability services and wish to go it alone. Frequently contact is not maintained by them nor is there information given about their whereabouts or change of address.
- 2.4 These difficulties also apply in their relationships with Health professionals.

Their contact with Health services is usually spasmodic and uncoordinated, largely confined to accident and emergency departments and where available addiction services.

There is little if any systematic monitoring or provision of health care for this group.

Young people therefore are left very vulnerable in terms of their physical well-being and mental health needs.

3. THE RESPONSE

- 3.1 A strategy group of relevant professionals was set up to consider as a matter of urgency what action was required to be taken in respect of providing appropriate services to these vulnerable young people. It was agreed that any action plan would be extended to young people already looked after and accommodated by the Social Work Department in children's and residential units as well as young people who were now being supported by the throughcare services.
- 3.2 A survey was carried out of the needs of these young people using a questionnaire, meetings with staff groups, meetings with the young people themselves. Initial collation of the information confirms the issues already identified and the need for a flexible responsive service which engages with young people at an early stage. Anxieties about mental health and consistent concerns emerged as an important health issue for the young people.
- 3.3 A survey of staff was also undertaken, to inform future training needs. This has recently been completed and analysed.

4. PROPOSALS

- 4.1 Following this survey, a proposal was developed for the funding of a development worker with a nursing background who would work closely with other professionals to provide direct services to identified vulnerable young people; assist in the development and introduction of training packages for relevant staff; review with young people the information available to them and methods of communication; and liaise closely with other Health and Social Work professionals, such as the Child and Family Clinic and Primary Health Care Teams.

This proposal has been successful in acquiring one year funding from the Primary Care Development Fund.

- 4.2 Joint training is also being prepared for staff of children's units and through care staff, aimed at raising awareness of mental health issues and early identification of problems.
- 4.3 The proposals will not stand alone and will link with existing initiatives such as 'Communities that Care' and 'Healthy Living Communities'. There is identified need for 'drop-in' facilities and appropriate accommodation for vulnerable young people who present difficult and challenging behaviour. Discussions are ongoing with the Housing Department to review arrangements for homeless young people and there is to be some reconfiguration of the service for these young people.

5. SUMMARY

- 5.1 A number of issues have been identified which may indicate risk in vulnerable young people of suicide or attempted suicide. Lanarkshire Health Board, the Primary Care Trust and Social Work Department are working together to address these issues.

Action taken has resulted in a new resource being acquired to specifically address the problem.

6. RECOMMENDATION

6.1 Committee is asked to

- note the contents of this report
- request progress reports on the implementation of the joint project with the National Health Service Primary Care Trust.

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SEPTEMBER, 1999.**

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