

## **BIBIC research on ASBOs and young people with learning difficulties and mental health problems**

### **Background information**

In 2005, following correspondence with Home Office and other interested organisations, BIBIC launched the 'Ain't Misbehavin' campaign. The aim of the campaign was to draw attention to a number of young people with learning difficulties and mental health problems who were being confronted with the government zero tolerance policies. They were being asked to sign Acceptable Behaviour Contracts (ABCs) and were facing Anti-Social Behaviour Orders (ASBOs) that used words and terminology beyond their level of understanding. This meant they were being set up to fail, and a breach of an ASBO is a criminal offence. Vulnerable young people were at risk of having a criminal record when they had not committed a crime or received a full legal hearing in court.

BIBIC discovered that social, medical and educational data on under-17 year olds being given an ASBO was not being collected by the Home Office. This meant there was no evidence of ASBOs given to young people with a learning difficulty. At the request of the Home Office BIBIC supplied a case study. The Home Office had no plans to collect more detailed information on the young people receiving an ASBO, so BIBIC agreed with the BBC to survey the youth offending teams and anti-social behaviour officers to ascertain the true scale of the problem.

### **Research methodology**

A letter from Matthew Hill, health correspondent from the BBC, explained the project and together with a simple questionnaire was sent to all youth offending teams and anti-social behaviour officers. The returns were either volunteered or obtained under the freedom of information act. Anonymity was promised to respondents. The data was then collated and analysed by the BBC. Preliminary results were released to the Home Office and to members of the 'Ain't Misbehavin' campaign, and the full report was released on 23 February 2007.

### **Response rate**

There was a 61% response rate from ASBO officers (77 responses out of 126). Among YOT respondents, the response rate was 38% (51 out of 135).

### **Statistical significance**

The difference in terms children with ASBOs who had a diagnosed mental health disorder or an accepted learning difficulty between the two groups is quite pronounced: 10 out of 218 cases reported by ASBO officers (5%) and 127 out of 345 reported by YOTs (37%). Even if we assumed a 61% return for the YOT survey (amounting to 82 responses) and if we also assumed that every one of those 'extra' returns (some 31) reported no such cases – a highly unlikely scenario, then the difference would still be significant.

### **Results**

- 1) Between April 2004 and April 2005 how many ASBOs for under 17's did your team deal with?

**ASBO Officers 218; YOT 345**

- 2) How many of those ASBOs involved children who had a diagnosed mental health disorder or an accepted learning difficulty?  
**ASBO Officers 10; YOT 127**
- 3) Of those cases (Q2), how many involved the following conditions?
- a) Autism/Asperger Syndrome: **ASBO Officers 0; YOT 27**
  - b) ADHD: **ASBO Officers 8; YOT 50**
  - c) Global Development Delay: **ASBO Officers 0; YOT 2**
  - d) Cases where estimated level of understanding was below the expected for 10 years of age: **ASBO Officers 0; YOT 2**
  - e) Dyspraxia/dyslexia: **ASBO Officers 0; YOT 10**
  - f) Others, please specify:  
**ASBO Officers 4** (including special needs and learning difficulties)  
**YOT 70 approx** (including emerging personality disorders, severe depression, non-educational attainment, suicide attempts, fixed term exclusions, psychosis, emotional behavioural disorder, special educational needs, self harming, learning difficulties, attachment disorder, conduct disorder)
- 4) Of those cases named above (Q3), how many have breached their order?  
**ASBO Officers 52; YOT 8**
- 5) How many of these cases, if any, had previously agreed an Acceptable Behaviour Contract (ABC)?  
**ASBO Officers 59; YOT 103**
- 6) How many failed to maintain the conditions of the ABC?  
**ASBO Officers 50; YOT 95**
- 7) When the ASBO was issued was there an individual support order (ISO) attached in all cases? **Yes – ASBO Officers 4; YOT 3**  
**No – ASBO Officers 36; YOT 43**

If not, how many cases were involved where an ISO recommendation was not taken up?

**ASBO Officers 1; YOT 4**

77 ASBO Officers and 51 YOTs responded to the questionnaire
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