FREAGARRACH:

AN EVALUATION
OF A PROJECT FOR
PERSISTENT
JUVENILE
OFFENDERS

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

THE SCOPE OF THE EVALUATION

The evaluation, which began in August 1995, is concerned with the development of the Freagarrach project from its establishment to the end of March 2000. It covers the processes involved in establishing the project, the way the project worked and its links with other agencies in central Scotland (the process evaluation), the characteristics of the young people who attended the project, their views of Freagarrach and those of their families, and the views of the project held by key personnel in other agencies. Finally, the effectiveness of Freagarrach is assessed, primarily in terms of known reoffending by the young people who attended it, and its performance is evaluated in terms of costs and benefits to the criminal justice system and to society as a whole, with a concluding overall evaluation that addresses the question of replicability. The methods used in the evaluation were: interviews with young people and members of their families, with the project staff, and, at intervals during the evaluation period, with key staff in other agencies; observation of practice; attendance at meetings; analysis of documentary material; analysis of data on reoffending and reconvictions from the TRACE information system used by Central Scotland Police and from Scottish Criminal Records; and an analysis of costs and savings.

THE ESTABLISHMENT OF FREAGARRACH

The circumstances of Freagarrach’s establishment are crucial for an understanding of its subsequent development. Its immediate origin was in a response by Barnardo’s Scotland to an invitation to tender for funding for a community-based project for persistent juvenile offenders. A major factor in the success of this bid, however, was that Barnardo’s was able to demonstrate that the proposal was not simply a response to a particular opportunity but emerged from a coherent inter-agency strategy on young people at risk in what was then Central Region. Barnardo’s had credibility in the region, and its work was integrated into the broader strategy that encompassed the police, social work and education services. These agencies committed support to Freagarrach in the form of information (notably access to the TRACE system), seconded staff, premises in Polmont and Alloa, and guaranteed access to special educational provision.

The thrust of the strategy was that a common philosophy among the agencies was needed if services for young people were to be developed that were appropriate to what was known about patterns of juvenile offending in the region. Essentially this meant that ‘one-off’ minor offenders should be dealt with informally, and diverted from the formal system, preferably into constructive leisure pursuits, and that an appropriately intensive service should be reserved for the relatively small group of persistent offenders (those with 5 or more episodes of offending in a 12-month period). Social work and education services were to contribute to the strategy of decriminalisation and diversion by undertaking to deal with problematic behaviour themselves – for example in children’s homes, by avoiding school exclusions, and through the secondment of education staff to the Reporter’s office – and by providing support for the most persistent offenders for whom an intensive service was required.

In retrospect, it was clear that some of the services and resources envisaged in the original strategy had not materialised. For instance, the idea of a single database covering all the
agencies was never realised in practice, and the expectation that victim-offender mediation would develop on a substantial scale was not fulfilled. Nevertheless, Freagarrach was unusual among specialist projects in being well embedded in an inter-agency strategy that survived largely intact throughout the evaluation period, and the project benefited in immediate practical ways from this supportive network. A similar commitment to inter-agency cooperation would be a key element in any successful attempt at replication.

EVALUATING PROCESS: FREAGARRACH IN ITS LOCAL CONTEXT

Access to the TRACE system was crucial in enabling the Freagarrach staff to retain a close focus on the target group originally envisaged – the most persistent juvenile offenders in central Scotland. The only change from the referral criteria established at the outset was that in 1999 the maximum age for acceptance at the project was raised from 16 to 18, reflecting growing concern at the strategic level about the lack of resources for offenders entering the adult criminal justice system. Along with TRACE, the understanding of Freagarrach’s purposes by social work staff at all levels helped to ensure that no net-widening took place, and that very few young people who should have been referred to Freagarrach were denied the opportunity.

By the end of March 2000 there had been 209 enquiries about possible referrals to Freagarrach, and 144 actual referrals; there had been 121 “starts”, by a total of 106 young people - that is, 15 attended more than once. The number of young people who attended Freagarrach was lower than the approximately 200 envisaged in the original proposal, because the average length of stay was longer than the 6 months which would have allowed the project to work with 40 young people in a year; the mean length of stay was 11½ months in 1995-96, and 7½ months in 1998-99. It was not unusual for young people to attend Freagarrach for over a year, and 3 stayed for over 2. The length of contact was determined by the staff’s perception of the young person’s needs, and for some young people leaving the project was very difficult; the staff continued to support several young people long after they had formally left. In general, the intensity of contact – 3 substantial periods of attendance a week – was in line with what had been envisaged, and with the findings of effectiveness research. Attendance was voluntary, but young people willingly kept in contact, apart from a few – the estimated figure is 9 – who never formed a relationship with the staff.

A vital stage in Freagarrach’s response to young people was the initial process of engagement. The staff succeeded in conveying to the majority of young people that it was worth making a commitment to the project and what it had to offer. They communicated an attitude of respect and care, which many young people – and their parents – contrasted favourably with their experience of other adults in positions of authority. This provided a basis for later work, the core of which was the need for the young person to reduce his or her offending behaviour. This work was approached either in-groups or individually, depending on the young person’s capabilities and learning style. Staff also worked with young people to address issues of education and employment, succeeding in many cases in achieving at least a partial return to school; they were less successful in helping young people into employment, or a sustained commitment to vocational training. The Freagarrach staff consistently tried to offer support to members of the young people’s families, through formal parents’ groups and informal contacts in the course of their work with the young people. They also provided opportunities – conditional on the young person’s willingness to engage in work on offending and related issues – to explore interesting leisure pursuits, but work in this area was limited by the scarcity
of resources accessible to the young people. The staff encouraged victim awareness and empathy among the young people, and experimented with joint work on this theme with Victim Support; but overall, this was an aspect of work that did not develop as fully as had been hoped. The same is true of joint work generally; encouraging initiatives were taken with the police and with court staff, but these did not result in long-term programmes. More enduring was work at Glenochil Young Offenders Institution, and later at the women’s prison at Cornton Vale, intended to educate young people at Freagarrach about the realities of the adult system.

A promising but in the event short-lived development that could have helped young people to leave Freagarrach and move on to independent living was a project established by Apex Scotland in October 1997. Twelve young people from Freagarrach were referred to the programme, but only 7 actually started it, and only one completed it. The staff and young people thought that in principle this was exactly the kind of resource that was needed to provide a “bridge” to adult life, but were critical of the methods used on the programme and of its rigidity. In the event anticipated funding for the project failed to materialise, and it closed in May 1998; from February 1999 one Apex worker was employed with funds from Forth Valley Enterprise, providing support and advice on training and employment from Freagarrach’s own premises, but with no connection to work previously done with the young people at Freagarrach.

The greatest threat to the continuation of a coherent inter-agency strategy that supported Freagarrach came from local government reorganisation at the start of 1996, and the consequent movements of staff and resources. The Young Offenders Strategy Group, established to oversee the strategy, was reconstituted to ensure representation from the 3 local authorities, and, after some work by Barnardo’s and police staff to persuade new members of the worth of the strategy, the principle of a common strategy was secured. A revised strategy document appeared in June 1998, which modified some of the aspirations of the original in the light of experience. Towards the end of the evaluation period, however, the common strategy was less predictably disrupted by the withdrawal of funding for Freagarrach by Clackmannanshire, which necessitated the closure of the project’s Alloa site in the summer of 2000.

**THE YOUNG PEOPLE AT FREAGARRACH**

Of the 106 young people who attended Freagarrach, 94 were male and 12 female, a ratio in line with what one would expect of a population of persistent offenders. The average age of the young people when they started at Freagarrach tended to increase over time, from 14½ in the first year to 16 in the fourth and 15½ in the fifth. Of the 95 young people on whom follow-up data were available, two-thirds had been charged with an offence by the age of 12. TRACE data suggested that the average number of charges against the young people in the year before they began attending the project was 17.7. The young people tended to be versatile offenders in that the majority had been charged with crimes of dishonesty, fire raising or vandalism, and non-sexual crimes of violence. In all these respects, the Freagarrach group is similar to other groups of known persistent offenders.

It was rare for young people of school age to be attending school normally when they came to Freagarrach; over half were currently excluded from school, and only 14 out of 80 were actually attending a mainstream school with reasonable regularity. The family lives of the
young people were often unhappy and disrupted: about 90% had some experience of loss or rejection within the family. Violence, substance misuse and mental illness were common in their family backgrounds, and about 25% were in some form of local authority care when they started at Freagarrach. Two-thirds of the young people themselves had problems with both drugs and alcohol; only 7 (6%) were judged to have no problems of substance misuse. Many of the young people lacked social skills and found it difficult to manage anger and aggression, and were enmeshed in local networks of criminality and drug dealing.

PERCEPTIONS OF FREAGARRACH

The young people expressed overwhelmingly positive views of the project and its staff, whom they found caring, prepared to listen, respectful and nurturing. They talked, as did their parents, of the staff’s persistence, their refusal to give up, and their continued faith in the young people’s capacity to grow and change. Many of the young people’s comments on activities at Freagarrach concerned enjoyable events such as sports and excursions, or the basic care the project provided; but some also spoke of the value of work on offending in making them think of the consequences, and of how the staff had helped them to control their use of drugs or alcohol. Their parents and carers largely echoed these sentiments, praising the staff for their insight, their persistence and above all for their willingness to accept young people whom had been rejected by most adult institutions. These were parents with a genuine concern for their children; others, whom the project staff could not engage in constructive work, remained angry and rejecting.

Staff in the social work, education, and police services spoke very positively of Freagarrach and its work, as did staff of the Reporter’s Administration. They valued it both for the high quality of its practice and for its role as a catalyst in maintaining a coherent cross-authority and inter-agency approach. Reporters spoke highly of the quality of information they received from Freagarrach staff, and of the regard in which panel members held the project. The general perception was that Freagarrach at least applied a brake to young people’s offending, and that it had a significant impact on the need for residential care.

THE EFFECTIVENESS OF FREAGARRACH

Of the 9 young people who never really engaged with the project, typically having come to it from residential care, 6 were known to have served at least one custodial sentence, and one had died of a heroin overdose. These outcomes are distinctly more negative than for the group as a whole. It was, however, as the staff recognised, difficult to show positive outcomes other than in terms of reoffending, for example in employment and education: only 15% of the young people who had spent a substantial time at Freagarrach were known to be in employment at the end of 1999, or to have had a job for more than a brief period. Experience of employment was associated with a lower rate of offending and less serious offences than for the group as a whole. There were indications that some young people actively chose not to work, and that others were effectively unemployable, because of deficits in attention and other social skills. It was rare for young people of school age to return to mainstream education while at Freagarrach; more often, “packages” of support were devised that kept them in at least minimal contact with education services.

There were indications that attendance at Freagarrach could help to improve young people’s family relationships. Supportive parenting was associated with a lower rate of offending, and
in an estimated 34 cases attendance at Freagarrach removed the need for residential care, curtailed the period in care, or delayed entry into the care system. Five of the 9 young women and 6 of the young men on whom information was collected at the end of 1999 were known to have become parents themselves; there were signs, stronger for the young women than the young men, that this had improved their relations with their own parents, and had a positive effect on their offending.

There is evidence that Freagarrach had the effect of reducing the offending rate of many of the young people who attended it, at least in the short term. Twenty-one of the 31 young people on whom 6 or 12 months’ data were available had 5 or fewer charges or convictions in the period after they started at Freagarrach, representing a considerable reduction in the offending rate. It can be estimated from Scottish Criminal Records figures that the overall offending rate was about 20% lower in the year after starting at Freagarrach than in the year before; but this is almost certainly an under-estimate, since TRACE data suggest a much higher percentage reduction. An exact estimate is impossible, but it is likely that the reduction was between 20% and 50%. It was unusual, however, for young people on whom 3 or 4 years’ follow-up data were available to have no, or few, convictions or charges recorded against them; a possible interpretation of this finding is that the effect of Freagarrach diminished over time.

It was also unusual for the young people to have been sentenced on more than 10 separate occasions: this was the case for only 3 of the 41 with a follow-up period of at least 3 years. Considering the seriousness of offences, only 7 of the 23 in the 4-year group, and 3 of the 18 in the 3-year group, had ever been sentenced to custody. Overall, 17 of the 83 young people with some subsequent offence recorded against them had received custodial sentences, and 7 of these had received only one such sentence. Taken together, these figures suggest that Freagarrach may have been effective in reducing the likelihood of long-term serious criminal careers. Comparisons with 2 other groups of offenders, both on average less persistent than the Freagarrach group, suggest that Freagarrach contributed to a significantly lower medium term use of custody than would have been predicted.

**COSTS AND BENEFITS**

The average annual cost of Freagarrach in the period of the evaluation was about £338,400, giving an average cost of about £13,580 for each young person who attended, or a weekly cost of about £350. The project’s costs were therefore closer to those associated with residential care or custody than to the lower costs of community-based measures. There is evidence, however, that Freagarrach helped to deliver substantial savings in the use of residential care, amounting over the whole period to just under £1 million, or an average annual saving of about £202,000. Further savings of about £70,000 in the use of custody can be identified, bringing the overall net cost of Freagarrach to about £600,000, or £125,000 a year. Annual savings to the criminal justice system through reduced rates of offending probably lie between £63,000, based on an estimated reduction of 90 offences, and about £158,000, based on an estimate of 226 fewer offences. On the lower estimate, the net cost of Freagarrach over the period of the evaluation would be about £300,000; on the higher estimate, Freagarrach would have produced a saving to the social work and criminal justice systems of about £160,000. Splitting the difference between these estimates, and counting only direct marginal cost savings, gives an annual net cost for the project of about £13,350. Over a period of 10-12 years (taking this as the average length of a criminal career), Freagarrach will probably deliver a direct saving of about £2.4 million. It should be
remembered that these estimates relate only to criminal justice system costs and savings, not to savings in the total social costs of crime. The actual costs of Freagarrach were therefore considerably lower than its apparent cost of about £1.64 million in the period of the evaluation, and it is likely that much larger savings will materialise over a longer time span.

AN OVERALL EVALUATION OF FREAGARRACH

Freagarrach can reasonably be regarded as a highly successful project. Over its first 5 years it largely avoided the problems of isolation and dilution that many ostensibly similar specialist projects experience. The 2 key factors making for success are the fact that it was embedded in a local strategic approach that ensured active and practical inter-agency support, and the high quality of work – in terms of content and also of style - delivered by its staff. The project was well resourced and functioned in a supportive environment, and while not all the aspirations of its staff were realised, its work provides a possible model for good practice elsewhere. Although it was superficially an expensive project, it can be shown to have delivered substantial savings to social work and criminal justice services, and its net cost was therefore much lower than what was spent on it. It is unlikely that these savings could be achieved with a much lower level of initial expenditure, a point that should be borne in mind if a replication is envisaged; and any successful replication will also require a high level commitment to partnership and a common strategy on the part of the relevant agencies.
CHAPTER ONE: THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE FREAGARRACH PROJECT

THE IMMEDIATE ORIGINS OF THE PROJECT

1.1 The immediate origins of the Freagarrach project lie in an initiative announced by the then Minister of State, Lord Fraser, in a speech to the 1994 annual meeting of the Scottish Police Federation. The Minister announced his intention “to promote a major new community based initiative designed to intervene in the behaviour of persistent young offenders who account for a disproportionate number of crimes and offences” (The Scottish Office, 1994). The background to this announcement was to be found in the White Paper Scotland’s Children:

“Effective supervision in the community is also needed for those whose persistent offending makes them a nuisance to the neighbourhoods in which they live or whose disturbed behaviour makes them a serious risk to themselves and others. More intensive supervision arrangements are required for a small number of young people and these arrangements should be developed from existing intermediate treatment and groupwork projects and the establishment of new ones so that the resource is available at least in each major urban area” (The Scottish Office, 1993, par. 7.23).

1.2 The Scottish Office invited six voluntary child care organisations to submit proposals for pilot projects, and copies of the invitation were sent to the Chief Executives of the Regional and Islands Councils and to Directors of Social Work. It was made clear in the specification that “the schemes proposed will be required to attract the support and collaboration of Social Work Directors and indeed local children’s panels - as well as the police and the education service” (The Scottish Office, 1994), and that “proposals should therefore be presented in conjunction with the appropriate local authorities”. Grants totalling about £200,000 per annum for a period of five years were to be made available, with the suggestion that this could be ‘augmented’ in cash or in kind by the local authorities and/or the voluntary organisations. The specification envisaged that projects would be located in two areas, to enable comparisons that would inform the development of best practice for possible replication in other parts of Scotland. The aim of the projects should be to reduce the demand for secure residential care, through the development of innovative practice.

1.3 In the event, only one project was funded, in what was then Central Region. Staff in the Scottish Office interviewed near the start of the evaluation were in no doubt that the crucial factors in the successful bid were the existence of a coherent inter-agency strategy and the credibility that the voluntary organisation concerned, Barnardo’s Scotland, had established with the relevant agencies: “We were tremendously impressed by the inter-agency reaction...Impressed by Bill Wilson [Chief Constable] and his commitment to TRACE”. (TRACE, the importance of which is discussed below, is the computerised information system on juvenile offenders used by Central Scotland Police.) Furthermore, “they [Barnardo’s] had also reached over to the Children’s Panel and got the Reporter's confidence.” Barnardo’s impressed the Scottish Office officials as “determined catalysts” already well established as providers of special education and intermediate treatment services, but it seems to have been
the inter-agency dimension of the proposal, which was also strongly stressed in the presentation at the Scottish Office, that was most important to its success.

1.4 Barnardo’s had to work fast in preparing the proposal. The original outline specification from the Scottish Office was dated 5 May 1994, and was received by Barnardo’s on 9 May. The final presentation to the Scottish Office was made on 20 July 1994, meaning that the tender had to reach its final form in under three months. In order to make the deadline Barnardo’s had to bypass its own committee structure, through which approval for such a major development would normally be obtained. Its organisation proved flexible enough to allow for executive approval, which was later ratified by the relevant committees. Barnardo’s staff was, however, somewhat uneasy about the speed of the process, and about its competitive nature, to which they were unused. There was some concern that a partnership with one authority might offend others, and alienate them from Barnardo’s, and some anxiety about the effect the competition might have on relations among the voluntary organisations themselves.

1.5 As well as this organisational flexibility, Barnardo’s was able to demonstrate in the proposal first-hand knowledge that a coherent inter-agency strategy was already in place, and how the proposed project would fit into it. The proposal was convincing in giving evidence of thorough knowledge of the regional strategy on young people and of Barnardo’s credibility with the key agencies. The presence of existing good relationships that Barnardo’s enjoyed in Central Region was modestly described by a senior manager as “a happy coincidence”, but it was a coincidence which strengthened the proposal enormously by allowing what became the Freagarrach project to be presented as a logical extension of the existing range of services. TRACE data were used to show the extent of the problem of persistent offending by young people in Central Region (according to a well-defined criterion of persistence), and therefore to establish an empirical case for a specialist project (58 young people were identified as having had five or more “episodes of offending” in the previous year). The proposal would have been very different without its practical evidence of support at chief officer level in the key agencies, and it seems likely that this was what crucially distinguished it from the other bids considered.

1.6 While the tight time-scale for tendering presented some problems for Barnardo’s, it may in practice have been helpful. Many people have found that an imminent deadline concentrates the mind; in this case, the short time available may also have increased awareness of the strength of the existing partnership and of the value and accessibility of the TRACE data. Insofar as what is at issue here is a “happy coincidence”, there may be an implication that future invitations to tender for similar projects should allow a longer preparation period, to enable, in particular, a thorough empirical demonstration of need. On the other hand, it could be argued that a soundly-based inter-agency strategy should include ready access to relevant data, and that a longer preparation period could encourage proposals in which “partnerships” were established for purely presentational purposes, with no substantial basis in practice (see Crawford, 1997).

1.7 The Scottish Office publicly announced the award of the tender for the development project to Barnardo’s, in association with Central Region, on 29 August 1994. Interviews for the post of Project Leader were held in November. The person appointed, Kelly Bayes, had worked in Central Region for many years, most recently as Project Leader of Barnardo’s Watling Lodge Project (an Intermediate Treatment Centre) in Stirling. She was well known to staff in the relevant agencies and was fully aware of the inter-agency strategy and the potential
of the TRACE system. Her official starting date in her new post was 20 February 1995, but she was able to take part in preparatory work on the project before her formal appointment. She was joined shortly afterwards by a Project Administrator. Job descriptions for all the remaining posts were drawn up in January 1995, and interviews were arranged for the following 2 months. The project, not yet named, was to operate from 2 centres, one in the south and one in the north of the Region. Each centre was to be run by a senior social worker and three project workers, with support staff, in line with the original proposal. The two senior posts were filled towards the end of March, both those appointed coming from jobs in Central Region Social Work Department that involved work with young people. In April and May 3 project workers were appointed by Barnardo’s, all with qualifications in Community Education. Central Region was to second 3 workers to the project; the first 2, both with experience in residential child care, started work in April, the third, who completed the staff team, in October.

1.8 Scottish Office staff interviewed about the establishment of the project reported that they had had some anxieties in early 1995 about apparent delays in getting it “up and running”. The main delay was over finding suitable premises for the project's northern site; the Regional Council could not identify a suitable building, as had originally been hoped, and Barnardo’s Property Services and the Project Director herself began to look for premises in Alloa. These were finally identified in May; builders began work in early July; and project staff were able to move in on 1 September. This undoubtedly represented a slippage from the original timetable, but by this time the project was well established at the other site, in Polmont, to which Barnardo’s had gained access in February. Building work was not finally completed until the beginning of May, but office accommodation and a meeting room had been available from the end of March. “Minor hiccups” mentioned by the Project Director (Bayes, 1996) were interference on telephone lines, a tendency for mail to be delivered in error to Polmont Young Offenders Institution, and visits by a mouse or mice.

1.9 Much of the Project Director’s work in the first months of her appointment was concerned with discussing means of ensuring that the project had access to relevant information and educational resources. It was arranged that she should have direct access to TRACE through a terminal in the project building and that 7 places in Special Education Units should be set aside specifically for young people attending the project and excluded from, or for other reasons unable to attend, mainstream school. She also arranged meetings with Children's Panel members, Victim Support groups, Intermediate Treatment projects, SACRO, and Social Work teams, and responded to requests to provide training and contribute to conferences. She began to set up systems for data collection and storage which, as well as meeting the project’s own information needs, would be useful for external evaluation. With other Barnardo's staff, she became a member of the inter-agency Young Offenders Strategy Implementation Group, which met for the first time in March 1995.

1.10 When other members of the project team were appointed, the Project Director worked with them to develop referral procedures, guidelines on policy and practice, and information for young people, their parents and social workers. These were produced in May. The information for children and their parents included clear statements about what was expected from them as well as what they could expect from the project. This was particularly important as the team was agreed that young people should attend the project voluntarily, on a basis of invitation and acceptance, although as persistent offenders they would usually already be subject to statutory supervision. The project's commitment to an open access policy on client
records (in line with Barnardo’s policy) was stressed, and its policy on child protection issues was explained. Overall, the clarity and comprehensiveness of the information provided was impressive, as was the care given to the referral process. The written material was extended in September, when a booklet on admissions criteria was sent to all relevant agencies, and the project staff made continuing efforts to keep social workers informed of developments, by visiting Social Work and Criminal Justice teams and inviting social workers to the Open Days held at both the project sites. Bayes (1996, p. 4) reported that the project had the capacity to work with 20 young people at any one time, and anticipated that over a year it would work with about 40 (on the assumption that the average length of an individual programme would be about 6 months).

1.11 The emphasis on voluntary attendance (albeit against the background of a statutory order) might have surprised Lord Fraser, who was quoted in the press release of 29 August 1994 as saying: “The new programmes...are not a soft option; they will be intensive, requiring compulsory attendance which will include evenings and weekends where necessary”. Although it is not unusual for politicians to use a language which practitioners might find unfamiliar when describing social work programmes, other statements from around the same time also implied that the project would provide a direct service to the Children's Hearings, with the implication that attendance would be a condition of supervision. It is less clear that this was ever how Barnardo’s and its Central Region partners understood the project's purposes: the successful proposal assumed that all young people referred would be subject to statutory supervision, and did envisage referrals from the Reporter, through a ‘fast-track’ process made possible by access to TRACE, but it also predicted a high demand for the project from Social Work teams. It was also envisaged by the Director of Social Work that the project would take referrals of young people returning home from residential care outwith Central Region (Bayes, 1996). In the event, the main route to attendance at the project was, from the outset, via a referral (sometimes prompted by the Project Director) from a social worker, and the young people’s attendance has, with the exception of a few whose attendance was required by a Probation Order, been voluntary, against the background of a statutory order. The first young offender to be accepted by the project began to attend in early June of 1995.

1.12 It was about this time (the exact moment is unclear) that the project acquired a name, apparently after much debate. “Freagarrach” is a Gaelic adjective defined by MacAlpine and Mackenzie (1973) as “answering, answerable, suitable, fitting”. There may be advantages in a name, which, at least to the great majority of young people attending the project, will be empty of emotional resonances, except those associated with a vague feeling that it is probably from the Gaelic. For anyone who did know the meaning of the word, its ambiguity could usefully convey both that the project aimed to provide a suitable service for the young people who attended it and that they were themselves answerable for the way in which they responded to the help offered.

THE WIDER ORIGINS OF THE FREAGARRACH PROJECT

1.13 The concept of partnership was essential to the conception of the Freagarrach Project, although it is managed by Barnardo’s Scotland and its public face is that of a Barnardo’s project. Those involved in the partnership, in addition to Barnardo’s, were the then Central Regional Council (essentially, the Education and Social Work Departments), Central Scotland Police, and the Reporter’s Office, although the formal application for funding was from
Barnardo’s and Central Regional Council. It was clear from interviews held at the beginning of the evaluation and from written sources that the convincing evidence that was provided of meaningful and well-established inter-agency co-operation was a distinctive and welcome feature of the application, and contributed substantially to its success. The main funding for the project was provided jointly by the Crime Prevention Unit and the Social Work Services Group within the Scottish Office, although, in the words of the press release which followed the Scottish Office decision to support the proposal, “Barnardo’s and Central Region will also be making substantial contributions in cash and kind”.

1.14 From both the interviews and the documentation it was quickly apparent that there already existed, prior to the specific development of Freagarrach, a high degree of inter-agency collaboration and co-operation within Central Region. There was open and formal dialogue between the police, the Social Work Department, the Education Department and the Reporter’s Service, which had culminated in a well formulated and comprehensive written strategy, which was attached to the proposal to the Scottish Office for a persistent young offenders project. The strategy was developed, supported and agreed by the chief officers of the four main agencies in partnership. Whilst the strategy document was entitled Services for Young People in Central Region, its focus and intent specifically related to the joint planning and provision of services for young offenders, coupled with the wider goal of community safety. The aim of the strategy was encapsulated in the final summary of the document:

“This intensive response to the needs of young people is targeted upon both helping those young people with an offending history, and enhancing community safety” (Central Regional Council, undated, p. 5).

1.15 The document set out (p. 1) the five key principles adopted by the four main services:

- to always act with the young person as a primary consideration;
- to share information with other services within the parameters of the law;
- to co-ordinate responses between services;
- to develop, together, a wide range of actions, treatments, disposals and responses appropriate to the different levels of need of such young people;
- to seek to divert young people from the criminal justice system where this was appropriate.

The interviews revealed what key personnel believed were the main factors that initially brought the 4 main agencies together, and provided the focus for their collaboration. One important step was taken by the Chief Constable. Following complaints about a group of persistent offenders by a number of residents in Alloa, he initiated a meeting with the Chief Executive of the Regional Council and the other chief officers to discuss responses to the problem of offending by young people. As a result it was agreed to undertake an intensive local study, focusing on the town of Denny, on the relationship between offending and other adolescent behaviour.

1.16 The study was led by the Chief Constable in conjunction with the Chief Executive, the Directors of Education, Social Work, and Administration and Legal Services, and the Reporter to the Children’s Panel. Personnel from the police, education and social work were seconded for a six-week period in order to carry out the study. Their report, which became known in Central Region as “The Denny Youth Study”, appeared in the autumn of 1993, and,
according to *Services for Young People in Central Region*, its findings “caused the four key operational services...to start to jointly address the issues of youth offending in Central Region” (p. 1). While the strategy document describes the results of the Denny study as “in no way remarkable”, one result which had important outcomes, and was cited several times in the interviews, was that there was a strong relationship between offending and exclusion from school, but not between offending and truancy (contrary to most research, which suggests that both truancy - at least when it is persistent - and exclusion are strongly associated with offending (see, for example, Graham and Bowling, 1995)).

1.17 The Denny study was seen by the interviewees as a powerful catalyst for an inter-agency approach to young people's offending. At the same time, there were important changes in personnel among senior officers and elected members. Historically, it appeared that there had been very little co-operation between the agencies at senior officer level. The Departments of Education and Social Work were reportedly (from both sides) critical of each other in a style described as “banter but with an edge to it”. There were also tensions between senior officers and elected members. In the 1990s officer-member relationships were said to have improved, along with inter-agency relations, as a result of changes in the composition of the Council: Central Region had sometimes been known as “Albania”, and the arrival of Labour councillors with a “modernising” outlook had helped to reduce what one interviewee called the “isolation” of chief officers. A new Chief Executive was able actively to promote a more “corporate inter-agency approach”. Furthermore, there were changes at senior level in each of the main agencies, which were felt by many interviewees to have led to important changes in operational style and ideologies; according to one, “the physical change in personalities was important together with changes in perception”. The promotion of a corporate approach by the Chief Executive was actively welcomed, adopted and supported by the new chief officers, and corporate agendas were quickly seen as the way forward. This shared belief that corporatism rather than separatism was likely to be more effective in dealing with young offenders reflected government policy of the time:

*The Government consider that there is considerable scope for improved multi-agency collaboration in providing effective services for children who present special problems in the development of normal personal self-control. No agency - school, social work, psychological service or police - is solely responsible nor does any hold all the answers* (The Scottish Office, 1993, par. 7.26).

1.18 This statement was reproduced on the inside cover of the important *Report of the Working Party into Juvenile Crime* (Central Scotland Police, 1994), which contains significant proposals for developing a management strategy for dealing with juvenile crime. This statement, together with the general content of the report, indicates the prominence of the inter-agency approach in the thinking and operational strategy of Central Region Police. The Chief Constable and the Director of Social Work were seen as those mainly responsible for initiating the inter-agency commitment for the development of a joint strategy and were described as the main partners, certainly in the early stages. The then Director of Education described herself as “open to this kind of interchange and co-operative work”, and was receptive to the idea of the police as potential allies. The principle of inter-agency working and its rationale were also accepted by the Reporter, although the potential for inter-agency conflict was illustrated by his concern that decisions to divert young people from the formal system should remain within the Reporter’s ambit rather than passing to the police.
Towards a common strategy

1.19 Differences are to be expected and even welcomed in inter-agency responses to offending, because the personnel and agencies involved have quite properly different interests and priorities; total agreement on everything is not to be expected, and would hardly be healthy if it occurred (Pearson et al., 1992). What matters is how the inevitable differences and occasional conflicts are acknowledged and managed. The overriding impression obtained from the interviews of the process of interaction during the early stages of the development of a common strategy for young offenders in Central Region was that it allowed differences to be discussed honestly and openly. In the words of one interviewee: “People were able to talk openly about their concerns...the [chief officers’] group enabled grouses to be expressed and then to be swept away”. The grouses were aired in a setting where all were motivated to find a basis for agreement: the group “came together to find a common purpose”. The problems of youth offending had been highlighted by the Alloa residents’ complaints and by the Denny study, which first brought the agencies together. At the same time Central Scotland Police, through the new TRACE computer system, were able (and, importantly, were willing) to obtain and share comprehensive statistics on patterns of juvenile offending within the Region. The importance of these statistics in identifying and defining the key issues emerged in the joint strategy document Services for Young People in Central Region, where they were used to provide a rationale for the agreed target areas to be addressed by the Chief Officers. The key facts as presented in the strategy are set out below:

- most offenders only commit one offence (69%);
- a further group of young offenders only commit two offences (10%);
- a substantial amount of juvenile crime (19%) is committed by 1.6% of the juvenile offender group;
- there was, it appeared, a relationship between exclusion from school and offending;
- the most crime prone young people were boys aged 13 and 14;
- [it would appear] that offending was a ‘normal’ behaviour pattern for up to 30% of male people within the Region (Central Regional Council, undated, pp. 1-2).

1.20 The same statistics, in a more comprehensive and sophisticated form, appeared in the Report of the Working Party into Juvenile Crime (Central Scotland Police, 1994), as an important factor informing police policy and practice. They provided reliable data specifically relevant to understanding the problem of youthful offending at a local level, and the police were willing and indeed eager to make the benefits of TRACE more widely available. While facts very rarely speak for themselves, the experience of Central Region suggests that local research, statistics and knowledge are likely to be an important element in any attempt to develop a coherent inter-agency strategy for young offenders. Locally generated data are likely to be more readily accepted than national figures over which relevant participants feel no sense of ownership, and provided that there are opportunities for their meaning to be discussed, as was the case in Central Region, they can provide an essential empirical underpinning for agreement on strategy. The main strategic issues agreed by the chief officers were as follows: (1) a decriminalising response to first and second time offenders; (2) an enhancement of services for offenders referred to the Reporter; (3) the provision of more intensive services for persistent and serious offenders; and (4) the creation of a database for tracking offenders and for evaluating the effectiveness of services in reducing offending.
behaviour. It is likely that the existence in Scotland of a consensus on the desirability of a welfare-oriented response to young offenders was important in enabling the chief officers to reach agreement on these principles.

1.21 Certainly the prevailing philosophy of the police's approach to juvenile offenders in Central Region was, in the Scottish context, a traditional one: an emphasis on "need not deed", with primary consideration being given to the welfare needs of young offenders rather than to their punishment. Among other things, this meant that young people who offended together would not necessarily be dealt with in the same way; the decision would be based on an assessment of individual need, not on the nature of the offence. This adoption of a child-centred position was wholly consistent with the views of Kilbrandon as enshrined in Part III of the Social Work (Scotland) Act 1968. An integral part of the police’s community safety strategy was what 2 police interviewees described as a return to "old fashioned policing values with modern technology". The approach of the police recognised, in line with previous research (Rutherford, 1986; Thorpe et al., 1980) as well as with the TRACE data, that the majority of young people who offend grow out of crime and that often the formal systems set up to deal with offending behaviour can exacerbate the problem. Equally, the commitment to providing intensive services for serious or persistent offenders (but for them only) could be supported by research from elsewhere, and was in line with the "risk principle" (McIvor, 1990) that intensity of intervention should be proportional to the risk of reoffending. The police view was therefore that more young offenders committing minor offences could be diverted from the formal system of referral to the Reporter and be dealt with informally.

1.22 In his description of early practice the then Senior Community Safety Officer reflected, "We were trying to process and inoculate everybody". The TRACE system facilitated the retrieval of aggregated data in a format that provided useful and usable knowledge about the processing of juvenile offenders, and their offending profiles. An interface between TRACE and a welfare database allowed for quick identification of any problems in a young offender’s background which might suggest, even in cases of minor offences, that help should be offered. The new technology enabled a more targeted approach to policing and, in the Chief Constable’s view, provided an answer to the Audit Commission’s criticisms of untargeted and unfocused policing (Audit Commission, 1993). The police were particularly interested in the development of targeted responses for the more persistent and serious young offenders, feeling that the practice of diversion, by impacting on the number of requests for reports from the Social Work Department, would free up the system to provide more innovative and intensive services for the persistent offender.

1.23 Two other elements of Central Scotland Police policy on young people who offend were mentioned in Services for Young People in Central Region, and emphasised by interviewees. One was a concern to make community resources more accessible to young people and thus enable them to find legal means of satisfying their craving for exciting activities. The feasibility of this depended on the development of an accessible register of local facilities for sport and leisure, and the availability of local volunteers who would, when necessary, help diffident young people to make use of them. Another proposal was that when young people in residential care offended within the care establishment the first response of care staff should be to deal with the problem as parents would usually deal with difficult behaviour by a child at home - that is, they should try to resolve the matter within the home, and calling the police should become a last, not a first, resort. This would give a helpful message to the young person concerned – "This is your home" - and save the police from
time-consuming involvement in negotiating some resolution of the offence, the usual result of which would be a return to the care establishment.

1.24 The ideas put forward by the police (diversion, decriminalisation, systems management, and a continuum of services to reflect variations in the seriousness of offending) were apparently readily accepted by the Director of Social Work; he was familiar with such ideas from his knowledge of juvenile justice in England and Wales, where they were the basis of policies of diverting young offenders from a criminal justice system seen as more likely to produce harmful than helpful outcomes. While the same view of the formal system as inherently damaging would be inappropriate in Scotland, the Director of Social Work was reported to have said that the Children’s Hearing system could be a “blunderbuss” or a “rifle” (only the latter being capable of hitting the intended target), and, employing a different metaphor, that “if you go around dredging the river you will pull up mud” (a variant of the familiar image of net-widening). The Reporter, in describing the Children’s Hearing system, believed that “in the past it has been a blunderbuss”, even if a “benign” one. He also felt that historically the Reporter had “dredged up the mud”. Statistics of which the Reporter was aware suggested that practice in Central Region could be criticised for over-interventionism: the Region had, over the years, the highest rate of referrals to the Reporter on offence grounds per 1,000 children aged under 16 years (The Scottish Office, 1995). The Reporter did, however, suggest that Central Scotland Police detection rates were very high, and that this could have contributed to the high referral rate. Despite his legally based reservations about shifting discretion from the Reporter to the police, the Reporter’s views were broadly in tune with the basic philosophy of the emerging inter-agency strategy.

1.25 Historically, a focus on young offenders has been marginal to the central concerns of Education Departments, and it is important to highlight the willingness of Central Region’s then Director of Education to become an integral member of the inter-agency partnership. While, understandably, no formal statement on policy towards young offenders seems to have come from the Education Department, the Director reacted openly, positively and promptly to the developing strategy, and was keen that her department should contribute to what she saw as an interesting set of ideas. She was interested in the link between exclusion and offending suggested by the Denny study, and was aware that Central Region had historically had the highest proportion in Scotland of children excluded from school. She was conscious that there was no “comprehensive picture” of the work of the Reporter and no system of prioritisation, and that the Reporter relied heavily on school reports (often of doubtful quality) to help identify those at risk. Two practical initiatives which contributed to the young offender strategy flowed from these concerns: a policy of avoiding exclusion where possible was introduced, and to support headteachers in implementing it teachers of children with special needs were involved in training mainstream teachers in the management of challenging behaviour; and two teachers were seconded to the Reporter’s Department as Education Liaison Officers, with a brief to work with teachers to improve the quality of school reports and to intervene directly with children, their families and their schools in appropriate cases.

1.26 One attraction of the overall strategy was that it was designed to have a positive impact on agency workloads by reducing them (the Education Department is a possible exception). It was inherent in the strategy that routine intervention in response to minor offences should be avoided or minimised, allowing for better use of existing resources and creating the possibility of developing new, well-focused services for those most in need of them. Another important element was the agreement “to share information with other services
within the parameters of the law”, and the speedy and economical processing of information via readily accessible new technology was seen, particularly by the police, as essential to the strategy’s implementation. Making information available to all means that no one agency can exercise the power which comes with privileged access to knowledge; in the field of criminal justice policy, this agency has usually been the police, so the enthusiasm of the police in Central Region for the TRACE system, and their wish that others should be equally enthusiastic, was essential to the development of trust and the sense of a partnership between equals. Although the police clearly provided the initial catalyst for inter-agency working in Central Region, their role was not seen as a dominant one, which has often been the case elsewhere (Pearson et al., 1992). There was thus no basis for resentment that the other agencies were being incorporated into a police agenda.

1.27 The key elements of the inter-agency partnership in Central Region, before Freagarrach, can be summarised as follows:

- changes in political context and in key personnel
- an initial catalyst (initiatives by the police; the Denny study)
- willingness by others to make a commitment to inter-agency working
- opportunities for open and honest debate (clearing the ground)
- no fundamental divergence in professional philosophies
- locally generated statistics to provide an agreed empirical justification for change
- agreed aims and objectives
- agreement to share information across agency boundaries; availability of valid information
- no major impacts on existing workloads or resources (rather a shift in emphasis)
- partnership on the basis of equality, with no agency dominating
- the development of a well formulated strategy

THE EVALUATION OF FREAGARRACH

1.28 Independent evaluation was conceived as an inherent and essential element from the planning stage of the Freagarrach Project, from the perspective of both The Scottish Office and Barnardo’s. The contract for the evaluation of the Freagarrach Project was awarded in August 1995. The evaluation was to run for 5 years, and to include 5 main elements: analysis of the initial development of the project; an evaluation of process; an analysis of outcomes, including evidence of the project’s impact on subsequent offending; a cost-benefit analysis; and an overall evaluation that would include an analysis of the project’s influence on practice elsewhere. The evaluation therefore began shortly after the first young people began to attend Freagarrach, and initial work consisted of the examination of the processes involved in its work, through close observation of practice and interviews and discussions with young people at the project, members of their families, and project staff. This approach to the evaluation of process was maintained throughout the period of the study. At an early stage, too, relevant documents were read and analysed, and key personnel involved in the establishment of Freagarrach were interviewed. It was important to conduct these interviews quickly, since on 1 January 1996 Central Region was disaggregated into the 3 authorities of Clackmannanshire, Falkirk and Stirling, and several of the staff who were instrumental in designing the young offenders strategy and supporting the establishment of Freagarrach were about to move to other posts or had done so already. The material on the project’s establishment presented in
this chapter comes from these initial interviews and the documentation associated with the project’s early months.

1.29 Interviews with key staff were also held at the mid-point of the evaluation and towards the end, in an attempt to chart changes in the project’s wider environment and to assess the extent to which a coherent strategy was maintained after the disappearance of Central Region. Material from these interviews, and from the visits to the project which continued throughout the evaluation, is presented in Chapter 2. From the second year of the evaluation outcome data on known reoffending were obtained from the TRACE system and subsequently from Scottish Criminal Records. A continuing effort was also made to assess the project’s impact on the need for residential care for the relevant age group. In consultation with the advisory group set up to oversee the evaluation, principles were agreed for the analysis of costs and benefits, and these have informed the discussion in Chapter 6.

1.30 A limitation of the TRACE system is that it only covers juvenile offenders. As will be shown in Chapter 3, the average age of the young people attending Freagarrach tended to increase over time, so that TRACE data were available on a smaller proportion of the young people towards the end of the evaluation. The use of TRACE allows for an estimate of the project’s impact on the total volume of offending in its catchment area, and thus provides a more detailed picture than is obtainable from criminal records alone. The report therefore uses TRACE in all cases where the material is available. In connection with the analysis of reconvictions, it should be noted that the length of the evaluation enabled a longer than usual follow-up period to be used for some of the young people who attended Freagarrach: most studies of reconvictions following some intervention use at best a 2-year follow-up period, but for Freagarrach 3 and 4 year data are available on the young people who attended in the first two years of the project. As well as using the before and after data on known offending that can be obtained from TRACE and criminal records, the evaluation also compares the outcomes for young people who attended Freagarrach with those for 2 comparison groups, one used in an earlier evaluation (Lobley and Smith, 1999), and one obtained (with some difficulty) specifically for the evaluation of Freagarrach. The relevant material, with further discussion of the use of the comparison groups, is in Chapter 5.

1.31 The evaluation thus employed a range of methods, including direct observation of practice, semi-structured interviews with young people and their families, interviews and discussions with staff at Freagarrach and in the agencies which formed its environment (the police, social work, education and the Reporter’s Administration), analysis of the project’s own records and documentation, and the quantitative work associated with the analysis of TRACE and criminal records. This multi-dimensional approach required the co-operation and interest of many people; the commitment of key staff in the 3 authorities to an independent evaluation of Freagarrach was impressive, the more so as in general they were strongly supportive of the project and its aims. The approach also enabled the collection of a large volume of data of different kinds, and while this cannot be fully represented in a report of reasonable length, an attempt has been made to show, in the following chapters, something of the complexity entailed by the long-term evaluation of a project which cannot be adequately understood in abstraction from its local context (for a theoretical and empirical justification of the importance of context, see Pawson and Tilley (1997)). Since some cut-off point had to be used, it was agreed with the Advisory Group that this should be 31 March 2000.
LOOKING BACK: WHAT DID WE GET RIGHT? WHAT COULD WE HAVE DONE BETTER?

1.32 Interviewed 5 years after the first young person had begun to attend Freagarrach, the project’s first leader reflected that in most respects the decisions made in establishing it had proved to have been the right ones over the longer term. Access to TRACE was crucial in enabling the project to remain focused on the intended target group; staff had sometimes worried that Freagarrach had been established as a response to an atypical period of juvenile offending in central Scotland, and that the estimate of 58 young people who met the basic criterion of persistent offending was too high, but even at times when the number of referrals dropped TRACE provided an indication of continuing need, and there were no grounds for thinking that in order to retain a supply of “customers” the project would have to broaden its admission criteria. It was helpful that the original staff were given time to “develop an ethos” for the project’s practice – “care and control were embedded in practice before we were inundated” – and the principle of voluntary attendance had been vindicated by experience. The support of senior staff in the different agencies, a product of the joint strategy, had also been important, although the project still had to establish credibility with fieldworkers. The fact that the project’s staff included people who were already known and respected in the area had been helpful in this respect: the original staff group had been a “good mix” of workers familiar with the area and new to it. Another virtue of the planning for the project was that it had been explicitly intended to operate according to “What works” principles (McGuire, 1995): its practice, instead of developing in line with staff preferences and interests, was to be based on the findings of effectiveness research. The fact that evaluation was built into the project’s work from the beginning “was a big bonus, though it made us nervous…it made us sharper and sensitised the team to the importance of self-evaluation”. As a flagship project, Freagarrach was intended to contribute to the dissemination of good practice, and there was evidence of success in this through staff involvement in conferences and the fact that many workers from other parts of Scotland had visited during its first 5 years; the model had, however, not been consistently promoted at central government level as an indication of how practice should develop.

4.15 On the debit side, work on victim-offender mediation had not developed as originally planned, as a result of the absence of good evidence to inform practice in this area with juveniles, which led to nervousness about the sensitivities of Victim Support and other interest groups that might ask “Why should young offenders get all these resources?” The original strategy had assumed that SACRO would receive funding for a mediation and reparation scheme for young offenders, but this never materialised (Bayes, 1997). Work on helping young people to move on after their time at Freagarrach had been satisfactory when they were moving on to further education, but less so when the intended move was into employment or training, as was increasingly the case over the 5-year period. In retrospect it would have been useful to have had a team member from the outset with expertise in employment and training, or a worker with a specific brief to liaise with employers and arrange work placements. In general, the project might have been planned to include a greater element of joint working on the programme with staff from other agencies (this had happened to a limited extent with the police, Victim Support and court staff), but the fact that more such work had not been undertaken was a reflection of the strains on other agencies rather than of reluctance to share work on the part of the Freagarrach staff: “it was easier to do it ourselves”.

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1.34 Other staff interviewed towards the end of the evaluation, in the Freagarrach team and in other agencies, expressed similar views. They highlighted as important the values and attitudes of the staff team, their evidence-based approach to practice, and the support provided by inter-agency commitment to the project, particularly the sharing of information by the police. This required “bottle” from the police point of view, given the existence of a “tradition in the Scottish police of not trusting social workers”. (The original strategy envisaged that TRACE data would also be made available to the Reporters and to Education Department staff, but this was never achieved, because of the cost of installing the required computers (Bayes, 1997).) The importance of a genuine commitment to working in partnership was mentioned by several interviewees, particularly in relation to the police: while it was easy to pay lip-service to partnership working, it was rare to see the principle realised in practice. Although Freagarrach had always – and rightly – been conceived as a resource among others within a coherent overall strategy, it remained important, according to interviewees from education and social work, that the project should be “more embedded in people’s thinking about resources...You can’t do too much work in embedding awareness”. A directory of resources, which might have helped in this process, had been envisaged in the original strategy, but this (like the SACRO project and the wider sharing of TRACE data) had never materialised.

CONCLUSIONS: COULD FREAGARRACH BE REPLICATED ELSEWHERE?

1.35 The feasibility of replicating the Freagarrach project elsewhere was among the questions the evaluation was designed to address. As Tilley (1993) notes, the answer to the question depends largely on the meaning given to “replication”. Given the importance attached by Tilley (1993) and Pawson and Tilley (1997) to the context in which any programme is run, it is clear that strict replication is impossible, since there will always be features of the context of the original programme that will be impossible to duplicate in another place and at another time. Perhaps influenced by such a conception, those who were interviewed towards the end of the evaluation tended to be sceptical about the prospects for successful replication. It is, however, possible to identify some of the key “mechanisms” (to use Pawson and Tilley’s term) that operated from the start of the Freagarrach Project, and that would be crucial in any attempted replication. It is not to be expected that these mechanisms will appear in an identical form anywhere else, but their identification does allow for “conjectures” (Tilley, 1993) about what was crucial in Freagarrach’s establishment and operation, and what is likely to be important for any replication.

1.36 The interviews with key staff conducted near the start of the evaluation produced a strong emphasis on the importance of seeing Freagarrach not as a stand-alone project but as part of a wider strategy – “the tip of the iceberg”. This integration of the project into an overall inter-agency strategy is probably Freagarrach’s single most distinctive feature; certainly it is in sharp contrast with projects that have been “parachuted” into an area with little or no consultation with the agencies whose co-operation and goodwill are necessary for the development of a supportive network (Lobley and Smith, 1999). At all stages of the evaluation interviewees stressed how crucial it was that a genuine inter-agency partnership existed to support Freagarrach, in which no one agency dominated and all the parties could expect identifiable benefits. In particular, the commitment at the highest level of Central Scotland Police to a broadly welfare-oriented approach to juvenile offenders, and the practical expression of this commitment in a willingness to share information and to maintain a public stance of support for the project and a coherent inter-agency strategy, were judged crucial to
the success of Freagarrach. Although not every element of the original strategy was achieved in practice, enough were (notably the provision of TRACE data from the police and of resources for special education for young people at Freagarrach) to make the inter-agency strategy practically effective in supporting the project as well as symbolically representative of a common commitment to a welfare approach to juvenile offending. The first key mechanism that is conjecturally important for replication is therefore a genuine partnership among the relevant agencies – and for this to be achieved it is essential, in the words of a particularly knowledgeable and interested interviewee, that one should “first have people sitting down round a table talking about reservations and problems, especially about sharing information” (see Pearson et al., 1992). The fact that a common strategy survived largely intact throughout the period of the evaluation, despite local government reorganisation and other changes in the environment that are discussed in Chapter 2, is good evidence that the groundwork for the partnership was done thoroughly; but it should be remembered, too, that Freagarrach itself contributed to the maintenance of the strategy: in the words of another interviewee, it “has acted as the catalyst or glue for our strategy – multi-agency working, cross-council working, retaining economies of scale after disaggregation”.

1.37 The second key mechanism is to be found in the work actually undertaken with young people at Freagarrach’s 2 sites. This is described at length in Chapter 2, but some of its more obvious features can be summarised here, drawing on the perceptions of the project’s first leader, and on observations of practice throughout the evaluation. These are the use by the staff of a variety of methods of work (the “multi-modal” approach recommended by the findings of effectiveness research (McGuire, 1995)); the incorporation into the work of insights and techniques from a range of disciplines, so that it did not draw exclusively on either education or social work practice, but on both, and on work in the fields of alcohol and drug abuse and family relationships; and the integration in practice of the approaches of social work with children and families and with criminal justice, so that the project was “very child-centred, welfare-oriented, while still challenging offending”. Underpinning this style of work was the principle that attendance should be voluntary: this allowed for far greater flexibility than would have been possible had attendance for specified times been a legal requirement, freed the staff from the need to spend time and energy on enforcement, and avoided the risk of promoting defiance and resistance among the young people.

1.38 Freagarrach was the product of a set of circumstances that will never be exactly replicated. A voluntary organisation – Barnardo’s Scotland – with local experience and credibility was able to respond to a government initiative in a way that demonstrated that it could draw not only on its own resources but on those of other local agencies to establish and run a project, the need for which had been shown by empirical research. The other agencies provided resources in cash and kind, including premises and staff, to complement the resources provided by central government and by Barnardo’s; they were also committed to supporting the project practically and symbolically, through a consistent public endorsement of the principles on which it was based. This gave a consistent message to practitioners in social work, education and the police that their approach to juvenile offenders and young people at risk should be guided by the principles of the Children’s Hearing System, and that the interests and welfare of the young people should be their primary concern. Freagarrach was conceived as only one element of a much broader strategy, which encompassed a commitment to diversion from the formal system whenever possible, and, in principle, a range of services organised according to the need and problems they were intended to address. Although some of these services never materialised, mainly because of shortage of resources, the principle of a
common and coherent strategy was maintained throughout the period of the evaluation. The other crucial element in the context of the Freagarrach Project’s establishment was that it was possible to bring together a team to staff the project whose members were prepared to work in a way that combined aspects of good practice from social work with children and families and from criminal justice social work. They were also open to influences from elsewhere, and were committed to the use of methods and styles of work that were in line with the implications for practice of the evidence on effectiveness in programmes for offenders.

1.39 There seems no reason in principle why these crucial features of the establishment of Freagarrach should not be replicated elsewhere: the principle of inter-agency co-operation has become more securely and widely embraced since 1995, and awareness of the findings of effectiveness research has spread among practitioners. Two further specific points are relevant to the question of replication. At an early stage of the evaluation it was provisionally concluded that the most unusual and therefore hard-to-replicate features of Freagarrach were the willingness of the police to share information, and the quality of the information they had to share. The opportunity presented by the invitation to bid for a developmental project is also an unusual (though not unique) event. If future specialist projects are to be firmly embedded, as Freagarrach was from the outset, in a supportive network covering all relevant agencies and staff at all levels, then a commitment to share information, even of a kind that has traditionally been considered sensitive, and high-level encouragement of an outward-looking, developmental perspective, are likely to be essential.
CHAPTER TWO: EVALUATING PROCESS: THE WORK OF FREAGARRACH IN ITS LOCAL CONTEXT

2.1 The aims of this chapter are to describe Freagarrach’s practice and how it developed over time, and to set this in the context of changes in its environment over the 5 years of the evaluation. The referral process is described first, since an essential part of the evaluation concerns the question of whether Freagarrach worked with the intended target group – the most persistent juvenile offenders in Clackmannanshire, Falkirk and Stirling. Details of the offending careers and personal characteristics of the young people who attended the project are reserved for Chapter 3; the focus here is on a description of the referral process and its success or failure in keeping the project on course to realise its aims.

THE PROCESS OF REFERRAL: DID FREAGARRACH WORK WITH THE INTENDED TARGET GROUP?

2.2 Referrals to Freagarrach came from social workers in the 3 authorities that made up the former Central Region, and were usually from teams dealing with children and families; towards the end of the evaluation period, 7 referrals which resulted in the attendance of young persons at Freagarrach came from criminal justice teams (reflecting the tendency for the average age of young people at the project to increase over time), and one successful referral was from a residential home run by a voluntary organisation. The project leader visited the relevant teams to explain the referral criteria and procedure early in the project’s life, but the effort to ensure that social workers were aware of the project and understood its purposes was a continuous one, not least because of the rapid turnover of social work staff. Formal referrals were preceded by initial enquiries, usually by telephone, during which basic details were discussed and levels and patterns of offending were confirmed by the project staff. If at the point of enquiry it was felt that the young person met the criteria for persistent offending, and that a referral would be appropriate, a referral form and an information booklet on the project were sent to the social worker. The referral form was then discussed and completed with the young person and his or her parents or carers. The criteria for acceptance by Freagarrach were as follows:

1. The young person is aged 12-16 years [raised to 18 in 1999] at the time of referral to the project.
2. There have been at least 5 episodes of offending within the previous 12 months (i.e. a minimum of 5 charges from separate incidents), and there has been at least one episode within the last 2 months.
3. Offending behaviour is the main reason for any statutory agency involvement.
4. There has been a recent social work assessment that highlights the need for intensive support from the project.

As noted in Chapter One, Freagarrach staff had direct access to the TRACE database of Central Scotland Police. Every week (barring failures of the IT system), the police supplied the project leader with a disk which enabled the project to update its own computer system. It also allowed information given on referral forms about charges, frequency and patterns of offending to be checked, and project staff often also checked information from social workers with the Reporter.
2.3 It was always the intention of the project to accept referrals on young people currently placed in residential care outwith the region, “if the offending had been the primary reason for their removal from home” (Freagarrach Project, 1996, p. 4), and if the young person met the criteria listed above. The project would, however, only accept such referrals if the young person had a suitable home base within the community, with family members or foster carers, or in some form of supported lodgings. The rationale for this restriction was that the number of young people whom the project could accept was necessarily limited, and it could be assumed that young people in residential care were already receiving some kind of intensive professional service.

2.4 Access to TRACE allowed the project to monitor the level of offending for all young people in the Central Scotland Police area up to the age of 16, and indeed the system could be used to highlight the young people with the highest number of charges at any one time. The project leader was therefore able to contact both the police and the Reporter to gather further information on young people listed on TRACE as having a high number of charges, but for whom Freagarrach had not received an enquiry or a referral. Access to the TRACE data allowed the project leader to be proactive in pursuing possible referrals to the project, rather than having to rely solely on the judgement of social workers. In these cases, after checking details with the police and sometimes the Reporter, Freagarrach staff would contact the relevant social worker directly to discuss the possibility of a referral. This would not always be appropriate, as when, for example, the social worker was already working to a clear plan, and might have considered but rejected the idea of a referral; in other cases, when the idea of Freagarrach had not entered the worker’s mind, this proactive approach was a means of ensuring that young people were not deprived of an opportunity to attend Freagarrach through simple inadvertence on the social worker’s part.

2.5 During the period covered by the evaluation there were 209 enquiries about the possibility of a referral to Freagarrach, resulting in 144 referrals. In only 23 cases where the process reached the stage of a formal referral did it not result in a young person’s starting to attend Freagarrach. In the period to 31 March 2000 there were 121 “starts” at Freagarrach, by a total of 106 young people: that is, 15 attended the project more than once. The most common reasons why a referral did not result in attendance were that the young person did not meet the criterion of persistent offending, and reluctance on the young person’s part to make a commitment to work with the Freagarrach staff. In the 65 cases in which enquiries did not lead on to referrals, the most common reason was again that the young person did not meet the criterion of persistent offending; in other cases, welfare issues rather than offending were judged to be the main problem, the referral concerned a child under the age of 12, or it was decided that another service should be provided. In a few cases, the social worker simply did not follow up the initial enquiry, and the case was not such a clear candidate for Freagarrach that the project leader pursued it.

2.6 The numbers of enquiries, referrals and starts at Freagarrach varied from year to year, but not in a readily identifiable pattern: for example, there was no evidence of an early burst of enthusiasm, or of gradually increasing interest in the project. The peak years for enquiries were the first, third and fifth, and this was also roughly true of referrals, although the year-to-year variation was smaller. Twenty-one young people began attending the project in the first year, 23 in the second, 27 in the third, 21 in the fourth, and 29 in the fifth (each year running from 1 April to 31 March, and counting starts rather than individuals). There were no
significant differences over the five years of the evaluation in the proportion of referrals that led to a young person’s attendance at Freagarrach.

2.7 The Freagarrach staff used the formal criteria for admission as a threshold or trigger that activated the project’s interest in a case. Within the total population of offenders who met the criterion of five or more episodes of offending, the project tried to offer places to those with the highest number of episodes or with a worrying pattern of escalating offending. TRACE data allowed for an estimate of the size of the overall population of persistent juvenile offenders in the region at any one time - that is, those with 5 or more episodes of offending in any one year – and regular checks were undertaken during the evaluation to ascertain how many young people who met the criterion of persistent offending were not referred (or were not the subject of an enquiry) to Freagarrach. At no stage was there any evidence of a large pool of persistent offenders who were “missed” by the project’s referral system. Where TRACE showed very persistent offending (10 episodes or more in a year), and thus suggested that the young person concerned should have been the subject of a referral, checks with the project leader revealed reasons why a referral had not been made (and similar reasons were present in the few “very persistent” cases which were referred but not accepted). Typically, these young people were in residential care or secure accommodation for welfare reasons, or had no viable home base in central Scotland; others were unwilling to attend the project, had committed offences, usually sexual, that suggested a need for specialist help, or had produced a spate of offences over a short period and then apparently stopped offending. The evidence is, then, that the referral system, largely thanks to the project’s access to TRACE data, worked well, in that very few potentially suitable cases were missed altogether. Chapter 3 will present evidence that it also worked well in ensuring that Freagarrach did not work with young people whose offending was not so serious as to meet the criteria for the target group.

2.8 A common problem for specialist projects in high demand is of an undesirably long time lag between referral and actually starting work on the programme; this is obviously to be avoided as far as possible, especially since the referral may well have been triggered by a particular crisis. Although there were times when a wait was inevitable, since the project was working to its full capacity of 20 young people, it was rare for the gap between referral and attendance to be longer than 8 weeks: only 10 (8% of the total) such cases were identified. Forty-four (37%) young people started attendance within less than a week after the referral, and a further 53 (48%) started within 4 weeks. In the small number of cases where the wait was longer, project staff often tried to provide support to the young person and the social worker, in order to sustain hope, interest and motivation. Young people who were re-referred after attending the project were always taken back almost immediately, as the staff responded to an evident crisis. The fact that Freagarrach provided individualised programmes rather than running a series of closed, fixed-term groups allowed for this flexibility and meant that long waits (after which the original motivation, and perhaps the need, might well have been dissipated) were unusual (cf. Lobley and Smith (1999)).

Informal work with young people

2.9 It is important to note here that young people who were not formally accepted on to the Freagarrach programme were not necessarily deprived of all that the project had to offer. Fifteen cases were identified of young people, including 2 young women, who never appeared as having attended in the project’s formal records, but who nevertheless received some service from Freagarrach – and there were almost certainly more cases than this. This “hidden work”
is hard to quantify and therefore to cost, but its existence means that the figure of 121 “starts” on the Freagarrach programme underestimates the project’s overall workload, and the number of young people to whom it provided some help. This work arose from the staff’s commitment to offering a flexible service to young people in crisis and to supporting social workers that had identified a need. The work was often described as “outreach”, meaning that a Freagarrach worker would visit the family home; the first case of this kind was recorded in early 1997, and work lasted for around 4 months. Typically, the aims were to work on the young person’s offending behaviour and to provide support to the family, in the hope that with relatively short-term, low intensity involvement a crisis might be prevented from developing into a long-term problem. In other cases the project arranged for support to be provided via a volunteer, the young person attended family meetings at Freagarrach without participating in a formal programme, project staff supported other workers with their specialist expertise, and the social worker was able to use the project’s resources to enhance work with the young person. The effectiveness of this type of work in reducing offending is impossible to measure, but there is no doubt that it was perceived as helpful by social workers, and won for the Freagarrach staff a reputation for adaptability and responsiveness.

METHODS AND STYLES OF WORK

2.10 In this section the main elements of the project’s approach to working with young people are described and discussed; many of these remained constant during the 5 years of the evaluation, but there were inevitably some important changes, and these are covered in the following section. The approach of this part of the report is mainly qualitative, as it attempts to give the flavour of the project’s work with young people, but quantitative data are also used as a measure of how far the project achieved its aim of providing intensive supervision.

2.11 Once a referral had been accepted, the project leader or a senior project worker visited the young person’s home, and the young person and his or her parents or carers were invited to visit the project base at Alloa or Polmont, whichever was nearer home. This allowed them to see the project building and to meet the team member who had been allocated the case. The reasons for the young person’s referral to the project were explained, and s/he and the family were given details about the project and its programme of work. Project staff explored the young person’s views, interests and expectations, and set out their own expectations of young people attending the project. Mutual expectations were similarly explored and clarified with the parents or carers. All being well, it was at this point that the young person was considered to have started to attend Freagarrach, and the programme of work began immediately after this initial process of engagement.

2.12 The basic expectation was that every young person should have 3 direct, face-to-face contacts with the project every week during the period of attendance, each contact lasting between 1½ and 2½ hours. The guideline period of attendance started off as 6 months, but, as will become clear, in practice the project operated with a good deal of flexibility, and the average length of stay was never as short as this. Every young person was given a timetable of meetings. When they were due to attend the project, young people were collected from home by a project worker, who would also take them home after the session. Those who lived nearby, or were attending the special educational facility that shared its premises with the Freagarrach’s Polmont site, made their own way to the project. If staff felt that specific circumstances warranted closer supervision or increased intensity of work, they negotiated more frequent contacts.
2.13 The first 4-6 weeks were used as an assessment period, in which the project staff could begin to understand the specific needs and circumstances of each individual, and to explore the reasons for their offending and related relevant problems. At the end of this period there was a contract meeting, at which a formal contract document was agreed, highlighting “the key issues and tasks to be undertaken” (Freagarrach Project, 1996, p. 9). This meeting was attended by the young person, his or her parent(s) or carer(s), the allocated project worker, the young person’s social worker, and any other professionals involved in the case. The meeting was held at the appropriate Freagarrach site and chaired by either the project leader or a senior project worker. The contract document was agreed and signed by all in attendance, and minutes were taken of the discussion, the tasks to be undertaken, and the future roles of the people involved. The contract covered the objectives the project was to pursue with the young person, relevant to the explicit aim of reducing the individual’s offending behaviour. These objectives related to the five main areas of work that were established at the outset (Freagarrach Project, 1996, p. 9): offending behaviour; victim awareness and reparation; education and employment; family issues; and constructive use of leisure time.

2.14 This document, known as the Individual Programme Contract, was a “working tool” (Freagarrach Project, 1996, p. 9) which specified the foci of work for each individual and informed the nature and content of the specific methods of work adopted. For example, a young person’s offending might be associated with involvement with a peer group, with drug or alcohol problems, with family tensions, or with problems at school, and one or more of these would be identified in the Individual Programme Contract as requiring particular attention. This document served as the basis for regular reviews or Progress Meetings, which were held approximately every eight weeks following the initial contract meeting, ideally with the same personnel, or at least with the same agency representation, as at the initial contract meeting. Progress was assessed in relation to the objectives contained in the initial contract or agreed at any subsequent Progress Meetings. The work undertaken with each individual was described and discussed and, in conjunction with a review of current case details, the future programme of work was agreed. Minutes of each Progress Meeting supplemented the Individual Programme Contract to ensure that the objectives of work remained relevant and feasible. At the final Progress Meeting a closing summary was produced, recording the achievement or otherwise of the objectives within each identified problem area.

2.15 The project staff worked with young people individually and through formal group sessions, as well as less formal group activities. In the main, individual sessions involved the young person and his or her allocated project worker, but another member of staff could stand in, and at times two staff members would work with one individual. The primary focus of the individual work was offending: discussions related specifically to the situation, motivation, perceptions and circumstances of the individual’s offending pattern. While the immediate situational context of offending behaviour was central to this work, it also incorporated exploration of wider contextual factors, such as education or employment issues, family relationships, use of leisure, and any other personal and social difficulties. Though fully aware of the research on effective practice with offenders, and committed to the methods and styles of working suggested by its findings, the staff also recognised the need to work flexibly and responsively to the needs and aptitudes of each young person, rather than attempting to impose a single undifferentiated programme on all.
2.16 Formal group sessions were used to discuss specific topics within the 5 main areas of concern, and dealt with these in general terms rather than exploring the situation of one specific individual. Other formal groupwork activities, instead of being topic-based, were organised with the aim of bringing the young people together to develop their personal and social skills in peer interaction, trust, decision-making and taking responsibility. Less formal group activities were aimed, at one level, at providing opportunities for enjoyment, but also at encouraging the young people to develop an interest in activities that might lead to a more constructive use of leisure time. Achieving success in challenging activities was seen as a means of enhancing self-esteem, and the sharing of the experience enabled workers to build and strengthen their relationships with the young people. The staff also recognised the importance of involving parents in their work: meetings were arranged at Alloa or Polmont to which the parents or carers of all young people currently attending the project were invited. In principle these meetings were held at regular intervals; in practice they varied in frequency, depending on the level of parental interest and on staff resources. As a by-product of the meetings, some parents at one stage formed a group of their own, with the encouragement and support of the project staff, to which speakers were invited to address topics highlighted in group discussions. Some mothers continued to attend the parents' group after their son or daughter had left the project, finding in it a source of support not available elsewhere.

INTENSITY AND DURATION OF CONTACT

2.17 Freagarrach claimed to provide a programme of supervision whose intensity and duration were commensurate with the young people's risk of reoffending. As will be shown in Chapter 3, the project worked only with young people who met its stated criterion of persistence (and in many cases far exceeded it), and who were therefore, according to the well-established “risk principle”, drawn from the group of offenders most likely to benefit from intensive intervention (Andrews et al., 1986). If, in line with the original plan, all young people attending the project had had 3 contacts a week, each lasting about 2 hours, over a 6-month period, they would have spent about 150 hours in direct contact with project workers, spread over about 80 days - giving an intensity and duration of contact close to that specified in legislation (for example, on community service and probation centres) as appropriate for the more persistent or serious offenders who receive community sentences.

2.18 In practice, both duration of stay and intensity of contact were much more variable than this – not surprisingly, given the commitment of the staff to tailoring the programme to the needs of the individual. Throughout the period of the evaluation, the average length of stay was considerably longer than 6 months, and some young people stayed for very much longer. This is the main reason why Freagarrach worked with fewer young people than had originally been intended, though, as noted above, this does not mean that substantial numbers of young people who could have benefited from the project were deprived of the opportunity to do so. Table 2.1 shows the mean length of stay for the first 4 years, most of the young people who started in 1999-2000 still being at the project at the time of the analysis. The table also shows the modal length of stay, since the mean figure gives a misleading picture in some cases because of very long (and short) stays by a few young people. It should be remembered in interpreting the table that the project staff remained in close contact with several young people who had officially left, while some that were officially attending were in fact seen only infrequently.
Table 2.1: Mean and modal lengths of stay at Freagarrach 1995-99

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Period</th>
<th>Starts</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Mode</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1995-96</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>11½</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996-97</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1997-98</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>9½</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1998-99</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>7½</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Of the young people who started in the project’s first year, 7 attended for over a year, and one stayed for almost 2½ years; in the second year, the mean length of stay was shorter, but again one young person stayed for almost 2½ years; in the third year, when the mean length of stay increased, one young person stayed for almost 2 years; and in the fourth year the longest stay (by 2 young people) was of 13 months. In general, younger offenders tended to stay for longer, and the tendency for the modal length of stay to decrease reflects the upward trend over time in the average age of young people starting at Freagarrach, as well as the efforts made by the staff, discussed later in this chapter, to encourage young people to move on from the project. The modal figure – the most frequent length of stay in each year – probably provides a better indication of the project’s practice than the mean, since it is less distorted by very long and very short periods of attendance.

2.19 The project’s records of contact were examined at various stages of the evaluation to assess the intensity of work. On each occasion it was apparent that the amount of contact with young people varied enormously across cases, as did contact with family members and other professionals. The young people who generated the most work during their first weeks at Freagarrach tended to do so throughout their time there, by virtue of the complexity of problems in their background and continuing problematic behaviour. There was in general no strong indication that the amount of contact tailed off over time, as might have been expected; indeed, contact was often intensive during a young person’s last weeks at Freagarrach, as the staff tried to make arrangements for moving on. It was in fact not unusual for young people who had formally left to remain in close contact with the project, particularly at the Alloa site, which was close to the town centre and readily accessible. The staff viewed this continued contact as a positive opportunity to undertake crisis intervention work, and thought it important that there should be scope for it: “we won’t turn them away”. This kind of continuing contact was inevitable given that Freagarrach functioned for many of the young people as a “micro-community of care” (Braithwaite, 1995), in ways described later in this chapter and in Chapter 3.

2.20 The type of work done with young people also varied across cases: a few young people were never involved in formal groupwork sessions, while others might have 50 or more contacts of this kind. The number of recorded individual work sessions varied similarly, as did the amount of contact with the young people’s families (from 2 contacts to well over 100). Some of these variations arose, of course, from the length of time young people spent at Freagarrach: 9 young people who made a formal start at the project never became truly engaged with the work, and left after a few weeks (though this short period sometimes
generated a great deal of activity). The principal reason for the variation is, however, that the staff were able to be flexible and adaptable, responding to assessed need (and of course to recurrent problems and crises), and trying to match their interventions to the learning styles and aptitudes of the young people. The actual workload of the project was therefore unpredictable: in most cases there was no means of assessing accurately in advance how much time, energy and commitment a young person newly arrived at Freagarrach would require. While the project’s records certainly do not record every contact with the young people or others concerned with them, they do clearly convey that the project provided intensive supervision, support and care for the great majority of young people who engaged with it all. They also convey the staff’s commitment and energy: the effort and intensity of involvement with young people attending for a second time, who had characteristically gone through a chaotic period of very frequent offending before returning to the project, are especially striking. The re-acceptance of these young people is an indication of the staff’s willingness to take the risk of trying to help young people whom it would have been easy to reject as having had their chance and failed to take it. Overall, there is no doubt that on average young people attending Freagarrach could expect rather more contact with project workers, over a longer period, than the original broad guideline of 75 contacts over six months implied.

2.21 In this sense, the project’s practice was plainly in line with the advice of Lipsey (1995, p.78) that to succeed in reducing the reoffending risk programmes need to provide “a sufficient amount of service, preferably 100 or more contact hours, delivered at two or more contacts per week over a period of 26 weeks or more”. In addition to providing a “dose” of the size prescribed in the effectiveness research, the project also followed both the “risk principle” (Andrews et al., 1986) and, in its use of a variety of methods, the “breadth principle” (Palmer, 1992). The programme focused on criminogenic needs while not neglecting others (Andrews, 1995), and, being based in the community, was more likely than an institutionally based programme to facilitate real-life learning (McIvor, 1990; McGuire, 1995). The project was adequately resourced, and staff were appropriately trained and supported (Hollin, 1995), there was a commitment to monitoring and evaluation, and activities were (in general) systematically recorded (Lipsey, 1995). These features of Freagarrach, according to available knowledge of “what works”, should be associated with positive outcomes in terms of reoffending.

THE PROCESS OF ENGAGEMENT

2.22 Before looking in more detail at the various components of the programme, it is important to say something about the style and approach adopted by workers in the project: the manner in which a programme is delivered may be as important for success as its content. Lewis and Gibson (1977) approach this issue by drawing a distinction between “engagement skills” and “work skills”. They argue that in analysing client-worker interaction it is only possible to say that work is taking place if there is a clear agenda, understood by both parties, and that the interaction is relevant to this agenda. “Engagement” refers to the process of helping the client to define the agenda and to work within it; it is not a once and for all achievement which can be forgotten once the client has formally signed up to an agenda, but a process which needs to be continually reiterated, since at any time and for any reason clients may be unable or unwilling to work on the agreed agenda, and the worker’s task is to “re-engage” them. The process of engaging young people in work is less tangible to researchers than that of working with them (in Lewis and Gibson’s sense), since it is inherently complex and raises questions about workers’ styles and skills in communication which can only be
answered by subjective judgement and interpretation. Worker style has, however, long been recognised as crucial to the success of interventions (Truax and Carkhuff, 1967), and it became apparent during the evaluation, especially from the interviews with young people and their carers reported in Chapter 3, that in their view the way in which staff related to them was a crucial element of the project’s success in motivating young people to attend initially and in retaining their enthusiasm for continued attendance.

2.23 The workers’ style was both informal and informative. From numerous visits to the project and discussions with workers, it was clear that the overall approach was strongly client-centred, and that the views and wishes of young people were sought throughout: the flow of information was in both directions. The workers were unanimous in their belief that the positive aspects of a young person must always be identified and highlighted (in line with the principle of reintegrative shaming that the act, not the actor, should be condemned (Braithwaite, 1989)). This was interpreted by the young people as “respect” (for the importance of perceived respect in relationships see Scheff (1997)). The positive personal attributes of the workers were described by young people and their families in terms that suggested general concepts such as friendliness, helpfulness, humour and honesty; they were also seen as available. These are everyday human rather than professional attributes, and it is worth remembering their importance, especially given the increasingly technical language and emphasis of research on effectiveness.

2.24 Flexibility applied both to the management of the programme and to workers’ approach to individual young people. From the workers’ perspective, this was important as a means of maintaining a balance between the requirements of the planned programme and an appreciation of the young people’s wishes and feelings. Moreover, the concept of balance indicated an ability to share some of the control and direction of specific sessions or work plans, and an emphasis on the achievement of objectives through skilled negotiation rather than by demanding compliance (in line with the principle of voluntary attendance). The approach was described by one of the workers as follows:

“[I]t’s] important to build a positive relationship. I found a lot of positives in his life. Also wanted it to be seen that he had to work. I wanted a balance between the two. I had to lay it on the line early on so he would not have false expectations but I would have jeopardised the relationship if I was critical or lectured him. Flexibility is a question of balance - prepared to fit in with changes the young person might want, but also aware that they might manipulate.”

Whilst the approach left room for the views and interests of the young people, it was also clear that the workers retained ultimate control, though not through simple enforcement, and that the relevant work was usually completed.

2.25 Many, perhaps all, of the young people at Freagarrach have been the object of negative judgements and opinions, from people in the community, professionals such as police officers and teachers, and often from members of their own family. Freagarrach could not avoid the negative aspects of young people’s lives and behaviour, which were after all the reason for their attendance, but in recognition of the burden of negative evaluations the young people carried staff tried to identify and build on their positive qualities and the positive elements in their lives. Again it was important to achieve a balance: if the focus was always on the things
that were “wrong” with the young people and their lives, this would be unhelpful in attempting to raise their self-esteem; on the other hand, the things that were wrong were the target for change, and could not be denied. As one worker put it: “we get in the mud with them to get them out again”. A further aspect of the approach was the willingness of staff to persist in engaging young people in the face of difficulties or apparent lack of enthusiasm and commitment. The message, as one worker put it, was that “I won’t go away”. The reality of this approach in practice was evident throughout the research. On occasions, usually within the first few weeks of the programme, some young people went through periods where their motivation to attend began to wane. In these circumstances the workers continued to visit the home, and acted as if they assumed that the young person would return to the project. If the young person was not at home, workers would often visit other places in an effort to retain contact (the contact sheets record meetings in, for example, shopping centres and supermarkets).

WORK ON OFFENDING

2.26 Work on offending constituted the central component of the Freagarrach programme. The starting point was generally a discussion of all the charges against the young person recorded in the TRACE system or, for those aged 16 and over, in their criminal record. The immediate situation of offending was explored, together with the young person’s accounts and explanations, in order to gain some insight into both the situational reasoning and the situational circumstances of offending behaviour. The focus was on understanding the cognitive and behavioural aspects of offending for each individual, and the initial task was to gain some understanding of the types of offences committed, together with the sequence of events leading up to them, which could enable the identification of possible characteristic patterns of behaviour and the typical situations in which these occurred. The young person and the worker would identify and explore particular factors which appeared to increase the risk of involvement in offending (for example, the presence of particular peers, the time of day, particular situational triggers, and so on). This cognitive-behavioural emphasis is among the key features of successful programmes for persistent offenders, according to the research on “what works” (McGuire, 1995).

2.27 This aspect of the work was undertaken individually, and in most cases the interventions that followed were also on an individual level, adapted to the specific issues that emerged from each case. Usually workers spent time helping individuals to recognise and avoid or withdraw from certain situations, and empowering and enabling them to make different choices and decisions when faced with similar situations in the future. The emphasis was always on the need for the young people to take responsibility for their own actions and their consequences for themselves and others. Using the situation of offending as a starting point, workers could begin to explore other contributory factors that are known to be linked to offending. In particular, for some young men at the project, drug or alcohol misuse played a major part in their offending, and in these cases work concentrated on the causal links between substance misuse and offending.

2.28 The project provided opportunities for young people to explore their general perceptions and understandings of crime. The topic of masculinity was one important focus for group discussion, and the link between masculine reputation and offending behaviour was also explored on an individual basis when appropriate. Anger management was also included in the programme for young people whose offending was associated with difficulties in
controlling their temper. Whilst formal counselling was the main vehicle for focusing on individual-level issues, this work was often carried over into less formal contacts: for example, all the workers mentioned the importance of the time spent with young people in car journeys to and from the project. Similarly, interactions with individual young people during activity-based sessions were seen as an integral part of the repertoire open to workers.

2.29 The approach at Freagarrach was eclectic in that it represented a practical synthesis of a number of cognitive, behavioural and social skills-based methods (specific influences included the work of Priestley et al. (1978), Priestley and McGuire (1985), Denman (1982), and Thorpe et al. (1980)). This allowed for the use of a variety of techniques and resources, including pencil and paper exercises, worksheets, video, role play, cartooning and the analysis of reasoned action, and staff tried throughout the evaluation to acquire new skills and methods and develop existing ones. Group sessions were used to explore designated topics in a more general way without focusing specifically on any one individual, though it was hoped that they would have an individual impact; for example, some sessions with older offenders invited them to consider the consequences of continued offending, with the aim of promoting constructive reflection. Early in its life, the project made arrangements with Clackmannanshire social work staff at Glenochil Young Offenders Institution to set up a programme that allowed young people at Freagarrach to meet staff and inmates. The purpose was to provide “an opportunity for the reality of custodial sentences to be discussed” (Freagarrach Project, 1996, p. 9), rather than being designed to shock or frighten the young people, which evidence suggests would have been counter-productive (McIvor, 1990; Lloyd, 1995). The work involved, rather, a shared discussion and an exchange of views, although the realities of institutional life and loss of freedom were no doubt conveyed in the process. The programme was in three parts: initially, staff and inmates from Glenochil visited the group at Freagarrach; then each young person had a short meeting with a Glenochil inmate; and finally, the young people met at Freagarrach to discuss the experience. A similar arrangement was later established with the women’s prison at Cornton Vale. The individual meeting was probably important in this work, since it was less likely to be affected by the bravado which young men may feel they have to display in a group of peers.

2.30 It was always clear that the central core of the programme concerned offending, and that most of the intervention related to the specific criminogenic needs of the individual. In the detail of its practice, therefore, as well as in the broad structure of its programme, Freagarrach worked in ways that should be associated with positive results in terms of reoffending. Summarising research on effectiveness, McGuire (1995, p. 15) points to the importance of separating “client problems or features that contribute to or are supportive of offending, from those that are more distantly related, or unrelated, to it”. The cognitive-behavioural core of the work was also, as noted above, in line with findings on effectiveness, as were the wide range of techniques and methods used, and the project’s recognition of the variety of offenders’ problems. This entailed work on aspects of their lives known to affect the risk of offending though removed from its immediate behavioural context (e.g. Farrington, 1994): education and employment, family relationships, and the use of leisure time. The following sections discuss the project’s work in each of these fields in turn, and also its efforts to develop work in victim awareness and reparation.

EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT
The original proposal for Freagarrach recognised the importance of education for young people, and, given the educational histories of the young people who attended (described in Chapter 3), it is no surprise that education should have been a significant part of the programme. A key aspect of the multi-agency development of a young offenders strategy in the former Central Region was the commitment by the Education Department to provide 7 day unit places to young people at Freagarrach who were currently receiving no education and for whom integration or reintegration elsewhere was unlikely. The project’s use of these places is discussed below, but this was only part of the work undertaken on education. There were three main types of intervention: advocacy and liaison, in which staff worked in partnership, mainly with teachers, educational psychologists and social workers, with the aim of finding or enhancing educational services for young people who were receiving little or no education; practical support for young people attending or being (re)integrated into a school or day unit; and work on the cognitive and behavioural aspects of young people’s experience of and response to education. Different combinations of these types of intervention were used at different times, as staff responded to the changing educational needs of the individual.

All young people at the project could be placed, at any one time, into one of four broad categories: (a) receiving no education, and with no link to any educational establishment; (b) not attending, through truancy or exclusion, but retaining some link with a school or day unit; (c) attending a school or day unit; (d) about to leave school, or already left. For those in the first group, the primary focus was on exploring the possible educational options with the young person, their social worker, and the relevant Education Department staff. The day unit places offered by Education were mainly intended for these young people, but they rarely if ever found the move back into education easy or straightforward. Many of them had strongly “anti-school” attitudes, and had been out of the education system for a long period, following permanent exclusion for truancy or behaviour problems (in some cases these amounted to serious violence). Staff worked on developing the young people’s commitment and motivation, discussed their expectations, and tried to prepare them, at a cognitive and behavioural level, for handling day to day interactions in a new educational setting. A similar approach was adopted for young people in the second group, the non-attendees, but here the emphasis was on exploring the possibility of (re)integration into school. This was often a gradual process, starting with part-time attendance at mainstream schooling and a day unit, but with the eventual aim of total reintegration. Again, staff saw it as crucial to gain the young person’s commitment and to help him or her to develop realistic expectations of what a return to school would mean. For both groups, the project’s role in advocacy and liaison was central.

If a young person was already attending mainstream school or a day unit, or moved to this point while at Freagarrach, the project’s task was to support him or her to reduce the risk of non-attendance or exclusion. Practical support was offered, for example, in helping young people to structure their day appropriately, re-organising Freagarrach sessions so that they followed immediately after attendance at school, and providing transport. Furthermore, individual counselling sessions for many young people often involved a focus on issues which could have a bearing on future attendance and behaviour, covering topics such as managing anger and confrontation at school, making friends, surviving in a school or college environment, exploring rules and expectations, and discussing the different perceptions of teachers and young people. In some cases this work was undertaken in the school or day unit itself, and involved liaison with educational staff about the content of the project’s work. Relations between Freagarrach staff and teachers and educational psychologists were, on the
whole, positive and productive. Education personnel were invited to and regularly attended contract and progress meetings; similarly, Freagarrach staff regularly attended school meetings and reviews held at the day units.

2.34 The final group, which over time came to include a high proportion of the young people at Freagarrach, consisted of young people who had either left or were about to leave school. The project staff liaised with local colleges, training courses and careers offices on behalf of these young people, and in a few cases were able to arrange work experience placements (for example, in a pre-school summer playgroup and a local garage). Staff would explore possible career choices with these young people, help them to obtain relevant information, and support them in approaching relevant training establishments, agencies or businesses, for example with help in completing application forms and arranging appointments.

Other work focused on skills and assertiveness training to help in gaining employment, and explored such issues as the differences between school and college, making friends, and advice on benefits and entitlements. In helping young people to move on from school the project staff relied heavily on local networks and personal contacts, which they worked hard to develop; but, as noted in Chapter 1, this was an aspect of work in which it would have been useful, in retrospect, to have had specialist knowledge and expertise from the start. Moving on to independence and life as a young adult remained a problematic process for many of the young people at Freagarrach throughout the period of the evaluation.

FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS

2.35 A significant aspect of the overall philosophy and approach of Freagarrach was the importance attached to establishing and maintaining meaningful dialogue with the parents or carers of young people. The project’s own early account of its work highlighted the link between “chaotic backgrounds” and persistent offending, the “isolation” felt by many parents, and their need for “support in coping with…problems within the family which are compounded by the offending”. This was why “the involvement and support of parents in the project is consistently sought and encouraged” (Freagarrach Project, 1996, p. 10). A high level of parental involvement in the formal referral process, and in the contract and review mechanisms, was evident from the minutes of these meetings, which include a list of those present, and confirmed by observations of meetings, in which the views of parents were consistently sought and their comments heeded. Although the agenda and management of the meetings were controlled by Freagarrach staff, parents were positively encouraged and enabled to participate, and, while they were perhaps not as vocal as the professionals in attendance, they generally appeared comfortable and not inhibited from contributing. This formal exchange of information and involvement in planning meetings was supplemented in less formal contacts with families throughout the programme; families’ experiences of these informal contacts must have made it easier for them to feel at ease and to contribute in the more formal settings.

2.36 It was apparent from the project’s records of contacts that workers used time spent collecting young people and taking them home to maintain informal contact with their families, and interviews confirmed that this was deliberate practice. These visits were generally unstructured and unplanned, and took the form of a “chat”, simply to inform parents about progress and to give them a chance to talk about the family’s current circumstances and concerns. The process of engagement with families took a similar form to that described with young people, and, as with their children, staff tried to stress the things parents were doing...
well, not just their failures and inadequacies. On occasions staff visited families on a more formal, planned basis to discuss a specific issue, the visits being instigated by the project or prompted by a request from the family. Project workers were very responsive to family requests for support, since, as one worker put it, “parents are needy too”. The focus for most of the family contact was on improving relationships, developing more positive communication patterns, sharing the different perspectives and views of family members, formulating and agreeing boundaries, encouraging consistency in parenting, and helping parents to recognise positives in their children - as well as offering general support. In a few cases more intensive and planned family work was undertaken over a number of sessions, often involving co-working with the social worker for the family.

2.37 The content of work with families was dictated by the needs that arose from a consideration of each individual case. In one instance work was undertaken with the families of two young people who were offending together; in another the project worker was the catalyst for encouraging a parent to start a college course. At one level the family contact was made with a view to making or sustaining changes likely to support or contribute to the young person’s commitment to desist from offending, but this did not preclude a response to the more general and personal needs of the family or a member of it. The approach was flexible and sensitive to the particular characteristics of each family, and the work was done wherever the family felt most comfortable. Inevitably the receptiveness of families to outside help varied, and much family contact was concerned with building sufficient trust for parents to accept the project and its objectives. The general commitment to involving families in the work was supported by the parents’ meetings organised by project staff. These meetings, held – at least in principle - every two months, were designed to bring together all parents or carers of the young people currently attending the project. Project staff provided transport if required. The purpose of the meetings was not to discuss individual cases but to give everyone a chance to discuss, in a general way, the problems facing parents of young people involved in offending, and their feelings about the project. While not all parents chose, or were able, to attend all meetings, the overall level of attendance was generally high. The effort the Freagarrach staff put into engaging and involving parents, both formally and informally, was unusual for a project working with juvenile offenders. Its value is likely to have been in neutralising some of the feelings of isolation and self-blame to which parents of persistent offenders are liable, and it is also worth noting that there is empirical evidence that support for parents is associated with reduced rates of offending (e.g. Farrington, 1996).

CONSTRUCTIVE USE OF LEISURE

2.38 During their time at Freagarrach young people were given the opportunity to participate in a variety of activities, either at one of the project’s two sites or elsewhere. As with other work, this could be on an individual or group basis. Activities included cooking, arts and crafts, music, swimming, go-karting, football, golf, cycling, fishing, pool, gymnastics, skiing, juggling, climbing, hill-walking and riding. Whilst there was always a fun element to these activities, the general purpose was to introduce the young people to new activities that they might wish to pursue after leaving the project. Staff encouraged and supported a number of young people in pursuing newfound talents and interests away from the project. One young person was referred to an art group in the community; another was introduced to a karate club; others attended “taster” courses (for example in map reading, at a motorcycle project, and in football coaching). The project staff made every effort to find something that each young person might enjoy, to accommodate this wherever possible, and to develop this interest outside the project.
2.39 Participation in activities was also used as a means of giving young people a sense of achievement, and of course was an important vehicle for staff to develop positive relationships with young people. Certain activities, apart from constituting a possible introduction to a new leisure pursuit, were used as a vehicle for the achievement of other, more specific aims. For instance, one young man was taken on a 10-mile hike by his project worker, which allowed for an intense but informal discussion about his offending, his family and his future ambitions. Three young people were supported, over a period of time, in planning and organising a three-day outdoor “residential”: the purpose here was to develop in the young people a sense of responsibility for their own actions and towards the group in which they were working. A similar exercise was set up for four young men who were about to leave Freagarrach: this “leavers’ group” was to plan and organise a residential trip to the Lake District. The aims, as expressed by one of the workers, were to “consolidate the development of social skills outside the home environment and to develop a sense of commitment to organising and completing tasks”, and to help the young men “move on from Freagarrach”.

2.40 The project staff were fully aware that resources for young people in the community were limited, and that, once a young person had left the project, he or she was likely to experience a dramatic reduction in the amount of adult support and encouragement available. The staff continually tried to identify potentially useful resources that might be on offer from agencies such as Community Education, but it often seemed to them that the only available resource was the project team itself. While the staff were strongly committed – in principle and practice - to supporting young people once they had left, they did not have the resources to undertake post-programme support for all the young people who might have welcomed and benefited from it. Freagarrach was always conceived as only one part of a larger strategy, and was not expected to compensate for a general lack of provision for disadvantaged youth in the community. There are indications from research on projects for offenders that work which is successful in the short term may need to be reinforced after the intensive part of the programme if promising early results are to be sustained (Raynor and Vanstone, 1996); the lack of guaranteed support for young people after they had left Freagarrach therefore represents not only a failure fully to implement the inter-agency strategy but a factor which could tend to reduce the prospects of successfully diverting young people from criminal careers.

VICTIM AWARENESS AND REPARATION

2.41 A consistent aim of the project was to raise young people’s awareness of the impact of crime on victims and, where possible, to provide them with the opportunity to make amends. A key aspect of the individual offending work explored the effects crimes have on victims, thus encouraging the young people to think about the consequences of their offending from the victim’s perspective. In addition, a three-day groupwork programme was set up which focused on discussing the perceptions and feelings of victims of crime, and encouraged the young people to consider situations where either they or their family had been victims. Victim awareness was thus very much an integral part of the programme. Staff held discussions at various stages with representatives of Victim Support, with the aim of involving victims or their representatives in work with the young people; the outcome is discussed in the section of this chapter dealing with developments in Freagarrach’s practice. Before this, there were instances in which the project staff suggested that young people apologise to their victims, directly or in writing, and helped them to do so, and in a few cases young people directly
compensated a victim by paying for property damaged or stolen, or by returning stolen items. Young people also became involved in direct reparation by doing unpaid work for the victim, and some indirect reparation was undertaken through involvement in unpaid voluntary work; and a band formed by young people at Freagarrach in the second year donated the proceeds of its concert to Victim Support. Nevertheless, there is a sense in which reparation remained an aspiration rather than a reality at Freagarrach. This can largely be attributed to the failure of the SACRO scheme envisaged in the original strategy to materialise, but it is not certain that the Freagarrach programme would have been improved had reparation or mediation become a routine element of its practice: direct reparation is often difficult to negotiate with victims, and indirect reparation, if undertaken as a form of punishment, is not always meaningful to the offender. A more individualised approach to reparation, where the restitutive actions are negotiated and are likely to be meaningful for the offender and the victim, is preferable to a blanket approach in which reparation may be experienced as punishment or humiliation, and has little effect on offenders’ levels of victim awareness and empathy (Blagg, 1985; Smith and Blagg, 1989).

DEVELOPMENTS IN PRACTICE OVER TIME

2.42 Thus far the report has concentrated on aspects of practice at Freagarrach that were established early on and remained relatively stable throughout the period of the evaluation. There were, however, important changes in the project’s work over time, and these are the subjects of this section of the report. The changes reflected the self-critical, reflexive attitudes of the staff team and their openness to new ideas, as well as being responses to the changes in the project’s environment that are the subject of the following section. Throughout the period of the evaluation the project’s work was characterised by continuity in terms of basic principles and styles of work, but also by a willingness to change and adapt when necessary. The basic stability and coherence of the project’s approach were demonstrated when the original project leader left in September 1998; her departure was followed a few months later by that of the leader of the team at Alloa. There is no doubt that these changes had a short term impact on staff morale, but there was enough continuity, both of personnel and of skills and understanding, to ensure that the project’s essential features remained intact. Such changes are inevitable in the life of any organisation, and in general Freagarrach enjoyed the benefits of stable staffing and a common philosophy.

2.43 Perhaps the most important of the developments in practice related to the issue of helping young people to leave the project in circumstances which provided some promise of continued support. Throughout the 5 years covered by this report, but particularly in the earlier period, many young people found it difficult to leave the “community of care” that Freagarrach had become for them; equally, the staff were anxious about withdrawing help from young people for whom no obvious alternative sources of support existed. Efforts to enable young people to leave the project were motivated not by any external pressure to meet the original target of working with 40 young people in each year but by internal changes: a refinement of the selection process and efforts to build a planned leaving date into the individual programmes devised for each young person. The staff came to believe that in the project’s early months some of the young people referred and accepted were too young to benefit fully from what the project had to offer: the younger the offender, the more likely he or she was to have a multitude of emotional, behavioural and family-related problems in addition to the specific problem of offending; and fewer of the younger age group (under the age of 14) had the cognitive ability needed to grasp the point of work on offending, or to acquire any
insight into their behaviour and experiences. Some of the longest stayers at Freagarrach were among the youngest when they started the programme; the length of stay was associated not so much with continued offending as with a range of other problems with which Freagarrach was not really equipped to deal. Some of these young people might, later in the project’s life, have received the kind of informal support described in Chapter One, allowing the staff to focus the offending-related core of their work on the older age group. With the older group, planning for their departure from Freagarrach concentrated on help in establishing a basis for independent life as young adults, and was therefore concerned with employment and training rather than with a return to school. A regular “leavers’ group” was established in the project’s third year to help young people identify and understand the problems they would have to face after leaving Freagarrach, and a sharper focus on planning for the move on after the programme became evident in the project’s case notes and records. It remained the case, however, that many young people found it difficult to leave a setting in which, perhaps for the first time, adults had treated them with care and respect; and in a few cases continued support for young people well after they had formally left the project occupied much worker time and energy.

The Apex project

2.44 A new resource which briefly promised to provide substantial help in enabling young people to move on to something constructive after leaving Freagarrach appeared in October 1997. Although this new project was established without much consultation, it was welcomed by the Freagarrach staff as a potentially valuable resource. The project – managed by Apex Scotland and known as the Forth Valley Young People’s Employment Resource (FVYPER) - was not intended exclusively for young people leaving Freagarrach, but promised a broader service for young people in their final year at school and disenchanted with formal education: this focus raised some concerns in the Young Offenders Strategy Group that it might encourage Education Departments to avoid taking responsibility for this group. The Freagarrach staff (along with others) felt that the FVYPER project had been set up rather hastily, and were unhappy about some aspects of its practice (for instance, the identities of individual young people who attended it were not disguised in its first published report); nevertheless, they saw its value as a means of helping young people move on towards greater independence, and of improving their chances in the labour market.

2.45 From October 1997 until the project closed in May 1998, when expected funding from the European Union failed to materialise, 12 young people who had attended Freagarrach or (in 2 cases) were currently attending were referred to FVYPER. Of these, 7 actually started at the project: one completed the programme, one attended for about half of it, one attended for only 4 days, 2 left because they moved from the area, and 2 were remanded in custody for further offences (one of these had already stopped attending on financial grounds). Of the 5 who did not attend, 2 would have done so had the project not closed, 2 were offered places but did not take them up (one obtained a college place, and one was awarded invalidity benefit and decided to stay at home), and one was rejected by the project because of his negative attitude. The young man who completed the programme was very positive about it, saying that he would have gone even without being paid the £40 per week the project provided. He valued the practical skills that were taught, on interview technique, completing application forms, using the telephone, and the like, and thought it a pity that the project had closed. The young man who left after 4 days disliked the exercises and group games that were offered during the first week, and contrasted his experience of FVYPER with his experience of
Freagarrach: “I really wanted to stay at Freagarrach - why couldn't they help me get a job instead of having to go somewhere new?” The young woman who stayed for about half the programme had originally attended with a friend who had not been to Freagarrach; she said that she left when her friend got a job and she was the only girl left on the FVYPER programme. She too was critical of some of the material and teaching methods, seeing them as boring and repetitive. When contacted in August 1998 this young woman was in paid employment. The 2 young men who were remanded in custody while attending FVYPER wrote positively about it in response to a simple questionnaire sent to them in custody. Both the young man who went to college, and the 2 who would have attended the project had it not closed down, spoke positively about their initial contact with it and saw it as a useful adjunct to Freagarrach’s work: “It’s not right that it’s closed down, there should be something after here [Freagarrach]...Maybe Freagarrach could do what they were doing”.

2.46 From these responses, it is clear that the young people generally approved of the idea of FVYPER, although they were critical of aspects of its practice. Much the same can be said of the Freagarrach staff. They felt that the criteria for acceptance at FVYPER were unclear, and that there was insufficient liaison from the project about the progress of the young people. They thought that the programme had been “cobbled together” rather than carefully planned, and that it was delivered without much flexibility or imagination by staff with little experience of working with such young offenders. On the other hand, they believed that the FVYPER staff had learned from early mistakes and that the quality of work had improved by the time the project closed. They agreed that in principle a programme like that offered by FVYPER was exactly what was needed to enable young people to move on from Freagarrach in a planned and constructive way.

2.47 At various points in Freagarrach’s life the staff considered the possibility of having an “outreach” worker linked to the project who could work with young people on the leavers’ programme to increase their job skills, liaise with prospective employers, and support young people after their entry into work. The advantages of such an appointment would have been in consistency and continuity, and in enabling young people to develop new skills without having suddenly to make a new set of relationships with adults. The quotations from the young people above suggest that they too would have welcomed such an appointment. In fact, from February 1999 something similar existed at Freagarrach, since Apex obtained funding for one worker from Forth Valley Enterprise; the person appointed, a member of the original FVYPER team, was based in Freagarrach’s own buildings and worked with young people whose leaving dates had been set. The work was on an individual basis, and closely based on issues specific to training and employability: there was no attempt to connect it with work done previously at Freagarrach. About 15 young people from Freagarrach had had some contact with the Apex worker by the end of March 2000, providing evidence of a demand for the service. Both the Freagarrach staff and the Apex worker recognised, however, that the young people found it difficult to sustain motivation and hope: “the problem is keeping them in training, not getting them started”. For young people long excluded from the routines of education, even a basic 13-week training course could seem “an eternity”, and the intensity and complexity of “underlying problems in the background” meant that there was a risk of “setting them up to fail in training”.

2.48 The FVYPER programme represented, on paper, exactly the kind of resource that the Freagarrach staff had identified as lacking for the older group of leavers. In practice, however, the service that it delivered (for a few months only) was limited: both the Freagarrach staff and some of the key personnel interviewed towards the end of the evaluation
were critical of the lack of consultation before it was established. The result was that “nobody was very sure what FVYPER did”; those who did have a sense of the content of its work felt that the staff were ill prepared to work effectively with young people from Freagarrach, since they did not appreciate the scale of their problems and needs, and failed to adjust the programme to take account of these. The sense from the interviews was that FVYPER represented a missed opportunity: it promised to address a major issue – the employability of young people leaving Freagarrach – but never did so with sufficient sensitivity or skill. Nevertheless, the issue was seen as so important that even the scaled-down service provided after February 1999 was regarded as better than nothing.

**Joint working: Victim Support, police and courts**

2.49 As noted in Chapter 1, the Freagarrach staff strongly supported the principle of joint working with staff from other agencies, but felt that the amount of such work actually achieved had been limited, because of strains on the other agencies’ resources. In the case of Victim Support, however, joint working was constrained less by resource considerations than by concerns on Victim Support’s part that its focus on victims’ interests should not be compromised by the provision of a service to offenders. In the project’s third year, staff began to explore the possibility of developing community service-type work, in conjunction with a community care social work team. They were aware, however, of the need to ensure that this work was experienced by the young people as productive and appropriate, rather than punitive and stigmatising, and worked alongside the young people on gardening, painting and decorating projects in the local community. While the outcomes of this work were seen as positive, both for the young people and for Freagarrach’s image in the locality, staff remained keen to develop forms of work that might contribute more directly to enhanced victim awareness and empathy.

2.50 After protracted negotiations on this “delicate subject”, a representative of Victim Support agreed to contribute to the work of Freagarrach with materials used for the training of Victim Support volunteers. These included a board game and a video, both designed to promote empathy with victims and reduce the effectiveness of such “techniques of neutralisation” (Sykes and Matza, 1957) as denial of injury and denial of the victim. Project staff saw this approach as an effective and non-threatening means of instilling a sense of responsibility and remorse, and eventually, it was hoped, of developing a conscience which would make further predatory offending more difficult. Victim Support also contributed to role-plays and to the simulated trial described below. The Victim Support representative interviewed towards the end of the evaluation thought that role play would work better with younger than with older, more “cocky” offenders; she had been happy with the extent of Victim Support’s involvement in Freagarrach’s work, since it had not diverted resources from victims. Victim Support later gave qualified approval to direct victim-offender mediation, provided that this was done selectively, in cases where the victim genuinely wished to meet the offender. The Freagarrach staff themselves were clear that the project did not have the resources to undertake victim-offender mediation on a regular or formal basis, but they did undertake direct mediation and reparation in a few cases, as when a staff member accompanied a young person to a shop, where he paid for stolen goods. Reparation, however, usually took
the generalised form of work in the local community on projects of environmental improvement, as described above.

2.51 The breaking down of barriers between the project and other agencies was seen by Freagarrach staff as a major achievement of its work in 1997-98: they saw this as an expression at the level of practice of the commitment to partnership represented by the Strategy Group, and found that the young people responded seriously and attentively to contributions by visitors to the project. The police in Bo’ness and Alloa worked with project staff on a groupwork programme focusing on joy-riding, which included a visit to the police station to see a video and discuss its implications with a police officer. The workers involved evaluated the programme in December 1998 and concluded that it had been useful in helping the young people to think more clearly about the consequences of car theft and the ways in which supposed friends in a peer group could exert an unhelpful influence on them.

2.52 Another development in 1997 was the organisation of a simulated trial in Falkirk Sheriff Court. This was an effort to bring home to the 4 young people who participated the realities of the gulf between the Children’s Hearing System and the adult court system; it also reflected the tendency for the average age of young people at Freagarrach to increase, which gave knowledge of the adult system added relevance. The exercise demanded careful organisation and required the co-operation of the Sheriff, police officers, a specialist social worker, defence and prosecution lawyers, and members of the local Victim Support scheme, who played the part of victims and witnesses. It was therefore an impressive example of inter-agency co-operation, but not one that could be expected to be often repeated. According to the young people involved, the experience was a salutary one.

CHANGES IN FREAGARRACH’S ENVIRONMENT

2.53 Just as there were, inevitably, changes over time in Freagarrach’s practice, so too there were changes in the environment in which it worked. The most obvious, and the most predictable, was the abolition of Central Region as an administrative unit in January 1996; but another event which had a serious impact, at least over the short term, was the tragedy of the Dunblane shooting in March 1996, the aftermath of which inevitably brought different priorities for the police and social workers. Even in the first interviews with the people who had played key roles in drawing up the original young offenders strategy, it was obvious that many were uncertain that a global strategy could survive the desegregation of the region into 3 local authorities, since this would entail a more local focus of interest, the establishment of new structures and procedures, and substantial staff movement. In the interviews towards the end of the evaluation, this reorganisation was still viewed as the moment when the commitment to a common strategy came under the greatest pressure.

2.54 Interviews at the mid-point of the evaluation allowed for an assessment of the extent to which the original strategy, and the inter-agency and inter-authority commitment to it, had survived reorganisation. At about the same time the strategy was formally reviewed by the project leader (Bayes, 1997) at the request of the Young Offenders Strategy Group, which had been restructured earlier in the year in an effort to ensure full representation at chief officer level. Bayes (1997) identified staff changes following reorganisation and lack of resources as the key problems in achieving the agreed strategic aims, a view largely supported by the interviews. The impact of staffing changes and internal reorganisation was not felt equally across the 3 authorities, but was especially marked in Stirling’s social work service: an
immediate effect of this was a decrease in the number of referrals to Freagarrach from Stirling, as staff operated in “emergency mode”, and over the 5 years of the evaluation Stirling made proportionally less use of Freagarrach than Clackmannanshire or Falkirk. Some of the staff newly appointed at senior level were initially sceptical of the strategic approach, questioning what added value it produced; but over time they became convinced, and in some cases proved among the strongest supporters of Freagarrach and the strategy as a whole. Some aspects of the strategy that failed to materialise because of lack of resources were mentioned in Chapter 1; another, specifically associated with reorganisation, was a shortage of foster care places for young offenders and of accommodation for young people generally.

4.15 Some of the most obvious changes after reorganisation were in the education service. Bayes (1997, p. 10) noted that the original strategy document referred to a “Reporters’ Resource Team”, which was not precisely defined but was usually taken to refer to the Reporters themselves, with their administrative support and the 2 Education Liaison Officers (ELOs), one seconded to the Falkirk Reporter’s office, the other to Clackmannanshire and Stirling. When responsibility for funding the ELO posts passed in March 1996 from the Regional Education Department to the new unitary authorities, the latter post ceased to exist: the view of some new staff in the education service was that it had been a product of the over-centralised, “paternalistic” approach of the old region, and that school-related problems were best dealt with by schools themselves. Regret at the loss of this post continued to be expressed, however, especially by Reporters; and the Falkirk post, which survived throughout, was regarded as highly successful, largely because of the personal qualities of the post-holder, in reducing the demand for residential care, and as a valuable resource for the Reporter. The anti-exclusion policy promoted by the old region was similarly seen as an over-centralised (and dubiously effective) response to problems that properly belonged with schools; the result was a more uneven pattern of provision across the 3 authorities, in which Stirling claimed the greatest success in enabling schools to reduce the number of long-term exclusions. Central government policy later came strongly to support a reduction in the number of school exclusions, and all 3 authorities claimed success in this; but the impact of any change was not visible in the experiences of young people referred to Freagarrach, and it is a fact that a young person may in effect be receiving minimal (or no) education without being formally excluded from school. Freagarrach retained the use of 7 places in a special educational unit in Falkirk, and some of its young people also benefited from the flexible and responsive service provided by the Day Unit in Alloa; but the development of “flexible” educational packages increased the need for clear communication between Freagarrach and schools or colleges about where a young person was supposed to be at any given time of the day or week.

2.56 The devolution of responsibility for discipline to individual schools also revealed some strains in inter-agency support for the diversion of minor offenders from the formal system. Incidents were recounted in which the police had returned to their school boys who had been involved in a fracas with boys from a neighbouring school, the police taking the view that this was a problem which the schools should resolve themselves, the head teachers believing that the problem was serious enough to demand direct police intervention. Another head teacher wrote to his education authority to complain of persistent intimidating and violent behaviour around the school by 2 young people who were attending Freagarrach at the time. There is good research evidence that supports the stance of the police and Reporters on diversion: schools which try to manage their own conflicts are likely to be more effective in controlling delinquency than those which rely on outside agencies for conflict resolution (Rutter et al., 1979; Mortimore et al., 1988). Nevertheless, these examples illustrate the tensions that were
inherent in the strategy between the central formulation of principles and their implementation in practice at the front line. The fact that there were so few instances of this kind is a tribute to the way in which, on the whole, commitment to the strategy was maintained at the level of practice as well as that of policy.

2.57 The Young Offenders Strategy Group, then chaired by the Director of Social Work for Falkirk, and consisting of senior managers from the Education and Social Work Departments of Clackmannanshire, Falkirk and Stirling, the three Reporters, senior staff from Central Scotland Police, and senior managers from Barnardo’s and Apex Scotland, produced a revised Young Offenders Strategy in June 1998 (Central Scotland Police et al., 1998), signed by the Chief Executives of the three local authorities, the Chief Constable, the Regional Reporter, and the Director of Barnardo’s Scotland. The document was formally approved by the three local authorities in the autumn of 1998. The principles of partnership between the police, local authorities and the voluntary sector which underpinned the original strategy of 1994 were strongly reaffirmed, and the document listed a number of achievements as well as aspects of the original strategy where progress was made but not sustained. The achievements included the continued secondment to the Reporter’s office of the Education Liaison Officer from Falkirk, the development of school-based policies against exclusion and bullying, a reduced reliance on secure accommodation for young people who offend, a warning system for first-time offenders which had reduced referrals to the Reporter’s Service, and two achievements directly related to Freagarrach: its contribution to a “significant” reduction in persistent offending by young people, and its use of the TRACE database. The two areas where early progress was not sustained were the provision of access to TRACE to the Reporter’s Service, and the development of a database on resources for young people (which it was originally intended should be accessible to all agencies).

2.58 The revised strategy identified areas for future work and the need to incorporate them into an action plan. These included improving data collection and information exchange across agency boundaries, the extension of the strategy to 16-18 year-olds, identifying links between substance misuse and offending, addressing the lack of suitable accommodation for young people, examining practice in residential establishments when “incidents” occurred, reducing delays in the criminal justice process, developing early intervention services, raising awareness of work with young offenders, learning from the evaluation of other projects, and addressing the long-term funding of Freagarrach “subject to evaluation and evidence of continuing need”. While, compared with the original strategy, the revised version was less centred on the need for a project like Freagarrach, other elements of it repeated themes consistently identified as areas for improvement over the previous 5 years, notably the quality and availability of information, the lack of accommodation, and the need to develop services for young offenders old enough to be dealt with by the adult system. For the Young Offenders Strategy Group, it was important that the new strategy should be a genuine product of inter-agency co-operation, to reflect the changed composition of the partnership, and to secure a sense of ownership and commitment.

2.59 Interviews at the time with Freagarrach staff and the Chair of the Strategy Group suggested that the most important new elements of the strategy were its attempts to integrate services for substance misuse problems into other work with young offenders, and to develop services for 16-18 year-olds; and these remained central themes for the development of practice in the interviews conducted towards the end of the evaluation. A successful bid for funding for the latter was made to The Scottish Office, which also provided funds for a
Barnardo’s project (Matrix) aimed at 8-13 year-olds, and conceived strategically as linked to but separate from Freagarrach. The existence of a stable inter-agency partnership was important in the success of this bid, but in practice, inevitably, there were variations in agencies’ capacity to deliver what they were committed to under the strategy. The police (with Barnardo’s) were seen as the most reliable and consistent partners, particularly in their willingness to share information. Practice in education and social work was more variable, with some evidence, for example, that the policies adopted by all three Education Departments on minimising exclusions were difficult to implement consistently, and that commitment to young offenders was higher in specialist criminal justice teams in Social Work Departments than in children and families services.

2.60 There was an apparent consensus across all members of the strategic partnership that it was very difficult to imagine an effective strategy that did not have a place in it for Freagarrach. In the summer of 1998 a central preoccupation for Barnardo’s and the Strategy Group was the question of continued funding for the project. Negotiations with officials in the Scottish Office led to the conclusion that funds after March 2000 would essentially have to be found from the three local authorities, a frustrating but not wholly unexpected outcome. The main doubt about the continued commitment of the local authorities at that stage related to Stirling, whose contribution was proportionally smaller than that of Clackmannanshire and Falkirk. There seemed little doubt at this point, however, that there would be considerable pressure from the other agencies on any partner whose commitment to Freagarrach seemed to be wavering, since the project had come to be accepted as an integral and valued part of the resources available locally for young offenders: Freagarrach was seen not as an exotic import but as an inherent part of a locally developed strategy that commanded support from all agencies. It was a surprise to the other partners, then, when Clackmannanshire was the authority that withdrew funding from Freagarrach early in 2000. The reasons for this decision, which aroused anger and disappointment as well as surprise, and entailed the closure of Freagarrach’s Alloa base from July 2000, were complex and will not be discussed in detail here. They included the sudden departure of a key “champion” of Freagarrach from the Social Work Department (Rumgay and Cowan, 1998), anxiety about the size of the financial contribution expected from an authority as small as Clackmannanshire, and a politically inspired determination to take an independent line, based on what were seen as local rather than regional needs. The general lesson to be drawn from the experience – which neither Barnardo’s nor any of the other partner agencies foresaw or could have forestalled – is that even a partnership with a long history and apparently secure inter-agency support is vulnerable to sudden change, and requires constant care and maintenance.

CONCLUSIONS

2.61 Freagarrach derived practical benefits from its status as the most visible part – “the tip of the iceberg” - of a much wider strategy on young offenders. The most obvious of these was its access to the TRACE system; this allowed for a proactive approach to referrals on the project leader’s part, and helped to ensure that all young people who met the criteria for acceptance at the project were at least considered for it, while also – as described in the next chapter – helping to avoid dilution or net-widening. The referral process, and the fact that the project provided open, individualised programmes of work, meant that it was rare for young people to have to wait for long after the referral before starting at Freagarrach. The original target – that the project would work with 40 young people each year – was based on the assumption that the average length of stay would be 6 months; in fact, the average number of
young people who formally started at Freagarrach in each year was 24. This figure underestimates the number of young people who received some help from the project, since around 15 were helped in various ways without ever being formally accepted for the Freagarrach programme; but there is no doubt that young people who became engaged with the programme tended to stay for longer than had been envisaged. The main reasons for this were that many of the young people became highly dependent on Freagarrach and the “micro-community of care” it provided, and had a range of personal and relational difficulties with which they were unlikely to receive help elsewhere; the lack of adequate resources to support the process of moving on from Freagarrach was also an important factor.

2.62 That Freagarrach provided a caring and supportive environment for young people is strongly attested by the young people themselves, whose views are reported in the next chapter. It is, however, difficult to convey in words how the staff at Freagarrach managed to convey care and concern while also making clear to the young people that their offending was unacceptable. The style of work was suggestive of the practice of reintegrative shaming described by Braithwaite (1989) and regarded by Sampson and Laub (1993) as the key protective factor in parenting that enables young people who are objectively “at risk” to avoid entering into criminal careers. The central message of the theory of reintegrative shaming is that to do nothing about criminal acts is likely to make things worse, but that to respond in a way that outcasts and stigmatises the perpetrator of these acts is likely to make things worse still. A response that conveys condemnation of the act while also communicating respect for and acceptance of the perpetrator stands a chance of making things better. The theory is in a sense a reworking of the traditional idea that in dealing with children and adolescents it is important to balance care and control; the project staff conceived this as essential to their practice from the beginning, and maintained a way of working throughout that allowed them to confront and challenge offending among the young people at the project within an environment that provided security, safety, comfort, respect and care. For many of the young people, Freagarrach was the only setting in which they had ever experienced such treatment from adults; it is no wonder that they should have found it difficult to leave.

2.63 The core elements of Freagarrach’s work remained constant throughout the period of the evaluation, but the staff were open to change and receptive to new influences: changes were made, but without losing a sense of continuity and commitment to basic principles. As well as making changes as a result of reflection on and evaluation of their own work, the staff had to respond to changes in the project’s environment, and to the kind of events that will inevitably occur over a 5 year period, such as movement of staff. Nevertheless, the sheer pressure of daily work meant that there was less scope for developments in practice, such as joint working with staff from other agencies, than the Freagarrach staff would ideally have wished. External changes were, in general, relatively predictable and therefore manageable, because inter-agency commitment to a common strategy survived largely intact over the period, and Freagarrach was itself an important influence on the strategy’s evolution.

2.64 A consistent theme in the accounts Freagarrach staff gave of their work was that it was based on the findings of research on effective practice. In their methods of work, in their adherence to a well defined target group, and in the intensity and duration of their contact with the young people who spent substantial periods at Freagarrach, the staff’s practice was certainly in line with the main conclusions of research on “what works” in programmes with offenders. But it was also essential to the project’s style of work that programmes for the young people should be individualised rather than follow a single template: hence, among
other things, the variations in the lengths of time young people spent at the project. It is also important to stress that the ways in which programmes are delivered may matter, in terms of outcomes, as much as their content: a programme that contains all the prescribed elements for effectiveness is unlikely actually to work if it is delivered in a harsh, punitive and condemnatory manner. In contrast, the Freagarrach programmes were typically delivered in a way that conveyed the qualities associated with success in helping people to change – acceptance, accurate empathy, and non-possessive warmth. These terms, taken from Truax and Carkhuff (1967), describe as well as any the distinctive style of work at Freagarrach.
CHAPTER THREE: THE YOUNG PEOPLE AT FREAGARRACH

3.1 This chapter provides basic demographic information on all the young people who started attending Freagarrach during the period of the evaluation. It also discusses the volume and nature of their offending before they started at the project, and gives information on other aspects of their lives, such as their experience of education, their family backgrounds, and known problems such as misuse of drugs and alcohol. The picture that emerges is similar to that given by other studies of populations of known persistent offenders (Hagell and Newburn, 1994; Stewart and Stewart, 1993): the young people who came to Freagarrach (apart from being predominantly young men) typically had a range of problems apart from (though no doubt related to) their offending. These include experiences of adverse family environments, rejection of (and by) the education system, and heavy use of alcohol and other drugs.

AGE AND GENDER

3.2 The age and gender of the young people at the time of their arrival at Freagarrach are shown in Table 3.1.

Table 3.1: Young people at Freagarrach: age and gender

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>12</th>
<th>13</th>
<th>14</th>
<th>15</th>
<th>16</th>
<th>17</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The great majority (89%) of these persistent offenders were male, as is to be expected: while young women routinely commit minor offences, serious and persistent offending is an almost exclusively male preserve, among juveniles as among adults (Graham and Bowling, 1995). Over the years the average age of young people starting at Freagarrach tended to increase: from an average of just over 14½ in the first 12 months it rose steadily to 15 and 4 months in the third year, and then to 16 in the fourth year; while the fifth year saw a drop to 15½, the overall trend was clear. Since Freagarrach at all stages accepted most of the truly persistent juvenile offenders in central Scotland, the change in the average age presents something of a puzzle: there is no logical reason to suppose that the most persistent offenders were older in 1999 than they were in 1995. In fact, TRACE data suggest that the number of known 15 year-old offenders did exceed the number of 14 year-olds in 1997 and 1998, though not in 1999; the project’s intake therefore mirrored the age distribution of known persistent juvenile offenders quite closely. It was also suggested, however, that in the first year, when it was important to establish the project’s credibility and demonstrate its usefulness, the staff felt some pressure to accept younger offenders who, later on, might have been diverted into other resources, or offered the kind of informal work described in Chapter 2.

OFFENDING CAREERS

3.3 Table 3.2 uses Scottish Criminal Records data to show the ages at which the young people were first charged with a criminal offence, counting only the 95 young people for whom at least 6 months’ follow-up data are available from the time they began attending Freagarrach.
Table 3.2: Age at first charge

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age when first charged</th>
<th>Number of young people</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>95</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Two-thirds of the young people had been charged by the age of 12 – not a surprising finding given the persistent nature of this group’s offending, since an early start to an offending career is a good predictor of persistence.

3.4 Table 3.3 groups the same 95 young people by the number of charges or convictions recorded against them in the 12 months before they began attending Freagarrach. The table is again drawn not from the TRACE system but from Scottish Criminal Records; for young people who had reached the age of 16 when they started at the project this was the only source available, so the table gives an underestimate of the number of offences which led to a charge in the relevant period.

Table 3.3: Number of charges or convictions in 12-month period before starting at Freagarrach

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of charges or convictions</th>
<th>Number of young people</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1-5</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-10</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11-20</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21-30</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31 +</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>95</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When the TRACE data were examined no significant change over time was found in the average number of charges recorded against the young people who attended the project. An analysis at the mid-point of the evaluation, when TRACE data were available on almost all the young people, showed an average of 17.7 charges in the 12 months before the young people started at Freagarrach. Table 3.4 shows the percentage of the total number of charges which fell into different offence categories, and the percentage of young people who had committed each type of offence. An analysis was also undertaken of the number of charges made against the young people in respect of each type of offence. Typically, young people who had been charged with any offence of dishonesty had been charged with about 9 such offences; for
miscellaneous offences and fire-raising and vandalism there were on average about 4 charges, for violence there were on average 3, and for “other” offences 2. These figures give an indication both of the versatility of the young people’s offending and of the types of crime and victimisation that would be prevented if it were the case that the project had a positive impact on young people’s offending.

Table 3.4: Types of offence and extent of young people’s involvement (12 month-period before starting at Freagarrach)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Offence type</th>
<th>Percentage of total charges (N=991)</th>
<th>Percentage of young people charged with this type of offence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Non-sexual crimes of violence</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crimes of indecency</td>
<td>&lt;1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crimes of dishonesty</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fire raising/vandalism</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other crimes</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miscellaneous offences</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.5 One conclusion to be drawn from this table is that the young people who attended Freagarrach were quite versatile offenders. Almost all had been charged with offences of dishonesty; as with the other offence categories, this covers a wide spectrum of offences, from the relatively minor, such as shoplifting low value goods, to housebreaking. Similarly, the “violence” category covers everything from relatively minor assaults to (in one case) attempted murder, but most charges were at the less serious end of the continuum. The same is true of the charges of fire raising and vandalism. “Miscellaneous” charges were mostly related to public order incidents, sometimes involving assaults, and often associated with alcohol or drug use; charges in the “other” category usually involved drugs or the possession of offensive weapons. It is worth noting that although most of the charges of violence were for relatively minor offences, the level of involvement in violent offending was high among the Freagarrach group: both the percentage of young people charged with violent offences, and the percentage of the total number of charges which were for violence, are much higher than was found in the case of an ostensibly similar group of young people in Fife (Lobley and Smith, 1999).

EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCES

3.6 Delinquency is strongly associated with not liking school, poor school performance, weak attachments to school and teachers, and low educational aspirations; but the association that is sometimes claimed to exist between intelligence and delinquency virtually disappears when the stigmatising effects of negative labelling at school are controlled for (Braithwaite, 1989). Predictably, then, many of the young people who attended Freagarrach had experiences of the school system that are associated with an increased risk of delinquency. Fifty-five (52%) of the 106 young people were recorded as being excluded from school at the time of starting at Freagarrach, and others had been excluded in the past; many of those currently excluded had been excluded more than once. Eighty-one (76%) were known to have a history of truancy from school, and 72 (68%) were adjudged to have a poor school record.
and to have had educational difficulties. Only 14 young people (18%) out of the 80 who should have been attending school at the time they came to Freagarrach were recorded as being in mainstream education (without truancy or exclusion) at the time. Twenty-three were receiving some form of special educational provision, through a day unit or home tutoring, and a further 6 were being educated in a residential setting. The school-related problems of many of these young people were long-standing, dating back to their experiences of primary school.

FAMILY EXPERIENCES

3.7 Many of the young people at Freagarrach had had to live in unhappy and disrupted family circumstances - again, an almost invariable finding in studies of populations of persistent offenders. Even the Freagarrach staff, however, were surprised by the frequency of experiences of serious loss or rejection in these young people’s lives; they estimated that almost 90% had had at least one experience of this kind, and, although there is room for argument over definitions, this figure seems broadly accurate. Ten of the young people had experienced the death of a parent or other close relative; accidents and suicide were causes of death, as well as illness. Another 19 had had to live with a close relative’s severe or long-term illness, physical or mental. At least 28 young people had been rejected by one or both of their parents or immediate carers, or literally abandoned. Sixty-two had experienced the divorce or separation of their parents, and 30 had experienced some other kind of loss, such as loss of status in a step-family, continual changes of partner on the part of one of their parents, and continual changes of residence. Overall, the family background of these young people was reasonably stable and peaceful (at least on the surface) in at most 20% of cases; even in these cases, the young people were likely to be described as “out of control” by family members or social workers, at the time of their referral to Freagarrach.

3.8 Another feature that distinguishes populations of known persistent offenders from the general population is that a much higher proportion of offenders have had some experience of local authority care (Dodd and Hunter, 1992). Of the young people who came to Freagarrach, a quarter (26) were in some form of care when they arrived: 15 were in children’s homes, 5 were in foster care (part-time in one case), and 5 were in secure accommodation or a residential school. Another 8 were described as “homeless” or were in insecure and short-term accommodation (hostels or bed and breakfast establishments). Overall, at least a third (records were not complete in all cases) of these young people had some experience of care, and it is likely that the figure (similar to that found by Dodd and Hunter (1992) among young prisoners in England and Wales) would have been higher but for the existence of Freagarrach.

3.9 Over half of the families were known to social workers for reasons other than the young person’s offending, usually for child protection issues and family violence. Where parents had separated or divorced they had often gone on to form new relationships, their new partners often bringing children from their own previous relationships into the family home, with consequent potential for confusion and conflict. Other problems in parental behaviour were indicated in just under half of the young people’s histories: the most frequent problems were associated with violence, alcohol or drug abuse, and mental health difficulties. Around one-third of the young people were known to have delinquent siblings, but this is probably an under-estimate, since records were not always complete. The Freagarrach staff regarded such problems in family life as closely related to the young people’s involvement in offending, and sought to improve their circumstances through parents’ groups and direct work with families. As noted above, direct work with families was seen as especially important with the younger
end of the age range; these young people had no alternative, apart from institutional care, to continuing to live with their families. With the older age group with whom the project increasingly worked, the main task could be to help the young person come to terms with the reality of a chronically dysfunctional family experience and with the feelings of sorrow, regret and loss this entailed, and to move on to independent living. The lack of suitable resources, especially in safe and affordable accommodation, was an obstacle to the successful adaptation of these young people to life as young adults, and a major source of the work of the project with young people who had formally left.

PERSONAL DIFFICULTIES

3.10 The young people’s adverse experiences of the education system and the turmoil and unhappiness that often characterised their family relationships had effects on their values, attitudes, personalities and social skills - on their ability to cope with the demands of everyday life without resorting to crime. The most obvious manifestation of difficulties in coping was the frequency of problems related to drug and alcohol use. These were formally noted in social work records and the project’s referral documents in only about half the cases in which they were identified by project workers on the basis of their direct experience of the young people. Using figures from the project’s records suggests that two-thirds of the young people had some problems related to misuse of both drugs and alcohol, about 10% had problems related to alcohol alone, and about 17% had problems related to drugs alone. Only 7 young people (6% of the total) were judged to have no problems associated with substance misuse.

3.11 Such a high prevalence of drug- and alcohol-related problems is, once again, not surprising given the nature of the group who attended Freagarrach, but it inevitably created additional difficulties for the staff, both in terms of the immediate behaviour of the young people and of the prospects of diverting them from a criminal career. While the link between drug (and alcohol) use and criminal activity is complex (Hough, 1996), and both can be seen as elements of a way of life characterised by the pursuit of quick gratification and risk-taking, there is no doubt that for some people dependence on heroin in particular can require a level of involvement in acquisitive crime that is much higher than it would be in the absence of the need for an expensive drug. The evaluation produced some evidence that heroin use became more widespread in central Scotland during the years 1995-2000, although it was also argued that compared with some parts of Strathclyde the problem remained of manageable proportions. In relation to alcohol, while the link with crime is again complex, and it would be wrong to claim that alcohol consumption causes violent crime, there is evidence that young people who have been drinking heavily are more likely to commit, and be victims of, offences of violence, and that alcohol use can facilitate violent responses to perceived challenges and threats, especially in young men who lack self-esteem (South, 1997).

3.12 Less obvious and less well defined problems of coping were also common among the young people at Freagarrach. Many of the young people had difficulty in managing anger and aggression, a problem which could be associated with a wider lack of social and relationship skills. A few young people appeared, worryingly, to lack normal means of expressing emotion, including the emotion of remorse. In other cases, the Freagarrach staff believed that young people were being sexually exploited, an experience sometimes associated with sexual obsession or deviance on the young person’s part. At a less individual level, young people were often influenced by local networks of criminality and drug-dealing: some came from families in which such behaviour was apparently accepted, others made links with such
families, and others formed friendships or sexual relationships with young people who had attended Freagarrach. The staff were disposed to take as positive a view as possible of the young people with whom they worked, as described in Chapter 2; but they were at the same time clear about the reality of the problems many of the young people had in managing emotions and relationships, often as a result of their experience of deprivation and abuse.

3.13 There is no doubt that the young people with whom Freagarrach worked were, as well as being some of the most persistent juvenile offenders in central Scotland, among the most emotionally scarred and vulnerable in their age group. The style of work the staff adopted and maintained, which, as described in Chapter 2, combined the expression of care and concern with the message that criminal and anti-social behaviour was unacceptable, was probably the only means of engaging such young people, with their experiences of rejection by, and consequent suspicions of, the law-abiding adult world. Given that the young people had all the difficulties described above, there were perhaps surprisingly few problems of management and control at Freagarrach, a tribute to the skill and commitment of the staff. In considering the outcomes for these young people after they had left Freagarrach (the theme of Chapter 5), offending is obviously an important measure of the project’s impact, and this was recognised by Freagarrach staff and by staff in other agencies who knew the project well. They stressed, however, that the difficulties these young people had apart from their offending were also important, both in interpreting figures on reconvictions and subsequent charges and as a basis for measuring changes associated with problems in family life, substance misuse, educational failure, housing, and overall coping with society’s demands. Such changes are less directly quantifiable than offending measures, but could be equally important in assessing Freagarrach’s success or failure.
CHAPTER FOUR: PERCEPTIONS OF FREAGARRACH

4.1 This chapter draws on interviews with the young people who attended the project, their parents or other carers, and staff in other agencies who had some knowledge of Freagarrach and its work. Interviews with young people were held regularly throughout the evaluation, and interviews with senior staff in the other agencies – the police, the education service, the Reporters’ Administration, and social work – were held near the start of the evaluation, at its mid-point, and towards the end. Some of the staff interviewed had a close knowledge of the project through their membership of the Young Offenders Strategy Group, while others, such as headteachers, had a more general awareness of Freagarrach and its work. Necessarily, the choice of interview subjects was guided by those with local knowledge, including the Freagarrach staff themselves, so that the question may arise of whether there was a systematic bias in favour of the project among those interviewed. There was, however, no suggestion at any stage that the evaluation was deliberately steered in a direction guaranteed to produce positive results (the Freagarrach staff sometimes suggested that interviews be arranged with people who were likely to be critical), and in fact some interviewees proved to have criticisms of Freagarrach and the young offenders strategy as a whole. There was obviously no point in interviewing people who knew nothing about the project, and knowledge is in itself no guarantee of a favourable opinion: logically, greater knowledge of the project was as likely to dispel a good initial impression as to turn a sceptical view into a favourable one. The young people who were interviewed, and members of their families, were assured that what they said would not be reported to the project staff, so as to minimise any pressure they might feel to give a positive account of their experiences. In the nature of things, not all the young people were forthcoming in interviews about their views and experiences of Freagarrach, but even the least articulate (in the context of the interview) were generally able to convey what they felt.

THE VIEWS OF YOUNG PEOPLE AT FREAGARRACH

4.2 The opinions of Freagarrach the young people expressed in interviews were overwhelmingly positive, and this was far from being only because they believed (though many did) that the alternative would have been residential care or custody. Many of their comments related to the qualities they perceived in the staff, who were often contrasted favourably with social workers. A few young people discriminated among staff members, preferring some to others, or singling out individuals as especially helpful, but more often they referred to the staff group as a whole. They spoke warmly of “the way they talked to you and the way they treated you”, of how “understanding” they were, and of how they were “not scared to have a laugh and a joke”. Staff were described as “pals, identical to pals”, with whom it was possible to talk “about things I wouldn’t talk to anyone else about”:

“The people here let you talk to them. You can have a laugh. They have helped me so that I drink less now, control my temper more. They make you think about what you are doing, although it doesn’t always stop you…. The best thing about this place is the staff.”

This sentiment was echoed by several young people: the staff were seen as understanding, as having time, and as prepared to “see your point of view”: “The best thing about this place is that the staff talk to you. They listen and they understand”. Several young people contrasted their experience of the Freagarrach staff with their much more negative perceptions of social
workers. Even the minority of young people who were lukewarm about the project and unable to identify specific gains from their attendance recognised that the staff treated them with respect: “the staff here don’t push it. You can talk if you want to, but you don’t have to”. Staff were also praised for their persistence and patience: “[she] would nag and nag and nag – that might be why I’ve stopped”. “Nagging” here is defined positively, as an indication of the staff member’s willingness not to give up but to retain and convey faith in the young person’s ability to grow and change. This refusal to give up was also identified by people who came to work at Freagarrach during the course of the evaluation as perhaps the “magic ingredient” – what made the project distinctive.

4.3 The young people were asked about what they did at Freagarrach. Perhaps half of them were able to talk articulately about the work they had done: “some of the worksheets were useful – why you did it, what you did it for”; “the cartooning has helped. We look at crimes and find the danger path”. Some young people said that they preferred individual work, because of the discomfort they felt in talking in a group or, occasionally, because they thought that associating with other offenders would increase the risk of their reoffending; it was not unusual for young people’s experience of Freagarrach to be exclusively an individual relationship with one worker. Other young people felt more comfortable in groups, and the project staff were able to adapt their style of work to match the preferred learning styles of the young people; the young people’s responses frequently confirmed the claim of the project staff that they were working according to the principles of effectiveness research, including the principle that a substantial minimum “dose” of intervention is required to produce an effect: typically, the young people said that they attended the project for 3 sessions a week. “Cartooning” – drawing the events leading up to an offence in comic book style – was generally (but not universally) preferred to writing; indeed, anything that reminded the young people of school work tended to be disliked. The following is a rather extreme statement of this position:

“The worst things about coming here are having to do the work. We have a folder and do stuff on how do you keep out of trouble…how to say No to your pals when you go out with them. We spend ages doing that, at least 45 minutes. It’s just like school, and I hated that about school.”

This young person also believed, however, that “this helps keep me out of trouble…They explain to me what is going to happen if I commit a crime, they make me think about it”. Of all the individual aspects of the Freagarrach programme, it was the visit to Glenochil that was most often mentioned as specifically helpful. This was, of course, a well defined and spectacular event, and it often proved memorable: “the best thing I’ve done here is probably the Glenochil programme. We really got to see what it was like, nothing like I thought it would be. Definitely don’t want to end up there”.

4.4 Young people who did not give a clear account of the work they did at Freagarrach nevertheless often believed that it was useful because at least it kept them “off the streets”, or kept them busy. The importance of structure in the lives of young people not at school or at work should not be underestimated: “I was OK when I was here, but when I left I got bored, took too much drink and drugs and went daft. I can’t do that now as I’m too busy”. Young people also often mentioned the activities they engaged in at the project, from the modest and everyday, such as playing pool, to more exciting and unusual events such as go-karting, visits to attractions such as “Sea World at Queensferry”, and outdoor activities: “I’ve had the
chance to do things like going on Venture Scotland, which involved a week’s sailing, rock climbing, and all sorts that I wouldn’t have been able to do”. To judge from the interviews, the young people generally understood that these excitements were privileges that had to be earned through work and a demonstrable change in their behaviour: “if I keep out of trouble for 2 months I get to go go-karting, that’s the deal, and that’s the best thing about this place”. Another form of valued special event arose from Freagarrach’s reputation and its commitment to informing others about its work: “you meet all sorts of people that you wouldn’t normally, like our MP”.

4.5 Behind the work and the enjoyable activities was the environment the staff created – one of safety, comfort and nurture. One young person summed up this feeling when he described the project as being “like a wee family”. Among the benefits this family provided was the fundamental one of physical sustenance, perhaps the most basic of human needs: the frequency with which food was mentioned by the young people suggests both what Freagarrach offered and what their own families did not. The staff told the young people, “This is your kitchen”, and from observation as well as the interviews, they used it as their own, sometimes taking food home even though there was no suggestion that food of some kind would not be available there. One young man thought the best thing about Freagarrach was that “we always have pizza and garlic bread”; another said:

“Coming here can help me and others. You can get trouble off your mind, it can make you happy. We get food and drink – I’ve been taken to McDonald’s. I will come here for at least 6 months, I will come for longer if I can.”

The stress on food and comfort is a reminder of the basic deprivations endured by many of these young people, a core reality of their experience that an exclusive focus on their offending could tend to obscure. It is no wonder that some spoke of how hard it would be to leave: “Leaving is hard, the place just grows on you”; “this is my last day. I’m sad to be leaving but they have said that I can still contact them if I need any help”; “I don’t want to leave”.

4.6 The young people were asked what impact Freagarrach had had on them. While a very few said that there had been no impact – “it just goes in one ear and out the other, I don’t remember anything we do. That was the same at school” – most were able to identify a positive effect:

“Most of my offending was drink-related. I’m hardly ever drunk now, I do it in moderation now. It helped me look after myself a bit better, opened up opportunities about what I could do if I put my mind to it. It’s been an eye-opener – having someone to talk to. Got a lot off my chest. I enjoyed going.”

Other young people talked of the effect of the offending-focused work in helping them resist peer pressure, think of the consequences for themselves of offending, consider the impact on the victim, and control their anger: “This place has calmed me down. I now know to watch my behaviour in public, to respect people and not cause grief”. Effects on their ability to cope with other aspects of their lives, less directly related to offending but still clearly linked to it, were also mentioned: “It’s been great coming here over the years. They helped me when my parents split up. I’ve had serious problems and they have done a lot”. One young woman spoke of the support she had had in coming out of care:
“All of Freagarrach have made it possible for me to leave the care system and settle here. If they hadn’t been here to help me I think I would have cracked up – I didn’t think anyone was listening to me. Now I have learnt to think before I speak, or even do anything. The work here has helped me look at why I was getting so angry and how to cope. I wouldn’t have managed without this place.”

4.7 The accounts of the young people confirm what was suggested by observation and discussion with the staff: that Freagarrach worked in a way that was in line with the implications of research on effectiveness while at the same time providing an environment that was perceived as safe, accepting and caring. While a few young people were critical of some staff members, or openly sceptical about whether Freagarrach – or anything else – could have much effect on their behaviour, the great majority spoke warmly of their experiences at the project, both of their day-to-day relations with the staff (or a particular member of it) and of the work they did on offending and related issues. Many also claimed that their time at the project had enabled them to change, most often specifically in their propensity to offend, but sometimes in related areas of their lives such as controlling their temper and reducing their use of alcohol. Perhaps the most striking aspect of the interviews, however, is that for many of these young people Freagarrach was a place in which their most basic needs were met as they had not been met anywhere else. It was a “micro-community of care” whose closest model was that of a warm, caring family – but one in which unacceptable behaviour was signalled as unacceptable (Braithwaite, 1995).

THE VIEWS OF PARENTS AND CARERS

4.15 The views of the parents and carers of the young people, as obtained from interviews, often echoed the young people’s perceptions. It is likely that the parents and carers who made themselves available for interview were among those with the most positive views of Freagarrach (though some were critical of some aspects of the project); this should be borne in mind in interpreting the material that follows, although it is also true that in general it confirms the accounts of the young people and the findings of our observations. There were critical comments from a few parents or other carers, mostly associated with the view that the Freagarrach staff were unduly “lenient”; but this view sometimes arose from self-serving accounts by young people of what was expected of them: “they said I don’t have to go if I don’t want to”, and the like. One young person’s parents complained that the project paid insufficient attention to their needs as distinct from their son’s, but in general parents felt that Freagarrach staff were also concerned with their interests and difficulties.

4.9 Like the majority of the young people, parents and carers praised the Freagarrach staff for their understanding, their willingness to accept young people who had been rejected by other institutions, and their accessibility. These qualities were sometimes contrasted with the perceived unhelpfulness of social workers, though this did not always entail blame: parents recognised that the Freagarrach staff had far more time to devote to the young people than could be expected of a social worker: “I think it’s the time they can devote to one case”. They felt that the staff “could get to the bottom of his problem when I couldn’t”, or that “they have the ability to read the person; they seem to understand and get inside his brain quickly”. Parents often mentioned improvements in the young person’s behaviour at home which they attributed to the project, and which brought benefits for them as well: “the house was a total
war zone, now it’s different”; “the whole family have gained a lot”. Their sense that the Freagarrach staff accepted the young people was expressed in terms of an ability and readiness to “see the good side” of the young person, to treat “kids as people”, and the view that “they give respect and therefore get it back”. One mother spoke of how the young people at the project “had such a reputation and couldn’t go anywhere, but Freagarrach accepted them”. She, like others, and like some of the young people, worried about what would happen when the time came for her son to leave: “the only thing I feel is what happens afterwards. There’s nowhere for them to go”.

4.10 Parents could regret the ending of a young person’s time at the project on their own behalf too: “I miss it, to tell the truth”. Like others who had attended the meetings for parents, this mother had found them a source of support and reassurance, after some initial anxiety: “I felt I was the only person, but met other people with similar and worse problems”. The meetings were appreciated as social events - “we socialised rather than questions, questions, questions” – that had a supportive purpose and effect:

“I made friends with other mothers and still come to the meetings even though X [her son] has left the project. It is helpful to listen to others and realise that they have similar problems and difficulties, that their social worker is useless as well, that they have neighbours who are always complaining about kids just being kids, that the police always assume that it is their lad who has done everything that happens in the area.”

Parents also usually said that they found the Freagarrach staff accessible and helpful: if anything was upsetting me, I would phone A or B [naming staff members]...I felt I could relax and talk to them so they gave me support”. The relaxed style of the work meant that contact with the staff was informal and non-threatening; staff members would “come in and have a chat” with the parents after driving the young person home from the project.

4.11 The impression from the interviews is that these were caring and concerned parents (usually mothers); the problems in their family relationships arose not from a lack of love and care but from uncertainty about how to express these feelings while at the same time setting and maintaining boundaries on the young person’s behaviour. Freagarrach provided these parents with support and reassurance, and (in contrast with the experience several had had with social workers and others whom they had met as a result of their child’s delinquency) they did not feel that the project staff reproached or condemned them for their failings or inadequacies. These were parents who wanted to work on improving their relationships with their children and were prepared to accept help to do so. It should be remembered, however, that not all the parents of the young people at Freagarrach were so ready to become engaged in a co-operative process: the attitude of others towards their children’s delinquency was overtly rejecting and angry, and still others had never been able to provide a safe, loving environment for their children. While there are good indications from research that projects that involve parents in their work with young offenders are likely to produce better results than those that do not (Nuttall, 1998), it is inevitable that some parents will be unable or unwilling to become involved.

THE VIEWS OF OTHER PROFESSIONALS
4.12 As with the interviews with parents, it should be borne in mind that the interviews with professionals were with a self-selected group. By definition, they were people who knew something of the project and were willing to give up time to talk about it. In the course of the evaluation, however, there were very few indications that social workers, teachers or police officers – the main “front line” staff involved – were anything but enthusiastic about the project; and they tended to become more so the more they knew about it. They saw it as a valuable resource and, when they had had the experience of working directly with Freagarrach staff, they were (according to mainly indirect testimony) full of praise for their commitment and skills. In these cases, when the project staff were able to work with the committed support of social workers and education staff, it is certainly true, as one social work manager remarked, that it would be wrong to attribute any credit that was due to Freagarrach alone; the achievement of a good outcome should be seen as the result of a collaborative effort.

4.13 Freagarrach was valued by other professionals – and by members of the Children’s Hearing Panels - for 2 main reasons: its practice with young people was highly regarded, and it was seen as a catalyst that helped to ensure the continued coherence of the broader strategy. While most of those interviewed recognised its contribution in both areas, the first reason was particularly stressed by those who had actually worked with Freagarrach, and by Reporters, the police and social work staff; the second was emphasised by staff from education departments, and by the police. Those who knew the Freagarrach staff typically described them as “very helpful, caring, and enthusiastic”. They were seen by the police as capable of having a long term impact on the young people at the project by awakening in them a “newly developed conscience”; their skills, and the time they were able to devote to individuals, were thought to enable them to “do better than anyone else ever could” even on specific problems such as drug abuse. Staff were praised for their commitment and dedication, and for their efforts to involve parents in the work with young people, which were seen as successful because they were based on a commitment to partnership, rather than on a “didactic” approach (which the parents might have construed as blame). It was generally accepted that Freagarrach had in fact worked with the most persistent juvenile offenders in the region; no interviewee suggested otherwise.

4.14 Reporters to the Children’s Hearing System spoke very positively about the project, and their view was apparently shared by panel members: “Panel members – rave, rave, rave – would lose a tremendous amount of faith if Freagarrach wasn’t there”. It was “wonderful to have that kind of resource…other Reporters are envious”, and Freagarrach was believed by Reporters to have reduced the need for residential care across the 3 authorities. Progress reports from Freagarrach were thought “very, very useful” by Reporters and panel members, and the attendance at hearings, when required, of Freagarrach staff was “tremendously helpful”. The standard of reports was “very good – occasionally it almost tips into advocacy for the young person [which is] not necessarily a bad thing”. The progress reports and the personal accounts from staff allowed Reporters and panel members to acquire a good sense of Freagarrach’s practice, which was perceived as “cognitive-behavioural work” of the kind supported by research, and which “social workers can’t do or don’t have time for”. The faith both Reporters and panel members had in Freagarrach meant that they were willing to allow young people to remain there without being reviewed at hearings as often as would otherwise have been the case, given the seriousness of their offending. The staff’s willingness to persist in work with young people was also noted: “Social workers at 16½ sometimes say, ‘Ach, let him go’. The Freagarrach staff say there needs to be the structure of a supervision order – they’re still working with them”. But in most cases “liaison between social workers and
Freagarrach is very good and very positive – it must help social workers as well because it’s never just offending that’s an issue. Other social work issues are for the fieldworkers to deal with”.

4.15 Other interviewees, especially from social work, tried to take a more critical, detached position: “it’s seen as a Good Thing, because everybody says it is. I’ve started to look more critically, recently”. But even from this perspective, “I’m not aware of any criticisms of Freagarrach’s work – invariably staff are pretty positive about it”:

“in terms of their actual way of working, staff and managers speak pretty highly of it. The seconded worker was taken aback to find her diary wasn’t full every day – a very positive thing, that they’ve time to think.”

Like other interviewees, this senior member of social work staff said that it was widely accepted locally that there was often “quite a dramatic reduction in young people’s offending during the period of engagement with the project”. A reduced level of offending, and of victimisation, was the measure of Freagarrach’s performance most frequently cited in the interviews, though it was also recognised that its impact on offending ought not to be judged “overnight”.

4.16 The other value attributed to Freagarrach concerned its contribution to the maintenance of a coherent strategy and, relatedly, its impact on other parts of the juvenile justice system. Freagarrach was described as “the catalyst or glue for our strategy”, the still point in a changing environment that had enabled the retention after local government reorganisation of multi-agency and cross-council working, and therefore of economies of scale. Staff in education and the police were especially likely to say that Freagarrach, as a visible sign of commitment to a coherent strategy, had influenced thinking and practice in their agencies: “it has had an enormous impact on the way we deliver our service” (from the police); “it has aided in sensitising people to the needs of ‘difficult’ young people” (from the education service). There were instances of “good collaboration” between Freagarrach and teachers, and when collaboration was less good this was attributable to variations among schools, not to Freagarrach’s failure to deliver: “it was ahead of its time 5 years ago. The education service is now catching up”. There was still room, however, for Freagarrach’s influence to increase, so as to promote “long term changes in ways of working” (in education).

4.17 Freagarrach’s more direct impact on other parts of the system was also mentioned by several interviewees, and was seen as relevant to judgements of its success. Few of those interviewed had a clear view of what its overall impact might have been, but one who had consciously examined the question estimated that over the 5 years Freagarrach had prevented the need for expensive residential accommodation for 17 young people (more than half of those it had worked with from this local authority). The question arose, for this interviewee, of whether this represented effectiveness and value for money; to answer this, it would be useful to know what effect Freagarrach had had on the overall use of residential care. Social work staff were uncertain whether Freagarrach had reduced the use of residential care; in the absence of clear evidence that this had declined over the 5 years, the most optimistic view was that it had probably “kept things on a fairly even keel” – that is, prevented a major increase. The clear view among Reporters, however, was that the project’s existence did reduce the demand for residential care, and this was echoed from the police perspective: “it doesn’t look expensive when you compare it with the alternatives”. This was on the assumption that
Freagarrach had not only displaced care and custody in a substantial number of cases but had reduced the number of crimes and victims in central Scotland. The evidence for both claims is reviewed in Chapter 5, while the related issue of cost savings is addressed in Chapter 6.

CONCLUSIONS

4.18 There is no doubt that Freagarrach enjoyed a high level of support within the relevant constituencies of users of the service and personnel in agencies that supported the project and were supported by it. Those with the most direct experience of Freagarrach – the young people who attended it and their families – were (judging from interview material) overwhelmingly positive about the project’s work. They confirmed the conclusions reached from the observation and analysis of the process by which Freagarrach delivered its service: that this was not only in line with the findings of research on effectiveness, but characterised by the successful communication of a sense of care, respect and faith in young people’s capacity to grow and change. Freagarrach accepted, in the fullest sense, young people who had been rejected by other agencies, and often by their parents; and it worked with them in a way that conveyed, “We will not give up on you”. The staff from other agencies who were interviewed all agreed: “we all know it’s working for the kids” – and, it could be added, for many of their families. All those interviewed, but especially the police officers, were convinced that Freagarrach had had a demonstrable impact on the number of offences committed in central Scotland, and therefore on the number of victims. There was less certainty about the impact Freagarrach had on other aspects of the system, though it was widely thought that its presence and example had encouraged changes in routine practice, particularly in the police and education services. Its effect on the use of residential care was a particular issue that concerned social work staff: they saw this as a key issue when assessing costs and benefits for local authorities. This is among the issues addressed in the following chapter, and in more detail in Chapter 6, which considers benefits and costs.
CHAPTER FIVE: THE EFFECTIVENESS OF FREAGARRACH

5.1 As was often remarked in the course of the evaluation, the crucial test of Freagarrach’s success was its impact on the offending of the young people who attended, but this did not imply that other impacts – for example, on family life, educational and employment opportunities, and general coping ability – were not also important. In this chapter the evidence on outcomes other than reoffending is presented first, after a brief discussion of the few young people on whom the staff had little or no information. The evidence came from intensive discussions with the Freagarrach staff at the end of 1999 about their knowledge of what had happened to the young people who had attended the project by that date. The staff’s account of the young people’s post-Freagarrach careers was later supplemented and in some cases modified in the light of evidence from Scottish Criminal Records.

YOUNG PEOPLE WHO DID NOT ENGAGE WITH FREAGARRACH

5.2 Information on outcomes other than offending was obtained on 94 young people, but 9 of these – one a young woman - had never really “engaged” with the project staff, so that they had little or no information about their lives after they had been accepted at Freagarrach. Four of these young people were to have attended Freagarrach as part of the process of reintegration after periods in residential care, and several had serious problems associated with heroin use: these circumstances may explain their failure to accept what the project had to offer. One of the 9 young people died of a heroin overdose early in 2000, one of 3 young people who had died after attending the project; of the other 2, one died of a heroin overdose and the other of leukaemia. It was noteworthy, when the criminal records were examined, that 6 of the 9 young people who had never properly engaged with the project had subsequently served at least one custodial sentence: the other 6 had accumulated a total of 13 such sentences (5 in one case, 4 in another). Only 3 of these young people had not served a custodial sentence. Overall, only 17 of the young people who had attended Freagarrach were known to have been sentenced to custody by the summer of 2000, so that young people who did not engage were at a significantly greater risk of a custodial sentence than the Freagarrach population as a whole. Inability or unwillingness to accept help in avoiding an adult criminal career seems to be a good predictor of embarking on such a career.

EMPLOYMENT, EDUCATION AND FAMILY LIFE

5.3 The Freagarrach staff and other reliable informants frequently stressed how difficult it was for young people who had attended the project to find a place in the labour market; for them, the difficulties facing all young people without obvious marketable skills or educational achievements were compounded by their criminal records, in some cases serious and lengthy enough to alarm any potential employer. Participation in the labour market is sometimes regarded as the key measure of social inclusion, not only for known offenders but for other marginalised groups (Smith and Stewart, 1998), but some of the young people who left Freagarrach seem to have found satisfaction in ways of life that did not entail either paid work or persistent offending (at least of a serious kind). There were hints in the course of the evaluation that the young people had access to a variety of subcultural adaptations to a social and economic environment in which traditional patterns of male working class life were no longer available. Sociological commentators have discussed such adaptations in the light of the disappearance of traditional, male working class employment, sometimes positively,
stressing the possibility of new, more equal social and family relationships (Giddens, 1994), but more often negatively, stressing the emergence of subcultures of aggressive masculinity, often associated with heavy drug and alcohol use, in areas where the impact of economic change has been most sharply felt (Robins, 1992; Campbell, 1993; Collison, 1996). Some of the young people who left Freagarrach seem to have experienced these new possibilities as sufficiently enticing to make a conscious decision not to work, preferring an apparently relaxed way of life that involved much contact with peers and heavy cannabis use, but no or little known criminal activity. Such a way of life, passive and drifting rather than active or aggressive, was a possibility – at least in the medium term - in those parts of central Scotland in which traditional values, including a work ethic, were no longer a strong influence. As a way of life, it is unlikely to earn the approval of conventional society, but it is a mellower and less dangerous expression of masculinity than those described by Campbell or Collison.

5.4 In other parts of the region, particularly council housing estates in which the male labour force had formerly been largely employed in a single industry, such as mining, a more traditional set of values had survived, and provided an accessible cultural resource for some of the young people who left Freagarrach. The dominant ethic in these areas, for men, was one that placed a high valuation on both work and the heavy consumption, especially at weekends, of alcohol. Young men for whom this resource was an option were essentially embracing the same cultural values as their fathers’ generation. Only 15 (18%), including one young woman, of the 83 young people who had spent a substantial period at Freagarrach by the end of 1999 and were of an age to be employed were known to be in employment at that time, or to have spent a substantial period in work before then. This figure probably underestimates the actual level of involvement in work of these young people, since information was not available on all cases; but when a young person was known to have substantial work experience, this was associated with a lower rate of offending, and less serious offences, since starting at Freagarrach than for the group as a whole: only one of this group had been sentenced to custody by the spring of 2000. The young people often obtained employment through family connections rather than through the formal systems designed to help those seeking work.

5.5 Apart from those who had chosen not to work, there was also a small group of young people who attended Freagarrach who were described by the staff as effectively unemployable. Given that the staff did not make such adverse judgements lightly, the claim deserves to be taken literally. Five young people were recorded as having learning difficulties serious enough to make employment problematic: the difficulties were reflected not only in cognitive limitations but in serious deficits in attention, to the point in one case of being unable to sit still; the other young people also showed a lack of basic social skills, in varying degrees. There was, however, no evidence that members of this group were particularly likely to go on to serious criminal careers; supportive parenting appeared to be an important protective factor.

5.6 At the end of 1999 3 young people were known to be on training courses, and other had of course gone through various training experiences, including that provided by the Apex FVYPER project. The difficulties many of the young people had in sustaining motivation for training were discussed in Chapter 2, but it is also worth stressing that a minority of them were able to use training opportunities well enough to achieve useful qualifications and enhance their chances in the labour market. In different ways, 2 young people showed their capacity to make positive social contributions, one as a volunteer helper of a disabled university student in Wales, the other as a promising speedway rider. Offending after starting at Freagarrach was minimal in both cases.
5.7 Freagarrach’s access to educational resources was a crucial element in the original planning of the project as part of an overall strategy for young offenders, but over the 5 years of the evaluation this became less important, as the average age of the young people at the project increased, and school-based education was therefore relevant for a smaller proportion. It is also likely that the aim of reintegration into mainstream schools came to seem less feasible or even desirable as an aim of work even for young people still legally subject to compulsory education. It was rare for young people to be attending school normally when they started at Freagarrach, and rare for a move into normal schooling to be achieved during their time at the project. More typically, combined educational “packages” were worked out with schools, special units, and home tutoring staff. Well over half of the young people of school age were excluded from school when they started at the project, and about another quarter were truanting; during their time at the project, some educational provision was organised for the great majority of the relevant group of young people. Freagarrach had some success, then, in conjunction with education staff, in making arrangements that might improve the young people’s educational chances, even though full-time attendance at a mainstream school was rarely achieved (or attempted); perhaps 5% of young people of school age attended school reasonably normally after starting at Freagarrach.

5.8 Family relationships were important in the lives of the young people at Freagarrach, both in their families of origin and in the families some of them started in the period of the evaluation. Promising results in terms both of offending and of other indicators of social adjustment were associated with supportive parenting in at least 7 cases, and no doubt there were more. Equally, negative relationships with parents – to the point of overt rejection, violence or abuse – were often associated with less positive outcomes. In 24 cases attendance at Freagarrach was noted as having made a difference to the young person’s experience of local authority care, by removing the need for it altogether in some cases, and in others by shortening the period that would otherwise have been spent in care, delaying entry into the care system, or enabling the substitution of foster care for residential care, or of children’s home accommodation for a secure unit. In another 10 cases, attendance at the project was recorded as having had an effect on the need for residential schooling, removing it altogether in some cases, curtailing it in others. Freagarrach therefore contributed to the reintegration of young people into their families and local communities, although, as noted above, some of the young people who were most difficult to engage in the project’s work were in some form of residential care at the time of their referral. Freagarrach’s impact on the use of care and residential education is discussed further in Chapter 6, dealing with costs and benefits.

5.9 Five of the 9 young women on whom information was collected at the end of 1999 were known to have had a baby by this time; in at least 2 of these cases it appeared that this event had improved the young women’s relationships with their mothers, support perhaps being more acceptable in a grandparental than in a parental capacity. These young women had typically been sophisticated shoplifters when they came to Freagarrach, and would have been at risk of custody had they persisted with this rate of offending. In fact only one was recorded as having received a custodial sentence, for breach of probation; all but one had continued to offend, but at a substantially reduced rate. Of the other 4 young women, one (who did not engage with the project) had received a custodial sentence as a result of an increased rate of offending after her formal acceptance at the project; another went into residential care (with her sisters) as a result of abuse within the family during her time at Freagarrach, and was convicted of further offences on her return home; another had been in care (again as a result of
abuse) when she came to Freagarrach, and had a record of frequent violence against care staff. The project staff helped her to deal with her anger about her experiences in care, and she found a job, but suffered from mental health problems, which were regarded as a more serious issue than her offending. The fourth of these young women would probably have been sent into residential care had it not been for Freagarrach; she had no recorded offences after starting at the project, despite coming from a family believed to be heavily involved in crime.

5.10 Six of the young men in this group were known to have become fathers by the end of 1999, and another had been a father, at the age of 14, before he started at Freagarrach. According to social control theory and research on criminal careers, the birth of a child should encourage desistance from serious or persistent offending (Hirschi, 1969; Leibrich, 1993; Sampson and Laub, 1993). There was some suggestion that becoming a mother had had this effect on the offending of the young women discussed above, and 3 of the young men who had become fathers had very few or no convictions or charges recorded against them after leaving Freagarrach, while the offending rate of another showed a marked decline after the age of 17. The remaining 2 who were known to have become fathers, however, had among the worst records of offending after their time at Freagarrach of the entire group, essentially continuing after their attendance in much the same vein as before it; so it is clear that the birth of a child does not automatically increase commitment to conventional lines of behaviour. It is possible that a milestone such as the birth of a child has less of a protective effect than suggested by previous research in a context of high local unemployment, low wages for those who do manage to obtain jobs, and poor economic prospects (Graham and Bowling, 1995; Stewart et al., 1994); but this is not to say that the protective effect disappears completely.

Conclusions

5.11 The information available on the life-courses of the young people who left Freagarrach (apart from their offending careers) is limited in most cases, but what is known suggests that an initial failure to engage with the project, through apathy or active rejection, was associated with a poor outcome in terms of reconvictions. Young people who did engage with the project over a period of at least 3 months were presumably better motivated to make changes in their lives and to see Freagarrach as a possible source of worthwhile help; willingness to consider change is a necessary precursor to actually changing. Information on employment was incomplete, but there were indications that substantial experience of paid work was associated with a lower rate of, and less serious, offending than for the group as a whole. The younger members of the Freagarrach group, for whom the immediate goal was a return to some form of education rather than a move into work, generally showed positive changes during their time at Freagarrach, although it was rare for them to move into full-time mainstream education. Support from parents or other relatives was important as a predictor of positive adjustment to the demands of adult life, and young people who had children by the end of 1999 generally – but not invariably – showed lower rates of offending than the group as a whole. In all these associations cause and effect are hard to untangle: for example, the ability to get and keep a job may reflect the same variable – motivation to change or commitment to conventional activity – as a reduced rate of offending, and parental or other family support may be a response to improvements in the young person’s behaviour as well as (or instead of) causing them. Nevertheless, the information available on outcomes other than offending suggests that a constellation of factors, including employment, training and a supportive family, is associated with a reduced risk of offending – a point that has implications
for policy and practice designed to reinforce positive elements of the social and economic environment of juvenile offenders.

OFFENDING AFTER STARTING AT FREAGARRACH

5.12 The material in this section is drawn from two main sources: Scottish Criminal Records and the TRACE system. The former gives data on convictions, pending charges, and Children’s Hearing System decisions (all decisions are recorded for juveniles, only those that changed the young person’s legal status for those aged 16 and over); TRACE gives all charges made against juveniles in the central Scotland police area, up to a maximum of 5 charges for each incident that gave rise to a charge. The criminal records provide data that allow for comparisons both with other studies and with 2 comparison groups: one of these was obtained for the purposes of the Freagarrach evaluation, the other for the earlier evaluation of the CueTen project (Lobley and Smith, 1999). As explained in more detail later, the comparison group material is of limited value, because neither group was composed overall of as serious and persistent offenders as the Freagarrach population. Information from TRACE is not comparable with other studies or with the comparison group data, since the system is unique to Central Scotland police; it is useful, however, in giving an indication of changes in the volume and nature of suspected offending by young people after they started at Freagarrach – “suspected”, because the young people were not necessarily guilty of all the offences with which they were charged, and some charges would never have progressed further in the criminal justice process, because of evidential and other considerations. The material from Scottish Criminal Records is presented first, followed by that from TRACE; there is then a discussion of what might be gleaned from a comparison of the criminal records of the young people at Freagarrach with those of the comparison groups. Since a project like Freagarrach should be judged by its failures as well as its successes, no distinction is drawn in the following analysis between young people who spent a substantial period at the project and those who never engaged with it; and, in view of the open-ended and flexible nature of the Freagarrach programme, no distinction is made between “completers” and “non-completers”, as was possible in the CueTen evaluation.

5.13 Table 5.1 shows the total number of charges and/or convictions recorded against the 95 young people for whom at least 6 months’ follow-up data are available from the date of their formally starting to attend Freagarrach. The rows show the number of charges in 8 bands; the columns the number of young people grouped by the length of the period for which information is available.

Table 5.1: Number of young people by length of period for which records are available

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Length of period</th>
<th>6 months</th>
<th>12 months</th>
<th>2 years</th>
<th>3 years</th>
<th>4 years</th>
<th>Total of young people</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-10</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11-20</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21-30</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31-40</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

65
The table suggests that Freagarrach contributed to a reduction in the rate of known offending of a substantial proportion of the young people with whom it worked, but that this may have been a relatively brief “containment” effect rather than a long-term change. Only 4 of the 14 young people in the 6-month group showed a rate of offending similar to or higher than the rate at which they were offending when they came to Freagarrach, and the same is true of only 6 of the 17 young people in the 12-month group. Taking these groups together, 21 out of the 31 young people, or 68%, had no charges or convictions, or between one and 5, representing a considerably reduced rate of known offending in all cases. (With the 6-month group, it is likely that delays in entering charges or convictions meant that some known offending had yet to be recorded; on the other hand, convictions – but not charges - during that period are likely to relate to offences committed before the young people started at Freagarrach, and therefore to be false positives or “pseudo-reconvictions” (Mair et al., 1997) (or pseudo-charges) from the point of view of the evaluation. It is probable that the 2 limitations in the data - both products of delay – in effect cancel each other out.)

5.14 Taking the 3 groups with the longest follow-up periods, on the other hand, produces a rather different picture: in these groups, it was unusual for the young people to have no or few convictions or charges recorded against them. It is of course to be expected that the proportion convicted – and convicted of large numbers of offences - will be higher in groups with a longer follow-up period, and this pattern is clear from the table: the proportion of young people with no or few convictions or charges declines sharply, from 7 out of 23 in the 2-year group, to 4 out of 18 in the 3-year group, and one out of 23 in the group for which 4 years’ reconviction figures are available. Equally, the proportion with many convictions or charges increases, particularly between the 3-year and 4-year groups: 9 of the 23 young people in the latter group had been convicted or charged for over 30 offences, suggesting (though not conclusively) that they were likely to develop serious criminal careers (careers lasting 10-12 years, in Farrington’s (1992) definition). The use of 4-year data is unusual in evaluation research (making comparisons difficult, and disadvantaging Freagarrach relative to other projects), and the number involved is too small for confident conclusions to be drawn, but a possible interpretation of these figures is that even when young people were influenced in the desired direction by attendance at Freagarrach, the power of that influence waned over time in most cases, perhaps as a result of the lack of supportive networks in their lives that might have reinforced and maintained the benefits gained from the project (Raynor and Vanstone, 1996).

5.15 This interpretation of the data is at first sight at odds with the results of an analysis of the time interval to the first charge or conviction after young people started at Freagarrach. Of the 83 young people with some offence recorded against them, 75 were charged or convicted within the first 6 months, 4 in the next 6 months, and 4 in the following year. The 6-month figures will, however, have been skewed by pseudo-reconvictions, and the relevant question is not whether attendance at Freagarrach led to complete desistance from offending (although it seems to have helped in this in some cases, over the medium term), but whether it helped to produce a reduced rate of offending. The 81 young people on whom at least 12 months’ figures are available had a total of 801 charges or convictions against them in the 12 months before starting at Freagarrach, and 681 in the 12 months after starting, a reduction of 15% in the total volume of recorded offending; the true percentage reduction will have been somewhat higher, since some of the early convictions will relate to earlier offences. Mair et al.
(1997) suggest a discount of around 6% to allow for false positives in assessing the effectiveness of community penalties, but since the figures for the Freagarrach population include charges as well as convictions this discount is likely to be too high. It is still possible to conclude, from these figures, that the overall offending rate in this group could be as much as 20% lower in the year after starting at Freagarrach than in the year before.

5.16 Another measure of the impact of Freagarrach on the young people’s subsequent offending is to count not the total number of convictions or charges, as in Table 5.1, but the number of court appearances at which they were convicted of an offence, and the number of Children’s Hearings at which an offence ground for the referral was accepted. Using this measure, as in Table 5.2, produces a picture that helps to put into perspective the rather negative long-term outcomes shown in Table 5.1. While the pattern is the same as in the earlier table, Table 5.2 suggests that a very high frequency of court appearances was unusual, even for the group on whom 4 years’ records are available. It should be remembered that Table 5.1 counts charges and convictions for all offences, and that some were relatively trivial, and others entailed by the nature of the main offence (for example, unauthorised taking of motor vehicles entails driving without insurance). Other charges might well never have led to prosecution or conviction.

Table 5.2: Court appearances and hearings, by length of follow-up period

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of court appearances or hearings</th>
<th>6 months</th>
<th>12 months</th>
<th>2 years</th>
<th>3 years</th>
<th>4 years</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3-5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-10</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11-20</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21 +</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Twelve of the 23 young people with records for 4 years had been sentenced (or received a disposal from a Children’s Hearing) on fewer than 6 occasions, as had 13 of the 18 young people in the 3-year group; on the other hand, 3 of the 4-year group had received a sentence or other disposal on more than 10 occasions. Whether the figures in the table are counted as evidence of success or failure depends on one's sense of the context: these were, generally speaking, the most prolific juvenile offenders in central Scotland at the time of their arrival at Freagarrach, and therefore the young people for whom a long criminal career could most reasonably be predicted. The fact that only 3 of the 41 with a follow-up period of at least 3 years had been sentenced on more than 10 occasions could be taken as encouraging evidence that the most pessimistic projections of their future careers at the time of their arrival at Freagarrach were not realised.

5.17 The rate of offending provides only one indication of the criminality of these young people; another crucial measure concerns the type of offences they committed. The analysis of their careers based on court appearances could be distorted if, for example, many of the young
people had committed a few very serious offences, leading to long periods in custody: in fact, one young man was convicted of murder at his only court appearance. Offence seriousness is to an extent a subjective matter, so the nature of the sentences imposed is often taken as a reliable proxy measure of seriousness. Table 5.3 shows the most severe sentence or order imposed on the 83 young people who had been convicted of some offence, or admitted an offence ground of referral.

5.18 In all, 38 custodial sentences were imposed on these young people; one custodial sentence was a good predictor of another. Seven of the 17 young people sent to custody, including 2 young women, served only one sentence; 2 served 5 such sentences, another 2 served 4, one served 3, and 5 served 2. The longest sentence was of life, for murder; the next longest were 2 6-year sentences, for serious assaults, in one case sexual. Three other sentences were for 12 months or more, all for offences of violence. The remaining sentences ranged in length from 7 days (for breach of the peace) to 10 months (for attempting to pervert the course of justice). Most sentences were short: a 3-month sentence was imposed on 10 occasions, and 13 sentences were of 2 months or less. More than half of these short sentences were for crimes of dishonesty; the rest were mainly for assault and breach of the peace. Looked at from another angle, the table shows that 66 of these young people had not committed offences of such quantity or gravity as to lead to a custodial sentence; only 7 of the 4-year group of 23, and 3 of the 3-year group of 18, had been sentenced to custody during a period of their lives when, as young adults, they were still in a high risk category for offending.

Table 5.3: Most severe sentence or order imposed, by length of follow-up period

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Most severe sentence or order</th>
<th>6 months</th>
<th>12 months</th>
<th>2 years</th>
<th>3 years</th>
<th>4 years</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No further action</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Admonished or police warning</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ongoing supervision</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supervision order (S.O.)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S.O. with residence requirement</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fine/compensation</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deferred sentence</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disqualified from driving</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Probation or community service</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Young Offenders Institution</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Eight of the 61 young people with at least 2 years’ follow-up data had received a minimal disposal (no action, a warning or admonishment, or the continuation of an existing order); for another 9, the most severe penalty was a fine or compensation order; and for another 20, it was a community sentence. Taken together, these figures suggest that apart from the group sentenced to custody, the criminal careers of these young people were following a fairly modest course.

5.19 Another indicator of the seriousness of the young people’s offending, and of what offences Freagarrach may in some cases have helped to prevent, comes from TRACE data on charges. This information is reasonably complete for the young people who came to Freagarrach during its first 3 years, though there are more gaps in the data for the third year group; in using the data it should also of course be borne in mind that TRACE counts charges (up to a maximum of 5 for each episode of offending), that the young people may have been innocent of some of the offences that led to charges, and that other charges were unlikely to lead to prosecution or other formal action. For the first 3 years, the total number of charges recorded against the young people in the 12-month period before they started at Freagarrach was 1,315; the comparable figure for the same group in the 12-month period after they had started at Freagarrach was 575, suggesting a total reduction of 740 charges (or almost 250 a year on average), or, in percentage terms, a reduction of 56%. Given the proportions of different types of charge recorded on TRACE, the annual reduction in crimes of dishonesty was about 120, for miscellaneous offences it was about 50, for fire raising and vandalism it was about 40, and for violent offences it was about 30. These figures could be multiplied by 5 to give an estimate of the reduction over the period of the evaluation in these offence types, on the assumption of a constant annual rate of reduction.

5.20 It is likely, however, that this would overestimate Freagarrach’s contribution to crime reduction, for 4 reasons: firstly, the fact that young people were attending Freagarrach may have led the police not to charge them when they would otherwise have done so; secondly, the TRACE figures for the first 3 years show a rate of reduction after the young people started at Freagarrach of, respectively, 28%, 78%, and 68%, suggesting substantial year-on-year variation; thirdly, the gaps in TRACE data for the third year group mean that the figure of 68% is based on an underestimate of the actual level of offending by this group; and fourthly, the TRACE figures are so different from those calculated from Scottish Criminal Records as to make it reasonable to suspect some problems with the data. Nevertheless, the TRACE figures confirm that a substantial reduction in the rate of offending by these young people did take place in the year after they started at Freagarrach, compared with the year before; and they provide an indication of what offences may have been prevented, and therefore of the types of victimisation that may have been avoided. The true extent of the reduction achieved in the first year after starting at Freagarrach is likely to be somewhere between the figure of 20% suggested in paragraph 5.15 and the 56% suggested by the TRACE figures; in the following chapter, a minimum of 20% and a maximum of 50% are used in the analysis of the costs of Freagarrach and the savings it achieved.

SOME TENTATIVE COMPARISONS

5.21 An effort was made to identify a group of juvenile offenders whose outcomes could be compared with those of the Freagarrach population. After prolonged negotiations with the

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total</th>
<th>8</th>
<th>14</th>
<th>20</th>
<th>18</th>
<th>23</th>
<th>83</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>69</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
police and other agencies in various parts of Scotland, it was agreed that a comparison group could be built up from data held by the Reporter’s Administration on juveniles in another part of the central belt of Scotland. This produced a total of 52 young people who at some time in their lives had accumulated 5 or more charges in a 12-month period, and were roughly matched in terms of age and gender with the Freagarrach group; their criminal records were analysed for the period January 1998-December 2000. In addition, it was agreed that the comparison group of 39 young people used for the evaluation of the CueTen project (Lobley and Smith, 1999) would be used in assessing the relative performance of Freagarrach, in order to produce a total comparison group similar in size to the Freagarrach group.

5.22 Unfortunately for purposes of comparison, neither group consisted, overall, of as persistent offenders as the Freagarrach young people. Sixty-three (66%) of the young people at Freagarrach had been charged by the age of 12; the comparable figure for the central belt comparison group was 20 out of 52, or 38%. Twenty-nine (30%) of the Freagarrach young people were in the lowest risk group, with 5 or fewer charges or convictions in the year before they started at the project, compared with 36 (69%) of the comparison group (and 51% of the group used in the CueTen study). On average, young people attending Freagarrach had 10 charges or convictions against them in the previous 12 months (using Scottish Criminal Records data), while the central belt comparison group averaged 4. These and other differences mean that a direct comparison is liable to be misleadingly to Freagarrach’s disadvantage, since the Freagarrach young people – as a whole – were a higher risk group for subsequent offending than either of the other groups; they were also a higher risk group – again as a whole - than the young people who attended the CueTen project (Lobley and Smith, 1999, p. 57). It is not surprising, then, that of the young people in the Freagarrach group on whom 2-year follow-up data were available a lower proportion had 5 or fewer charges or convictions in this period, and a higher proportion over 20, than in the comparison groups; but the differences were not statistically significant (using chi squared), and in fact a slightly higher proportion of the combined comparison groups had over 30 charges or convictions during the 2 years. Statistically non-significant differences – not all to Freagarrach’s disadvantage - were also found between the Freagarrach group and the comparison groups (and the CueTen group itself) in comparing the total numbers of offences (from Scottish Criminal Records) before and after the date at which the young people began attending the projects or were included in a comparison group. Given the higher rate of offending in the Freagarrach group, it is perhaps surprising that no statistically significant differences were found – a result that could be interpreted as evidence that Freagarrach made more of a positive difference relative to the range of measures to which the other groups were subject.

5.23 Some interesting comparative information emerges when the criminal careers of the Freagarrach young people are measured against those from the comparison groups, using severity of sentence as a proxy for offence seriousness, as in Table 5.3. A higher proportion of the young people who were convicted or charged in the combined comparison group (the central belt group and the CueTen comparison group) were sentenced to custody during the 2-year period for which records are available. Of the 67 young people with convictions or charges in this group, 19 (28%) were sentenced to custody, compared with 12 (14%) of the 83 young people (over a 2-year period) charged or convicted in the Freagarrach group. The 19 young people in the comparison group received a total of 28 custodial sentences; 2 sentences were for murder, one was for 5 years, one for 3 years, 2 for 2 years, and one for 18 months. The 12 young people in the Freagarrach group received 25 custodial sentences in the comparable 2-year period, the longest of which was for 6 years; one was for 18 months and
one for a year, and 15 of the total were for 3 months or less. A smaller proportion of the Freagarrach young people, then, received custodial sentences in the 2 years after they started at the project, compared with the comparison group, and those who were sentenced to custody tended to receive shorter terms. There are indications, therefore, that Freagarrach may have produced a lower risk of custody than would otherwise have been the case; if the same proportion of the Freagarrach group had been sentenced to custody as in the comparison group, 23 rather than 12 would have received such sentences over the 2-year period. The difference between the groups is statistically significant at the 5% level, but it cannot be claimed confidently that all of the difference is due to Freagarrach, since the sentences were imposed at different times and in different courts. It is likely, however, that Freagarrach contributed a proportion of the difference, since there were no major variations in sentencing practice across the relevant courts in 1997, the latest year for which figures are available (The Scottish Office, 1999).

CONCLUSIONS

5.24 Freagarrach worked with young people who in many cases had serious problems of social and personal adjustment, as well as the problems directly associated with offending. The project’s first task was to engage the young people and, when possible, their families, in work that offered the possibility of positive change. When young people declined the project’s offer of help, as a minority did, this was associated with worse outcomes in terms of subsequent offending than for the group of young people as a whole. As a corollary of this, there were indications that when both the young person and members of his or her family were engaged in working with the project, this was associated with positive outcomes in offending and other aspects of the young person’s life, such as involvement in training and employment.

5.25 Freagarrach’s impact on the development of criminal careers by the young people with whom it worked is hard to assess precisely, because different results emerge from different sources of data. There is no doubt, however, that the majority of the young people offended at a lower rate in the year after starting at the project than in the year before. The project thus contributed to a lower rate of offending by this group in the short term, and there were indications that over a 2-year period young people who attended Freagarrach offended less seriously than those in the comparison group, who as a whole had been less persistent offenders in the year preceding the date from which records were examined. A longer term effect might also exist, since only 10 of the 41 young people on whom at least 3 years’ follow-up data were available had been sentenced to custody, although all had been charged or convicted of some offence by that stage. In interpreting the results as indicating that Freagarrach ‘worked’ or did not, it is important to remember that the project dealt with almost all of the young people in central Scotland who were most at risk of long-term criminal careers; with such a group, total desistance from offending while still in young adulthood may be an unrealistic aspiration. A more reasonable measure of success is change in the rate and seriousness of offending, and on this measure Freagarrach can be judged to have succeeded with a majority of those with whom it worked. The implications of this and of other effects Freagarrach had on the young people’s lives, for cost savings are explored in the next chapter.
CHAPTER SIX: COSTS AND BENEFITS

THE COSTS OF FREAGARRACH

6.1 The total cost of the Freagarrach Project over the period of the evaluation was £1,642,721, according to the project’s own annual reports. The average annual cost, based on the 4 complete years, was £338,430; the average monthly cost for the entire period, treated as 58 months, was £28,323. The bulk of the costs was contributed by central government, and the rest by Barnardo’s Scotland and the local authorities, originally Central Regional Council, and from 1996 Clackmannanshire, Falkirk and Stirling. The support from the local authorities took the form of seconded staff and the provision of premises. Year on year variations in expenditure resulted from periods of staff absence and to a lesser extent from spending on equipment and the maintenance of premises; costs in the final 2 full years were only 4% higher than in the first 2 full years.

6.2 During the period from the end of April 1995, when the first young person was recorded as having started at Freagarrach, the project worked with 106 young people, 15 of whom attended twice; in effect, therefore, the project worked with 121 young people, counting starts on the programme and places taken up, but disregarding the young people with whom Freagarrach staff worked informally, as described in paragraph 2.9. On this basis, the project worked on average with just over 24 young people in each year, giving an average cost for each young person of about £13,580, or an average weekly cost of about £350; the actual costs will have varied greatly around this figure, depending on the length of time the young person spent at Freagarrach and the amount of work he or she generated. Using figures from The Scottish Office (1999), the cost can be calculated as equivalent to just under 8 weeks in secure accommodation (weekly cost about £1,800), about 13 weeks in a residential placement with educational facilities (weekly cost about £1,040), and about 6 months in prison department custody (weekly cost about £500). The average unit cost of Freagarrach was therefore closer to that usually associated with residential care or custody than to that associated with community-based measures (the average total cost of a probation order without additional requirements is about £1,450, and that of a community service order about £1,300). This is not surprising, given the intensity of Freagarrach’s involvement with young people and their families, but the unit cost was over twice that of the CueTen project (Lobley and Smith, 1999), which also aimed to provide intensive supervision in the community, and the savings that Freagarrach would need to demonstrate, in terms of reducing offending and related costs, are correspondingly greater.

6.3 Apart from any impact it had on offending, Freagarrach could potentially deliver savings to other services in a number of ways: by reducing the use of secure accommodation and residential care, it could reduce costs for social work departments; by reducing the use of residential schooling and school exclusions, it could reduce costs for education departments; and by encouraging a reduced use of custody, it could reduce prison service costs. It could also produce some savings for social work departments insofar as its work relieved social work staff of the need to attend to some of the needs and demands of young people likely to be thought of as requiring intensive community supervision, but these possible savings are not considered here, since the requirement that social workers liaise with Freagarrach staff could be taken as an additional cost to social work departments: the savings in supervision can be regarded as cancelled out by the costs of liaison. The possibility of savings from a reduced
level of school exclusions is also not considered here, since, although the number of young people formally excluded fell during the period of the evaluation, very few returned to mainstream education, and the costs associated with providing some form of special education remained. The possible savings in the use of secure and residential care, and of custody, are considered below.

SAVINGS IN RESIDENTIAL CARE AND CUSTODY

6.4 The senior staff who were interviewed about their experience of Freagarrach believed that Freagarrach might well have prevented an increase in the use of residential care for the relevant age group, but were unable to quantify the extent of this saving. In order to obtain a clearer view of possible savings in this area, the circumstances of each of the young people at the time of their arrival at Freagarrach were examined and discussed with project staff, with a focus on the part the project had played in diverting the young people from care or custody, shortening the time they spent in care, or delaying their entry into the care or custodial systems. This investigation took place at the end of 1999 and covered 94 young people.

6.5 Apart from the young people for whom, by virtue of their age, custody rather than care was the threat, 12 young people were identified for whom care was not an issue; in these cases, therefore, no saving had been achieved by attendance at Freagarrach. In another 42 cases it was not possible to identify any difference in outcome, in respect of the use of care or custody, that resulted from Freagarrach’s intervention. These cases included the 9 young people who never engaged with the project; in other cases, the young person had either remained in some form of official care or entered it after or during his or her time at Freagarrach; and in a few others, the young person had received a custodial sentence despite the project’s efforts. In some cases, not enough information was available to make a judgement. It should be noted that the project staff were not dogmatically opposed to the use of residential resources; in a few cases, they believed that residential school, for example, was in the young person’s best interests, or that secure accommodation was the only realistic option. There is no evidence, however, that attendance at Freagarrach ever led to, or even increased the likelihood of, entry into care; a reduction in the use of residential care was a key aim of the project from the start, and one to which the staff were strongly committed; and the project’s success in maintaining a focus on its original target group meant that the potential problem of “net-widening” never materialised. The theoretical possibility that Freagarrach increased the use of care (and therefore increased costs) can be discounted.

6.6 Of the remaining 40 young people, 28\(^1\) were identified as cases where Freagarrach’s involvement had had an impact on the young person’s experience of care, and 12 where it had affected the use of custody. Sometimes the evidence of this impact was direct and obvious, as when a Children’s Panel had indicated that it was considering secure accommodation, or a Sheriff said that had it not been for Freagarrach the young person would have been sent to custody. In other cases, Freagarrach had been used specifically as a means of helping the young person to leave care and begin his or her reintegration into family and community. For some young people, however, Freagarrach’s impact had to be inferred from knowledge of their circumstances at the time of their arrival at Freagarrach, and of the thinking at the time of social workers and others about what the available options were.

\(^{1}\) This figure is lower than the project’s staff own estimate of 34 cases, given in paragraph 5.8.
6.7 In 12 cases, it was judged that the young person would have gone to, or spent longer at, a residential school had it not been for Freagarrach’s intervention. The estimated number of months at residential school ‘saved’ by Freagarrach ranged from 6 to 24 months, and totalled 150. The cost of providing residential education for this period would be about £660,000, but since the alternative made possible by Freagarrach involved foster care for at least one of these young people, and it was rare for them to return to mainstream education, the net saving will have been rather less than this: if 10% is discounted to allow for these factors, and, following the procedure of Greenwood et al. (1998), a further 10% is deducted to allow for the fact that some costs are fixed and thus to produce the marginal cost saving (90% of the average cost), the net saving on residential education can be estimated as £528,000. For 4 young people, Freagarrach was judged to have removed the need for secure accommodation; on the assumption that the average length of stay in secure conditions would have been 6 months (a conservative assumption in the light of the time spent in secure accommodation by the young people at Freagarrach who had some experience of it), the saving achieved would be £187,200. On the basis, again, of discounts of 10% to allow for alternative care arrangements and the marginal cost saving, the net saving can be set at £150,000. For another 12 young people, Freagarrach removed or curtailed the need for some other form of residential care; the average length of residence for those cases on which an estimate could be made was 12 months, giving a total period of care avoided of 144 months. On the assumption that the average cost of accommodation in a children’s home is half that of residential education, the saving in respect of these young people can be estimated as £325,000. Since these young people did not generally receive any other form of substitute care, the marginal cost saving (90%) can be treated as the net amount saved, giving a saving of £292,500. Overall, therefore, during the period of the evaluation Freagarrach probably enabled a net saving in the use of various kinds of residential care of just under £1 million, representing an average annual saving of about £202,000.

6.8 Savings were also estimated from the reduction in the use of custody resulting from Freagarrach’s involvement. An effect – diversion from custody or delaying of the first custodial sentence – was identified for 12 young people; this estimate is close to that arrived at in Chapter 5 through the 2-year analysis of the use of custody for the Freagarrach group and the comparison group. On the assumption that the custodial sentences avoided would have been short – say, leading to an average of three months actually in custody – the saving in the use of custody would amount to about £78,000; the net amount saved can be treated as £70,000, discounting only 10% to give the marginal cost saving, since these young people were not placed in any other kind of official accommodation. This figure brings the total estimated saving in a reduced use of custody and care to about £1,040,000, an average annual saving of about £217,000; the net cost of Freagarrach over the period of the evaluation would then be just over £600,000, or about £125,000 a year. It should be noted that the estimate for Freagarrach’s effect on the use of custody refers only to the 2-year period after young people started attending the project; there were indications, discussed in Chapter 5, that the use of custody for young people who had been at Freagarrach remained lower than might have been expected over a longer period, so savings from a reduced use of custody may well have been greater in the long term. Short-term savings on custody, however, are likely to be modest compared with savings on care, which, in view of the age of the young people at Freagarrach, are inherently short- to medium-term. As Freagarrach dealt with more young people towards the upper end of its target age range as time went on, the savings from a reduced use of care must have declined over the period of the evaluation.
SAVINGS FROM REDUCED RATES OF OFFENDING

6.9 The problems of estimating how many crimes Freagarrach may have helped to prevent were discussed in the previous chapter. It was argued that a reasonable minimum figure for the percentage reduction in offending in the year following the young people’s arrival at Freagarrach was 20%; this took account of the shortcomings of Scottish Criminal Records data as well as of the need to disregard some convictions as false positives in assessing the effectiveness of community-based measures. The discussion also noted how different estimates could be reached if the TRACE data were used; TRACE suggested a percentage reduction of 56%, but because of limitations in the coverage of TRACE it was suggested that a reasonable maximum figure was a reduction of 50%. TRACE provides a better measure of victimisation by juveniles than Scottish Criminal Records, since it includes almost all charges (including those of which the young people may have been innocent); but it is inherently limited to juvenile offending, and provides no information on young people who were 16 at the time they started at Freagarrach.

6.10 There are considerable problems in measuring the costs of crime and therefore the benefits of crime prevention. There has been relatively little work on the economics of criminal justice (Knapp and Netten, 1997), although in the late 1990s governments began to show greater interest in the cost implications of criminal justice decisions (hence the publication of relevant material by the Scottish Office (1999)). While criminal justice system costs can be reasonably well estimated, however, it remains problematic to assign a cash value to the harm caused by the average crime of a particular type: ultimately, human suffering and distress cannot be quantified. Analysts have therefore tended to adopt a narrower approach, which counts only direct costs and savings to the criminal justice system (and hence to government), rather than attempting to quantify costs and benefits to society at large (Karoly et al., 1998). The problems were addressed in Scotland by the accountants Coopers and Lybrand (1997) in their work for the Prince’s Trust: they offered 2 figures, the first, of about £2,700, representing the marginal cost of the average youth crime to society (that is, what society would save if the crime did not take place), the second, of £700, representing the marginal cost of a youth crime to the criminal justice system (what the system would save if the crime did not take place). The narrower approach is the one adopted here: although it undoubtedly leaves some real costs out of account it has the advantage of being more closely related to demonstrable expenditure. Another analytic convention is also followed here, that of treating all criminal justice and related costs as net costs, disregarding the benefits that may arise from the employment of staff and the economic activity generated by the existence of a criminal justice system. No attempt has been made to adjust costs and savings for inflation, since the proportion of the total cost that is subject to inflationary price rises is not known, and efficiency savings may well have reduced some costs in the period under review.

6.11 The minimum estimate of a 20% reduction in the number of crimes committed by young people in the year after they started at Freagarrach compared with the year before, on the basis of charges recorded in TRACE, produces an annual figure of 90; at an average marginal cost of £700, the annual saving would be £63,000, and the total saving to 31 March 2000 would be about £302,000. The 90 crimes would typically consist of 45 offences of dishonesty, 19 miscellaneous offences, 15 offences of vandalism or fire-raising, and 11 violent offences. On the maximum estimate of Freagarrach’s short-term crime reduction effect, the annual figure would be 226, giving a saving of £158,200, and a total saving over the whole period of about £759,000. The figure of 226 would be made up in the same proportions as for
the lower estimate, giving 113 offences of dishonesty, 47 miscellaneous offences, 38 offences of vandalism or fire-raising, and 28 violent offences. On the lower estimate, the net cost of Freagarrach over the period of the evaluation – the extent to which it did not deliver a direct cost-saving - would be about £300,000; on the higher estimate, Freagarrach would have contributed a direct saving to the criminal justice and social work services of about £160,000. If the figure of £2,700 were used as the average cost to society of a youth crime, Freagarrach would have saved about £240,000 annually on the lower estimate, and about £610,000 annually on the higher. On the least generous estimate, then, the annual net cost of Freagarrach was just over £60,000, taking account of the savings to the criminal justice system through the reduction of offending by the young people with whom it worked; on the most generous estimate (but still counting only direct costs and savings), it produced a net annual saving of about £33,300. The arbitrary procedure of splitting the difference gives an annual net cost of £13,350. On any estimate of its crime reduction effect, however, Freagarrach helped bring about a substantial saving in the total social costs of crime: for the entire period, this saving was, on the lower estimate, over £1 million, on the higher estimate, just under £3 million.

6.12 These figures take account only of short-term savings, resulting from Freagarrach’s immediate impact on the young people’s offending and on the use of other types of care or punishment. Although the exercise inevitably entails some speculation, it is possible to estimate the longer-term savings Freagarrach may have produced by diverting young people from criminal careers. The tables in Chapter 5, and the comparison of the proportions of the Freagarrach group and the comparison group sentenced to custody, provide a basis for estimating the extent to which this type of diversion was achieved. Only 10 of the 41 young people with at least 3 years’ follow-up data had been sentenced to custody; and 25 of them – 13 of the 3-year and 12 of the 4-year group – had received a sentence or other disposal in court or at a Hearing on fewer than 6 occasions. Given that these young people were on all established measures among those most at risk of developing a long-term criminal career, these figures suggest that Freagarrach may have had a long-term effect that helped to divert some of them from continued high-rate offending. Greenwood _et al._ (1998) estimate the cost to the criminal justice system of a criminal career as roughly £50,000, but their definition of “career” is conservative, since they count as career offenders all those who commit an above average number of offences for a known offender population; the young people at Freagarrach threatened to go on to criminal careers that were almost exclusively at the top end of the distribution of career types. A figure of £100,000, as used by Lobley and Smith (1999), seems a more plausible estimate of the cost of the kind of criminal career that Freagarrach may have prevented. The data on court appearances and custodial sentencing suggest that Freagarrach may have helped to divert about half of the young people it worked with from criminal careers; this would produce a total saving of about £4.8 million from diversion of the group of young people on whom at least 6 months’ data are available. This saving would be realised over a period of 10-12 years, this being the average length of a criminal career as estimated by Farrington (1992). A more cautious view of the results might still lead to the conclusion that Freagarrach had a diversionary effect on about a quarter of the young people it worked with (12 out of the 41 young people in the 3-and 4-year groups had been in court or before a Hearing on fewer than 3 occasions), but this would still produce a direct saving of about £2.4 million. Again, these figures are based on cost savings to the criminal justice system, and not to society as a whole.

CONCLUSIONS
6.13 Compared with most community-based services for juvenile offenders, Freagarrach was an expensive project. Its costs, however, were a direct product of the intensity of work that it provided, and of the fact that it worked with many young people over substantial periods of time. The unit cost (the average cost of a young person’s attendance at Freagarrach) was higher than had been originally planned, because Freagarrach worked with fewer young people than had been envisaged; this was inevitable, given the highly individualised style of work the project staff developed, and the gravity of the needs and problems of many of the young people who attended it. As was shown in Chapter 2, there is no evidence that there was a large population of young people who should have come to Freagarrach but were denied the opportunity to do so.

6.14 In considering whether Freagarrach delivered value for money, it is important to be clear about the criteria by which this should be judged. There is an understandable tendency for agencies that support such a project to look for immediate and readily identifiable short-term savings. The most obvious way in which Freagarrach might have done this is by reducing the need for other, more expensive services – essentially, those involving some form of residential care. Although there are strong indications that Freagarrach did remove or curtail the need to use such services for a substantial minority of the young people with whom it worked, its net cost over the period of the evaluation was still about £680,000 – or about £600,000 if savings in the use of prison custody are included. These figures take no account, however, of the savings Freagarrach may have produced through reducing, in the short term, the rate of offending among the young people who attended it. If these less apparent cost savings (to the Children’s Hearing System, the police and prosecution services, local authority services, and the courts) are taken into account, Freagarrach’s net cost over the whole period was (on the least generous estimate of its crime reduction effect) about £300,000; and on the most generous sensible estimate, it produced a net saving of about £160,000. Thus, even without considering the broader social costs of crime, and disregarding the long-term benefits from diversion of young people from adult criminal careers, Freagarrach’s costs were much lower than the headline figure of the project’s expenditure would suggest. It is doubtful, to say the least, that the savings Freagarrach made possible, and the benefits that flowed from its impact on the offending rate of the most persistent juvenile offenders in central Scotland, could have been achieved with an initial outlay much lower than the £1.64 million spent on Freagarrach.
CHAPTER SEVEN: AN OVERALL EVALUATION OF FREAGARRACH

7.1 Freagarrach benefited from the outset from being embedded in a local strategy that brought the various agencies concerned with juvenile offending together with a common sense of purpose. Originally a product of a police initiative, the strategy was agreed by key staff in the relevant departments of Central Regional Council, the Reporter’s Service, and Barnardo’s Scotland, which had an established presence in the area and a high level of credibility with relevant audiences. The desegregation of Central Region, and the changes of personnel associated with it, meant that the principle of a joint strategy, its direction and purpose, and the structures and procedures that were needed to give it practical effect all had to be renegotiated; in this process, the continuity provided by the police and by Barnardo’s was crucial. Inter-agency and cross-authority commitment to the strategy, and to Freagarrach, was maintained until early in 2000, when Clackmannanshire withdrew its financial support.

7.2 The strategy was not successfully implemented in all respects: resources never allowed for the development of some of the services for young people that had been envisaged, such as a common information system for all the participating agencies, an electronically accessible inventory of youth resources, and a mentoring system. Nevertheless, the fact that there was a common strategy with authoritative support benefited Freagarrach by conveying the message to local authority staff – importantly, in the social work and education services – and to Reporters and Children’s Panel members that this was a resource to be valued and supported. At the level of day to day practice, the Freagarrach staff also benefited from the willingness of the police to share information with them on the young people who were at any time the most persistent juvenile offenders in central Scotland. This allowed the project to avoid the potential problem of “net-widening” and retain as its target group those who were, on the strongest evidence available, the most persistent offenders in the 12-16 – later 12-18 – age group; it also allowed the staff to demonstrate that this was the case. The difficulties that can be predicted to arise in inter-agency working duly arose (Pearson et al., 1992), but the will to resolve them, and the structures that made their resolution possible, remained largely intact.

7.3 Freagarrach’s status as “the tip of the iceberg” helped it to avoid many of the problems that are often encountered by projects that are not similarly integrated into a coherent local strategy: problems such as isolation, insufficient knowledge and interest on the part of field social workers, lack of referrals, and pressure to accept inappropriate cases. The project’s staff were not thereby relieved of the need to work at establishing and maintaining credibility and awareness, but their task was undoubtedly made easier by the high-level support Freagarrach enjoyed. While exact replication of any project is impossible (Tilley, 1993), it is plausible to claim, on the basis of the Freagarrach experience, that as a matter of principle a specialist project should be conceived not as a stand-alone enterprise but as one part of a broader programmatic effort should inform all developments of such projects in future, certainly within the field of crime reduction (King, 1988), and perhaps in relation to any social problem. The need for coherent inter-agency strategies and partnerships on youth crime is now recognised in statute in England and Wales, and is expressed in practice in the form of Youth Offending Teams; it was also stressed in the recommendations of the Youth Crime Review in Scotland, which reported in the summer of 2000. The experience of Freagarrach, and of those in central Scotland who persisted with the principle of partnership, provides a
positive example from which others interested in policy coherence can draw encouragement and hope.

7.4 The other main distinguishing characteristic of Freagarrach was the quality of its direct work with the young people and, when possible, their families: on all recognised criteria the standard of practice was exceptionally high. This was not simply because the staff consciously worked in ways that evidence suggests are most likely to be effective in helping offenders change, though this was certainly the case; it is quite possible to follow the canons of effectiveness and still provide a service that is not perceived as helpful and changes nothing – for example, if a programme is delivered in an alienating, punitive or merely didactic style. The Freagarrach staff, in contrast, succeeded in conveying a sense of care and warmth even as they indicated what the boundaries of acceptable behaviour were – a claim based on observation of practice and the testimony of many young people and members of their families. One of the classics of systematic evaluative research on the effectiveness of social work and similar forms of intervention (Truax and Carkhuff, 1967) can be read as saying that the content of the theories and methods used by practitioners matters less than the style in which these are delivered in practice; almost, that good practitioners are also good people. Subsequent research has shown that content does matter in work with offenders (McGuire, 1995); but this should not obscure the basic truth that style also matters, and that acceptance, empathy and warmth are also associated with success in helping people change. These were qualities in the Freagarrach staff that were frequently mentioned, though not in these words, by young people and members of their families, and seen by them as essential elements of their experience of Freagarrach. For some of the young people, the project may have been the first setting in which they felt that their most basic needs – for care, comfort and even physical nourishment – were adequately recognised and met.

7.5 There were features of Freagarrach’s work that could be criticised, as, at various times, the staff themselves recognised. It was sometimes not clear either to the evaluators or the staff which young people ought actually to be counted as attending the project: some were still counted although they were barely in contact, others, who had officially left, were still being seen frequently. It was sometimes difficult for the staff to “let go” of young people, just as it was difficult for some young people to move on. The aspiration that the staff had to break down inter-professional barriers and undertake more joint work with staff from the police and other agencies remained more an aspiration and less of a reality than they themselves would have wished. The staff’s sense that other agencies were under pressure of work, so that it was easier to do things themselves than to try to engage a specialist service as an additional resource (for example on drug counselling), may at times have stretched their expertise to its limits. Informed observers believed, however, that even in specialist fields it was likely that the Freagarrach staff provided a better service than was realistically available elsewhere: the staff group was itself multi-disciplinary, as a matter of policy, and, as a result of the practice of seconding staff from local authorities (another benefit of partnership), its members had the security of employment that enables continuity and an undistracted focus on the tasks in hand.

7.6 Freagarrach’s main focus was on offending, and the staff used the cognitive-behavioural approach recommended by research on effectiveness to help the young people think more clearly about the damage they were doing to themselves and others by their offences, but they also recognised that a focus on cognition – on thinking – needed to be complemented by a concern with emotion – with how the young people felt. The project worked with a population that consisted not only of many of the most persistent juvenile offenders in the
region but of some of the most emotionally scarred. The staff themselves were surprised by
the frequency with which experiences of loss, abandonment and rejection featured in the lives
of the young people with whom they worked. These experiences had often left a legacy of
anger, hostility, resentment and aggression, powerful emotions that had to be acknowledged if
young people were to be successfully engaged in working towards change. The care and
respect shown by the staff towards the young people were therefore not optional extras, let
alone the sentimental expression of a misplaced concern to understand rather than condemn:
they were essential ingredients in the process of engendering the hope that positive change
was possible, and in freeing young people to feel emotions other than the hostility and anger
that are the product of rejection and disrespect (Scheff, 1997).

7.7 These characteristics of the young people need to be borne in mind, along with the
seriousness and persistence of their offending before they came to Freagarrach, in interpreting
their subsequent offending histories. It would not be realistic, for many of these young people,
to expect that any professional intervention would produce complete desistance from
offending, though there were instances of young people whose offending declined dramatically
both in frequency and seriousness. It would be possible, for example, to treat the finding that
it was rare for young people to remain free of further convictions in a 2-year period from the
start of their attendance at Freagarrach as a disappointing result, but this would be to
underestimate the depth of their involvement in offending before they started, and the strength
of the forces – personal, relational, and subcultural – that had to be overcome for offending to
cease, or even diminish. The burden of the argument of Chapter 5 was rather that Freagarrach
should be judged by evidence of its impact on offence seriousness and frequency, and that, on
these more realistic measures, the project could demonstrate an impressive degree of success.
Given the presence in Freagarrach of the elements of practice repeatedly shown to be
associated with good results in work with offenders, it would be surprising if it had been
otherwise. Again, if a realistic view is taken of the kind of cost savings Freagarrach could be
expected to deliver, the results reported in Chapter 6 will be interpreted as showing that,
although at first sight an expensive project which could be dismissed as an extravagance,
Freagarrach can claim to have delivered short-term savings that made its net costs much lower
than they might appear simply from at expenditure on the project since 1995.

7.8 The lessons to be learned from the evaluation of Freagarrach are mainly positive ones.
The most important are probably (i) that projects of this kind are much more likely to succeed
when they are established as one element of a coherent inter-agency strategy, and based on a
serious effort to determine the scale of the target problem, and (ii) that practice of the quality
needed to make as difference requires a well trained and supported staff team, aware of the
findings of effectiveness research and willing to put them into practice while maintaining an
attitude of respect for and acceptance of young people. The ability of the Freagarrach staff to
convey these human qualities while remaining clear that their offending was harmful and
unacceptable seems to have been much more effective in gaining a positive response from
most of the young people than any amount of attempted compulsion would have been.
Although the exact circumstances of Freagarrach’s establishment and development will never
be precisely replicated, the project, viewed in the context of the local strategy on young people
in trouble, could usefully become a model for policy and practice elsewhere. Anyone
considering a similar development should, however, remember that the initial expenditure will
inevitably look high, that high quality staff (working in a reasonable physical environment) are
essential, and are unlikely to be available – or to work to their full capacity – without security
of employment, and that partnership across agency boundaries requires sustained practical commitment, not merely rhetorical flourishes.
REFERENCES

Central Regional Council (no date) Services for Young People in Central Region, unpublished.


