

Criminal justice and you

An essential guide for victims and witnesses

Youth Justice Service

By Matt Willcox

I'm Matt Willcox from Devon's Youth Justice Service.

Youth Justice Services or Youth Offending Teams, as they used to be known, are situated across Devon and Cornwall. Our primary role is to prevent offending by young people, but we recognise that victims of crime are an integral part of this.

We fundamentally believe part of taking responsibility for an offence is to try and repair the harm caused. As such, we want to involve all victims of youth crime in finding a way forward for everyone.

Our involvement in the case starts once the police have identified a young person, age 10 to 18, as the offender and decided that they have sufficient evidence to charge them with that offence. They then liaise with their local youth justice team, to help them decide on the most appropriate outcome, either an out of court disposal, such a caution, or a charge to court and the intervention to go with it.

The Youth Justice teams then meet with our partner agencies to find out what has been going on in the young person's life that has led to these behaviours, how the victims have been affected and what may help repair this harm.

As long as the victims give the police permission to share their details, we then contact the victim directly. We will first write to them asking for permission to call. Our worker will then call and arrange a first meeting. We prefer to meet face to face but can do it over the phone if needed. This meeting will allow us to hear the victim's story and how they and those connected to them have been affected.

We then explain where the young person is in the system and the options that the police and Youth Justice Service are considering. Views are gathered and shared with a panel of decision makers. After the decision on outcome has been made, we will then contact the victims again to explain the agreed outcome.

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If the young person is going to receive an out of court disposal, we will explain what the young person could do and how those harmed can be involved. If the young person is charged, then this will happen after they have been to court and we know the sentence.

The decision as to just how much victims are involved in the case is down to them. Some people just want to understand the outcome and others want more direct information and even contact with the young person to understand their perspective and help the young person understand theirs.

Our workers are skilled in restorative justice and can guide victims through these options and processes. However much victims get involved, they can have confidence that those we have worked with in the past almost universally told us that their experience was a positive one and help them in their recovery.

Thank you and I hope this is useful.

Glossary

Out of court resolution (OoCR) – is the new term used to describe what were previously named Out of court disposals. In certain circumstances the police can make a decision to resolve a matter without going to court. This tends to be for less harmful offences. They may include issuing of a caution, a letter of apology, or agreement for restorative justice.

Outcome - In April 2013, a new outcomes framework was introduced, replacing the detections previously recorded. The move from detections to outcomes was a marked change, with an emphasis on greater transparency on how all crimes recorded by the police are dealt with.