

# Whose crime is it anyway?

2nd edition



*changing lives  
reducing crime*

# Crime is everyone's problem

Crime has a devastating effect on individuals and on neighbourhoods. It creates victims and builds climates of fear and hostility within communities. It leads to divisions and resentment, and costs the taxpayer an enormous amount. Never has this been more clearly in evidence than with the recent incidents of rioting in London, Manchester, Nottingham, Birmingham and other large cities across England.

Following the riots we witnessed a shift in the public mood. Having watched on TV shops being looted, gunshots being fired in busy streets and buildings being burned to the ground, the public called for a swift and robust response. The police and the courts swung into action and the prison system experienced its largest single influx of prisoners. But ordinary people swung into action too. They rallied round with dustpans and brushes and with practical offers of help to the victims.

**At a time when  
crime is everyone's  
problem, everyone  
has to be part  
of the solution.**

Despite the maelstrom of debate and lessons to be learned about the best way to reduce crime and reoffending, the long-term solution is not to be found in simply isolating offenders in prisons away from the wider community. At a time when crime is everyone's problem, everyone has to be part of the solution.

Closing the gap between those who commit crime and those who don't is crucial. So is making sense of the criminal justice system – for people who come into contact with it, but also for those who don't.

People do have the capacity to change. They can be steered away from crime before they become irrevocably involved. Criminal careers can be broken. Offenders can give something back to society where previously they only took from it. And both victims and offenders can find closure in a world where all too often the experience can leave its mark forever.



Underpinning Nacro's work are four imperatives based on years of policy research and practical experience gained from our work on the ground with thousands of offenders in hundreds of communities across England and Wales.

They show the importance of:

- 1** getting in early with troubled young people
- 2** challenging attitudes – both the attitudes of offenders and those of the wider community
- 3** putting the notion of 'giving back' at the core of measures to make communities safer
- 4** concentrating on outcomes in relation to reducing reoffending, and getting offenders ready to live and work in their communities.

But reducing crime and reoffending in some ways is the easy part. Sustaining those improvements is much harder. Nacro is also focused on the bigger picture – working with the government to change the hearts and minds of employers and the public at large to ensure that rehabilitated offenders get jobs and are given a fair chance to move their lives on so they can give something back to the community.

Nacro's Change the Record campaign argued for the removal of various legislative and procedural barriers which prevent ex-offenders finding and keeping work. Employment offers so much: structured time; an income; the opportunity for a new outlook and new relationships; a legitimate identity; and financial security.

As people move away from offending, they can focus their energies on work and other positive activities, proving to themselves and others that they can excel at a legitimate job and reach their potential. This is all an employer wants from any employee. It is also rehabilitation in action.

# 1 Get in early

By no means all young people commit crime. When they are bored, disadvantaged and estranged from their parents, the vast majority don't commit crime. Even when their friends do so, most young people still stay away from crime.

The key is spotting the minority of young people who are most likely to get into trouble. The gateways to future criminal behaviour are well known. They include antisocial behaviour, personal victimisation, alcohol misuse, involvement with drugs, and having close friends and siblings who are in trouble. Some young people, having shown signs of criminal behaviour and struggled at school, come to think as they get older that offending is acceptable and become set on a life of crime.

To steer young people away from crime we need a balance of measures. We must combine police enforcement with programmes that target young people who are most likely to offend. Working with parents, the police, schools and youth offending teams, we must build a ring of confidence around young people – providing positive role models, teaching them to develop constructive relationships, getting them back into education, tackling drug and alcohol misuse, and offering them a sustainable future which does not involve crime. By the time a young person takes a gun or a knife on to the streets or joins a gang, it's often too late.

Getting in early with the most troubled young people is money well spent. It prevents future victims and safeguards the future of our neighbourhoods. It offers young people the chance to contribute to, rather than to just take from, their communities.

## 2 Change the situation

Most people who get involved in crime when they are young grow out of it as they get older. They find a job, a settled home and a relationship. Others don't and go on to commit more and more crimes.

As a general rule, the more heavily involved someone is in offending when they are young, the harder it will be for that individual to move on from crime. The worse they do at school, the less work experience they are likely to have; the more time they spend associating with those from the criminal world, the more likely they are to commit crime. This, combined with alcohol and drug misuse and a growing acceptance that crime and violence is an effective way to solve everyday problems, confirms the offender in a life of crime.

With some offenders it can be hard to change their situation. But it can be done – with the right combination of measures and the right motivation to stay the course. This means tackling many problems all at the same time: getting offenders job ready; providing them with a home and helping them to keep it; tackling anger and aggression; teaching problem-solving skills; reducing dependence on alcohol and drugs; challenging attitudes and behaviour; and opening up new opportunities and interests for them.

Changing offenders' lives is money well spent. It reduces the likelihood of them reoffending, and each step that they take towards rehabilitation and towards moving their lives on is a step that the wider community will reap the benefits of as they start to play a positive role in their communities.

# 3 Be active in the community

In the interests of justice and public safety, some offenders warrant the most severe forms of punishment for the offences they have committed. In short, they need to be in prison.

But for offenders who do not pose a danger to the public, the costs, both financial and social, of custodial measures far outweigh those of community-based measures.

For this group of offenders, imprisonment makes it much harder for organisations like Nacro to challenge them in the real world to act differently and to offer opportunities for offenders and victims to come together and then move on.

There's a mountain to climb to persuade the public that community sentences work. They are often seen as too complicated, inaccessible and insufficiently robust. Currently, too many offenders drop out before the sentence starts or before it is completed, and too many reoffend. For community sentences to succeed, it is crucial that the work carried out with offenders is not locked away inside town centre probation offices. To get offenders to change the way they think, feel and behave, the work needs to be much more closely associated with each offender's reality and where that person is at in their life. For this to work, programmes need to become an intrinsic and visible part of the community they operate in, to be active in the heart of neighbourhoods, and not out of the sight and the minds of ordinary people.

It is possible – with new delivery partners, new thinking and new technology – to hold offenders to the terms of their order, to make community sentences accessible and understandable to ordinary people, and to reduce both attrition and reoffending. And this in turn will also help build public confidence.

Being active in the community is money well spent. For many offenders, spending another three months in jail, absolved of all responsibility and exempt from the burdens of everyday life, is the easy option. But learning new disciplines and skills in the community, confronting dependence on alcohol or drugs, having their attitudes and behaviour challenged in the real world, coming face to face with their victim, and giving something back to their own neighbourhood – these measures are altogether tougher and much more worthwhile all round.

# 4 Focus on outcomes

It is impossible to argue with the concept of paying those who provide programmes to offenders based on the outcomes that they achieve. However, it is also important that we focus on the right outcomes.

What everyone wants is to stop offenders committing crime. But for some, progress is more of a zigzag than a straight line. So incremental steps along the way are important too. Learning new disciplines and skills, ending dependence on alcohol or drugs, gaining qualifications, changing attitudes, reducing the number of offences that come before the court – these are all signs of progress and show that the offender is moving forward and giving something back.

But in a world of payment by results we must also get the payment mechanisms right, and this will take time. And the pace of change is all-important, particularly when it comes to the voluntary sector – too fast and the necessary building blocks will not be in place; too slow and the momentum will be lost. Drawing on the expertise of the voluntary sector at an early stage in the design of payment-by-results models is also important. Providers like Nacro know from experience which programmes are likely to produce the right outcomes. This includes having all the right components present in the right configuration to the right level of intensity to match the risks and needs of any particular cohort of offenders. It also involves having the right organisations taking part.

This new focus on outcomes – reducing crime, reducing reoffending, securing jobs, accessing safe accommodation – puts partnership working on a new footing. It makes perfect sense that those investing in the service and those providing it work together to define the outcomes, making certain these are both realistic and measurable and that they match the risks and needs which each offender presents.

Focusing on outcomes is money well spent. We need to move away from old and tired methods of working with offenders where in some cases as many people drop out of programmes as take part, where ordinary people don't know what goes on and ultimately don't see a positive result. We need to balance enforcement with compliance so that more offenders start, stay on and complete their community orders. We need to balance punishment with rehabilitation so that the boundaries we set through community sentences enable us to challenge the way offenders think and solve their everyday problems. And the key to achieving all of this and reducing reoffending is bringing in the right providers and paying them on the basis of what they achieve.

Nacro, Park Place, 10-12 Lawn Lane, London SW8 1UD

[www.nacro.org.uk](http://www.nacro.org.uk)

Registered charity 226171