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**RESPECT: a personal development programme for
young people at risk of social exclusion**

Option One Impact Report

Executive Summary

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April 2008

Executive Summary

Background

The RESPECT programme is governed by a partnership of organisations which work within the Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service area of Cheshire, Halton and Warrington. The programme brings together a number of elements of the Fire and Rescue Service's earlier work in a concerted attempt to tackle wider challenges pertinent to the fire services, whilst working in partnership with other agencies.

RESPECT, which has been funded for three years from the Government's *Invest to Save* initiative, is a targeted intervention for young people who are aged 11 to 16 years and who are disaffected and/or displaying anti-social behaviour. The programme aims to re-motivate young people who may be temporarily or permanently excluded from school, be in danger of exclusion, have a high level of unauthorised absence, be involved in anti-social behaviour and/or be known to the Youth Offending Teams.

The RESPECT programme comprises a number of different elements. These are Option One led by fire service personnel; Option Two led by the Youth Federation; detached youth work, *On the Streets*, led by Halton Youth Service; and a school holiday project.

A three year evaluation was built into the RESPECT bid in order that the individual, community and societal benefits of the programme could be quantified and evidenced. This report is part of the outcomes evaluation. Its focus is to explore and evidence the short and medium term impact of the Option One courses upon the young people who were allocated places during 2007.

Study design and methods

The study has adopted a pluralistic approach to the evaluation of the impact of Option One of the RESPECT programme. This has enabled the evaluators to bring together the perspectives of all of the 'stakeholders' – the young people themselves, the staff who have run the programme, referrers and school contacts and the young person's family. Primary and secondary data collection methods have been employed; data sources included referral forms, attendance registers, the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire, self-completion questionnaires, focus groups and individual interviews, and contemporaneous notes completed by RESPECT staff.

This report has placed the impact of the RESPECT programme at the individual level within the theoretical construct of risk and protective factors and the development of resilience. A young person's involvement with the initiative can be viewed as a potential 'turning point', providing an opportunity for 'positive chain reactions' through the reduction of risk factors, an increase in protective factors and the development of resilience.

Key findings

The Option One course of the RESPECT programme has had a greater impact on some young people than on others. The reasons that have been proposed for a lack of immediate impact for some participants, or their inability to maintain positive changes which have occurred, include the following:

- the length and content of the Option One course and the timing of the intervention;
- the difficulty the young person experiences in transferring the learning from the Option One course to other situations;
- the entrenched nature of the difficulties facing the young person, including problems at home;
- the influence of peers and peer pressures.

Where the Option One course did have a positive impact, it appeared to be most frequently reflected in the young person's increased self-confidence and self-esteem, in their general attitude and motivation and in improved relationships with adults. The factors that appear to be important in encouraging a positive impact include the following:

- appropriate referrals to the Option One course in terms of the needs of the young person and the timeliness of the referral;
- young people having information before they start the course so they have realistic expectations and are ready to engage;
- positive attention from staff and peers, and the construction of positive relationships, resulting in the young person feeling valued as a member of the team and able to participate in the activities;
- the self-perception, and external recognition, of success whilst the young person is on the course resulting in the growth of confidence and self-esteem;

- stimulation through experiencing something different and learning through practical activities;
- encouraging interests in a range of activities that the young person may pursue at a later date;
- teachers, support staff and family members providing opportunities for the young person to talk about the course, reinforced the learning and helped the young person in the transfer of skills.

Conclusions

This evaluation presents a picture of the short and medium term impact of the Option One courses for the young people who were allocated places during 2007: the ongoing impact of the RESPECT programme can only be measured in the months and years ahead.

The evaluation highlighted a number of issues for the operation of the RESPECT programme and its evaluation. Operational issues included the need to invest in the referral process and pre-course engagement and to consider how all of the young people who participate in the programme can be supported during and after the course to maximise their learning. The report raised a number of important issues for the evaluation of the RESPECT programme. These included the value of both the qualitative and quantitative data in measuring impact, and the need to ensure comprehensive data is collected over the lifetime of the programme, data which also reflects the views and experiences of all stakeholders.