

# Knife crime cut by fifth thanks to youth crackdown ... Danish style

SCOTSMAN EXCLUSIVE

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YOUTH crime, including carrying knives, has fallen dramatically since the introduction of an early-intervention scheme developed in Denmark, according to a report published today.

An evaluation of the pilot scheme in East Renfrewshire found that carrying offensive weapons and vandalism had fallen by 21 per cent and 15 per cent respectively after the initiative began in 2006.

The school, social work, police and community (SSPC) project brings together every agency involved in a young person's welfare – including teachers, police, health and social workers, and housing officers – to discuss their offending and find ways to tackle the causes to prevent them slipping into a life of crime.

Young offenders referred to the scheme, which involved creating three designated "campus cops", included teenagers caught carrying knives, vandalising property, fighting and taking drugs in school.

The "engine room" of the scheme is a referral group, which takes on young offenders who would otherwise have to wait weeks before being dealt with by the children's panel or courts.

The referral group draws up a plan aimed at stopping the offending, which may include police visiting the youth's parents, providing drug and alcohol counselling, or activities such as football or a Duke of Edinburgh award.

The evaluation report says the scheme, which was funded by a £250,000 grant from the Scottish Government, has been effective in cutting youth offending.

People caught with offensive weapons, including knives, fell by 21 per cent from 122 in 2005 to 96 in 2007. Vandalism was down from 1,846 incidents in 2005 to 1,563 in 2007, while there was also a reduction in the number of persistent offenders. Meanwhile, referrals to the children's reporter dropped by 31 per cent, from 212 to 145.

The researchers recommend that the model – which has been shown to cut youth crime in Denmark, where it has been used extensively – is a "useful and



Parents and teachers are often unaware of the trouble youngsters are getting into. Picture: Getty Images

interesting model for the government to consider". But they warn that other areas of Scotland, faced with more serious problems of crime, drugs and deprivation, will find it difficult to implement.

"It would seem from statistics on re-referrals, from anecdotal evidence and from reduction in referrals to the reporter, that there has been a reduction in

antisocial behaviour and youth offending," says the report, by the research company Blake Stevenson.

Kenny MacAskill, the justice secretary, is urging other councils to "learn the lessons" of the East Renfrewshire pilot.

He said: "It's great that this evaluation gives us clear evidence that early and effective action by different professionals

working together can have a massive impact on the lives of young people and communities. I hope other councils can learn from this approach and help make sure it can benefit as many young people as possible."

However, one expert involved in setting up the scheme said extra government funding would probably be needed to roll it out across the country.

Kevin went from gang violence to team leadership

## Case study

KEVIN started going off the rails when he was in primary school when he continually fought with fellow pupils.

High school was, he says, "brilliant" – different teachers, a clean slate, and a chance to get into trouble all over again.

He started hanging about with older boys, standing on street corners drinking cheap wine. The police gave him a slap on the wrist a couple of times, but the school had no idea what he was up to.

Kevin began smoking cannabis and stealing to fund his new addiction. He lived with his mother and two sisters – but they too were largely unaware of what was going on.

Drugs, alcohol, stealing and gang violence quickly became Kevin's daily routine – and no-one was doing anything to steer him away from trouble.

Eventually, a police officer referred him to the SSPC project. Teachers, police, social work, housing and youth workers were able to understand the trouble Kevin was getting into, and the home problems contributing to his behaviour. He was given access to alcohol services, counselling and outward-bound activities – where he discovered a flair for team leadership. His mother was given extra support to bring up the family.

Kevin, now 17, is currently training to become a mentor for other young offenders.

Wendy Harrington, of the Association of Directors of Social Work, said: "What we need are answers for youth crime now, and to prevent problems in the future, if that is not resourced adequately, it won't be achievable. "Communities, and young people, deserve that to be achieved."

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## National use of early intervention must be based on local links

### Analysis

model work is it is locally managed.

The professionals involved know and understand their communities, and know personally the young people and families involved in offending.

Simply rolling out the model on a council-wide basis would not work in large cities such as

Glasgow or Dundee – unless there were a number of local Young People's Referral Groups to address the very local circumstances.

In East Renfrewshire there is evidence that professional staff in health, social work, education, youth work, the Children's Reporter service and the police have made positive shifts in their organisational culture, their ways of working and their attitude and outlook towards young people.

This has not happened overnight. It has taken a long time, and commitment from the most senior levels to make it happen.

The result is that staff in East Renfrewshire are a fair way along the road to taking personal responsibility for young people in their area.

In East Renfrewshire, staff on the Young People's Referral Group work well together. They share details, take decisions quickly and act on

them immediately. It sounds easy, but anyone who has ever worked in the public sector knows how difficult this is to achieve.

To bring about this major shift throughout Scotland will require strong leadership from the top – in the Scottish Government but more so in local authorities and police authorities. It also needs additional resources.

NORMA HURLEY, director of Blake Stevenson.

Scottish oil workers left stranded on Russian rig by red tape

FRANK UROUHART

MORE than 40 offshore workers, the majority understood to be Scots, remained stranded on an oil rig off the north coast of Russia yesterday in a bureaucratic wrangle.

The 43 workers, employed by Aberdeen-based drilling company Northern Offshore, were due to leave the Energy Exerter drilling rig in the Barents Sea last week.

But Russian immigration authorities are alleged to have blocked attempts to allow a replacement crew on to the rig.

The rig recently arrived in the Barents Sea after sailing from the Danish port of Esbjerg to begin work on a five-month drilling programme for Russian operator Gazflot.

A crew change was scheduled to take place on Tuesday last week, but workers due to be deployed to the Energy Exerter remain stuck in the Russian port of Murmansk.

Northern Offshore said yesterday that it was doing everything possible to ensure the return of the stranded workers.

John Monks, the firm's offshore manager, said: "Our sole focus is keeping the guys comfortable and safe on board while doing what we can to get everyone home."

Gary McHattie, the rig's offshore installation manager, added: "We understand that people are frustrated by the fact we have been unable to change the crew yet, but things are progressing."

David Coonice, one of the stranded crewmen, said: "The situation is not ideal, but everyone is being well looked after and morale is good."

Yachtsman dies after fall into Forth

AVACHTSMAN has died after falling overboard into the Forth during a club race.

Doug Brown, 61, of South Queensferry, a former harbourmaster at Grange-mouth, was participating in the weekly event last Wednesday as part of a three-man crew.

But as they attempted to manoeuvre the yacht – called One Up – he fell overboard. He died a short time later in hospital.

Guthrie Stewart, the commodore of Port Edgar Yacht Club who organised the event, paid tribute to the "friendly and outgoing" sailor and said his death was "an absolute tragedy".