

Making Research Count - University of York

Young People and the 'Troubled Families Programme'

Wednesday 10th September 2014

Overview

In 2011 the government's flagship 'Troubled Families Programme' (TFP) was launched. The TFP has been placed high on the political agenda for action with the intention that by 2015, 120,000 troubled families will have been 'turned around' (DCLG, 2013).

The presentation by **Dr. Aniela Wenham**, Lecturer in Social Policy at the University of York and Director of the 'Children and Young People's Pathway' will draw upon qualitative research with young people who are predominantly silent or passive within the governments TFP. This is significant for two reasons; firstly, and most notably, within the context of austerity, the decimation of youth services must be acknowledged as being a key barrier to the success of the TFP. It will be argued that real tensions lie here; the programme rests upon the assumption that a lead professional will broker in support via effective multi-agency working at a time when provision and support is being drastically cut. How are young people experiencing this cold climate and what challenges might arise for the practitioners delivering the family intervention?

Secondly, it is important to question how appropriate this 'family wide' intervention is when it primarily rests upon the success of engaging and 'turning around' the lives of 'risky' young people. The very definition of a troubled family heavily rests upon the characteristics or behaviour of 'risky' young people, rather than the adult/s within the household. Considering the emphasis placed upon the 'problems' of young people is it really appropriate for a whole family approach? What tensions might arise between different individuals within the family?

This presentation will explore how young people interpret and negotiate the TFP. How the very notion of 'turning your life around' might be distinctly different to the needs and perceptions of the wider family, and how, if at all, these differences can be reconciled.

It will be argued that understanding the young person's journey *through* and *beyond* their encounter with the TFP, including their aspirations for the future, is critical in being able to really appreciate any claims to positive long term outcomes.

Steve Crossley of Durham University and Regional Child Poverty Research & Action Plan Co-coordinator in the Institute for Local Governance will present on; 'Double Trouble'? The dual problematization in the Troubled Families Programme.

This presentation will examine how the official classification of a family as 'troubled' has been constructed, following the English riots of 2011 and what this means for the families involved. It will also examine what the construction means for the agencies

delivering services to these families and how they have been presented in the ‘troubled families’ discourse. At the launch of the TFP, David Cameron stated that ‘troubled families’ were *‘already pulled and prodded and poked a dozen times a week by government’* and that *‘one of the reasons for their dysfunction is their hatred of ‘the system’’*.

Steve Crossley argues that a neglected area of the TFP is the way in which local services have also been ‘problematised’ in the ‘troubled families’ story. This focus on failing local services, which also allows the impact of national social policies on ‘troubled families’ to remain relatively hidden, has provided justification for ‘radical reforms’ which are being proposed. These reforms to the way that state agencies and their partners engage with disadvantaged families more widely will be discussed, including the ‘massive expansion’ of the TFP to include 400,000 ‘high-risk families’ following the next general election.

