

The Life of a Persistent Young Offender

Peers

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Research (and experience) tells us that young people, who are persistent offenders, will often have offending or antisocial peers. We know that peer acceptance is an important need of adolescents. Family recedes as the major influence in the lives of young people and peers assume greater importance. Often, ‘treating’ the young person in isolation or without an understanding of the context of offending dynamics (i.e. within peer structures) will have few positive outcomes.

The following provides some excerpts taken from various books (criminological or sociological texts) about offenders. These excerpts have been taken to demonstrate how some offenders are introduced to offending through their peers and the influence of the peer group on young offenders. Read the excerpts and then answer the questions below.

“... around eleven, I wanted to run around and do what I wanted to do, breaking into houses and takings things off the line - that’s what everyone did; there was nothing there, absolutely nothing for people. We haven’t got a tennis court, we haven’t got a youth centre. So the only thing that we could do was to make our own fun”

“You got to be part of the era, you know, what the boys are doing. You’ve got to copycat or else they’ll just, you know, they’ll push you aside, you’ll not be part of the group anymore. And you want to prove to yourself that you’re just as capable of doing what they do, make a name for yourself ... You didn’t want to miss the action. It made you feel like you were part of the boys”

“No dreams, no career, nothing, no goals. Just to prove yourself, just to prove to your mates that, you know, you’re someone good to hang around”

“My friends had been doing it for maybe eighteen months before me and they’re like, ‘We’re doing a house, come and try it’. And I couldn’t say no”

“It turned out they used to drink every day so I started drinking... Another habit they used to have was glue sniffing, and I started getting into that too ... For two weeks I just blacked out and did nothing except drink and sniff all this glue”

“I had started hanging around with other street kids... and we were stealing cars and doing the usual petty stuff”

References:

Marshall, P. (2002) *Scarred for Life: the true story of a self harmer*

Korn, N. (2004) *Life Behind Bars: Conversations with Australian Inmates*

Questions:

- If you were describing a persistent young offender, based on your experience, when would they start hanging around with antisocial young people?
- What behaviour would they display at school and in the neighbourhood?
- Who will be their role models?
- Will they behave differently in groups than if on their own?
- Will they have any non-offending peers?