



Young people's access to advice – the evidence

Key research evidence on young people's access to advice on social welfare issues

James Kenrick

Youth Access
October 2009

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ACCESS
to information, advice and counselling

A report written for

justrights
the campaign for fair access to legal services
for children and young people

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Abbreviations used

An attempt has been made to minimise the use of jargon throughout the report, but some has been unavoidable. These are the abbreviations that are used most frequently in the report:

BAME	Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic
BSL	British Sign Language
CAB	Citizens Advice Bureau
CLS	Community Legal Service
CLSP	Community Legal Service Partnership
CSJS	Civil and Social Justice Survey
DCA	Department for Constitutional Affairs
DCSF	Department for Children, Schools and Families
DfES	Department for Education and Skills
LGO	Local Government Ombudsman
LSC	Legal Services Commission
LSRC	Legal Services Research Centre
NEET(s)	(Young people) not currently in employment, education or training
YIACS	Youth information, advice, counselling and support services

Foreword

We share a deeply-held belief that it is incumbent on those who hold power to ensure that all children and young people have ready access to high quality, independent information, advice and assistance that meets their specific needs, so that they can exercise their rights. Without this, any commitment to the wellbeing of children and young people becomes empty rhetoric.

Regrettably, current policy and services fall some way short of meeting children and young people's needs. For this reason, our four organisations – Children's Rights Alliance for England, Howard League for Penal Reform, Law Centres Federation and Youth Access – have come together to form JustRights: the campaign for fair access to legal services for children and young people.

We believe that:

- Children and young people are a uniquely vulnerable client group with legal needs and advice-seeking behaviour that are distinct from those of all other client groups.
- Only carefully tailored – and properly resourced – service delivery approaches will be successful in meeting the specific needs of children and young people.
- Current arrangements do not provide the legal services needed by children and young people if they are to enjoy the rights and protections the law affords them.
- The benefits to society of investment in accessible legal services for children and young people outweigh the costs.

We are grateful to James Kenrick for this comprehensive review of research on the subject of young people's access to advice on their social welfare problems. Alongside his recent report on *The Advice Needs of Young People*, it provides compelling evidence of young people's continuing and scandalous marginalisation from access to high quality, age-sensitive advice. Positively, in accurately identifying the range of barriers young people face, the report provides a reliable evidence base for planning solutions.

This report is essential reading for all planners, funders and providers of advice services for young people.

Julie Bishop
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Federation

Frances Crook
Director, Howard League
for Penal Reform

Mike Lindsay
National Co-ordinator,
Children Rights Alliance
for England

Barbara Rayment
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Julie Bishop

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Mike Lindsay

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I am particularly grateful to Professor Pascoe Pleasence, Alexy Buck, Dr Nigel Balmer and their colleagues at the Legal Services Research Centre for satisfying my frequent requests over the past few years for data on young adults from the Civil and Social Justice Survey. I hope that the inclusion of such robust national data lends greater credibility to the report as a whole, particularly given its consistency with the other evidence presented.

I am also deeply grateful to the many advice workers – too many to mention here – with whom I consulted throughout the lengthy process that has resulted in this report. Their insights from their experiences at the ‘front-line’ have enabled me to test the reliability and applicability of findings from published research and have added a greater degree of depth to this report.

I would like to record my gratitude to a number of people for providing detailed comments on earlier drafts of this report, in particular: Mandy Wilkins (Law Centres Federation), Mark Sefton (independent researcher), Lisa Wintersteiger (AdviceNow project, Advice Services Alliance) and Alicia Hardy (YouthNet). I would also like to thank Margaret Doyle for her help editing the report.

This piece of work has not been specifically funded. However, it has been made possible by funding from the Big Lottery Fund and the Department for Children Schools and Families which has helped support Youth Access’ advice team over the last few years.

Finally, I would like to thank everyone who is committed to working to improve young people’s access to high quality advice.

James Kenrick
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Contents

Abbreviations used ii

Foreword iii

Acknowledgements iv

Executive summary vi

Introduction 1

chapter 1

Seeking and obtaining advice 4

chapter 2

Modes of access 11

Face-to-face

Telephone

The internet

Email advice

Social networking and videolink

Using print and other media for delivering information

chapter 3

Sources of advice 21

chapter 4

Locations 31

chapter 5

Legal capability – knowledge, skills and psychological barriers 37

Awareness of rights and services

Skills

Psychological barriers

chapter 6

Shortcomings in service provision and planning 49

Young people's services

Statutory services

Mainstream advice services

Physical barriers

Fragmentation of policy and services

References 63

Executive summary

Why is this an important issue?

Youth Access estimates,¹ based on data from the Civil and Social Justice Survey, that each year:

- 16–24-year-olds will experience at least 2.3 million rights-related problems requiring advice.
- More than a quarter of these problems will be experienced by young people who are not in employment, education or training.
- Young people will not even seek advice in relation to around half of their problems – about 1.15 million problems each year.
- A further 200,000 problems will result in young people trying, but failing to obtain advice, often because there is no service able to help them.
- In all, considerably fewer than half of all young people with serious social welfare problems will actually manage to obtain advice – leaving at least a million of our most vulnerable citizens to cope with their problems unassisted each year.

This is despite evidence indicating that young people are more likely to need advice when they have a problem than other age groups, as their problems have a greater adverse impact on them and getting advice makes a bigger positive difference to the outcomes of their problems.

The cost of the country's collective failure to provide this vulnerable group with the rights-based advice services it needs is likely, based on existing research,² to amount to several hundred million pounds a year.

Recent indications are that the effects of the current UK recession are leading to a sharp rise in demand for advice from disadvantaged young people on debt, welfare benefits, homelessness and employment.

In this context, it is vital that service planners and providers gain a better understanding of how young people access advice.

This report attempts to provide a comprehensive source of evidence on the subject for practitioners, policy makers and funders to turn to as they attempt to understand and tackle unmet need. It is complemented by *The Advice Needs of Young People – The Evidence*, a separate report published by Youth Access in July 2009, which provides evidence on the extent and nature of young people's social welfare advice needs.

Seeking and obtaining advice

Young people's advice-seeking experiences differ markedly from those of the general population. Their attempts to obtain advice are relatively haphazard and unsuccessful, resulting in poor outcomes.

¹ The figures quoted on this page have been calculated by Youth Access using data from the 2004 Civil and Social Justice Survey supplied by the Legal Services Research Centre (LSRC). The calculations have been checked by the LSRC and are deemed to under-estimate the extent of young people's unmet needs for advice. For further details of the calculations, see Appendix 1 to *The Advice Needs of Young People – The Evidence*, Kenrick, J., Youth Access 2009.

² Ministry of Justice economists have used CSJS data to estimate that over a three-and-a-half-year research period, unresolved law-related problems cost individuals and the public purse at least £13 billion (DCA 2006).

Young people are less likely than the general population to obtain advice when they need it ...

The proportion of young respondents to the CSJS who have not obtained advice for their 'hard-to-solve' problems is consistently well over 50% and greater than that for other age groups. Moreover, those who obtain advice rarely do so from a recognised advice provider.

... particularly in key areas of social welfare law

Young people are particularly unlikely to obtain advice in relation to core areas of work for most advice agencies, such as debt, welfare benefits and homelessness.

NEET young adults are more likely to seek and obtain advice than non-NEETs

NEETs account for approaching half of all young adults seeking advice.

However, it is unlikely that NEETs are actually more skilled at advice-seeking

NEETs are more likely to seek advice than non-NEETs when they have a problem because they are more likely to experience severe and multiple problems and they are relatively unable to deal with their problems without help. Overall, NEETs and non-NEETs are equally likely to try but fail to get advice.

NEETs' mistrust of 'the system' affects their advice-seeking

Although some NEETs may be more familiar with 'the system' than non-NEETs, it is a system many mistrust intensely. A significant minority of disadvantaged young people do not seek help or advice of any type from anyone.

Young people are more likely than other age groups to take no action to resolve their problems

This particularly applies to younger young people and those with problems relating to homelessness, employment rights and domestic violence. As well as being less likely to seek advice, young people are also less likely to turn to courts, tribunals and ombudsman services.

When they do take action, young people are prone to delay or give up seeking help ...

Many young people find their problems, and the thought of trying to resolve them, extremely daunting. Their tendency to put off dealing with their problems can exacerbate their situation and render their problems considerably more difficult to resolve by the time they reach a professional adviser. Young people may only seek help at a very particular moment, when their need is acute, and their will to tackle their problems can dissipate quickly where there are delays in accessing a service.

... and are more likely to fail to get advice

Looking only at those who sought advice in the 2004 CSJS, young people were more than twice as likely to be unsuccessful in obtaining advice as the general adult population. Older young adults (22–24-year-olds) and those with

homelessness and welfare benefits problems appear to experience the greatest difficulties. This data provides useful indicators of service gaps and access barriers.

Some young people deal with their problems independently

Nearly a third of young people handle their problems alone, i.e. they take some action, but do not seek advice.

Many young people who don't get advice regret it

Young people who try but fail to get advice or who deal with their problems alone are far less likely to meet their objectives and often feel that advice would have improved the outcome.

Modes of access

There is no doubt that the internet and other new technologies offer exciting opportunities for improving young people's access to advice. Overall, it is clear that the greater the range of modes of access available, the more accessible a given service will be to young people. However, the available evidence raises a large number of issues for service providers and planners to consider.

Most young people access advice through 'old-fashioned' means

Despite the proliferation of new technology amongst young people, a large majority choose to access advice and support for their social welfare problems either in person or by telephone.

Young people are far more likely to access advice face-to-face than other age groups

Data from the 2004 CSJS indicates that whereas people aged 25 and over were more likely to make initial contact by telephone than face-to-face, the opposite was true for young people.

Young people's preference for face-to-face advice relates to trust ...

The evidence suggests that remote mediums, such as email and the telephone, are not as conducive to building the trust with an adviser which is necessary for young people to open up about their social welfare problems.

... and disadvantage

It is highly significant that disadvantaged young people, who experience the more severe problems, are considerably less likely to have access to telephones and the internet than their better-off peers.

Cost, deprivation and communication skills are barriers to accessing advice by telephone ...

Many young people simply cannot afford the cost of a potentially lengthy phone call. Those least likely to benefit from telephone advice services include young men and those with lower levels of education, language difficulties or lower incomes.

... but the telephone remains an important means of accessing advice

Whilst telephone advice is not appropriate for all young people, the telephone remains the most popular method of contacting advice services remotely and is particularly valuable for those who face obstacles to accessing advice by other means, e.g. due to distance, disability or mobility problems.

Many like the speed, accessibility and anonymity of telephone advice

However, it is worth noting that young people tend to say they would prefer face-to-face advice for more complex problems and that successful helplines for young people tend to focus on sensitive personal, emotional and health issues rather than legal or practical issues.

Texting can be useful for initial access and keeping in touch with clients

Providing young people with access to an adviser by text message can be limited in terms of their capacity to actually give advice. However, texting can be a valuable tool for young people to make initial contact and for advisers to keep in touch with clients where they have an ongoing case and issue reminders about appointments.

Do not assume that the internet will solve everything!

Use of the internet for seeking advice and information has increased rapidly over the last few years, but remains a minority activity. The extent to which young people currently use online advice and information services remains limited, although a small number of specialist services for young people, notably TheSite.org, are extremely successful.

Young people are less likely to use the internet for information and advice than other age groups ...

Although they are major users of the internet overall, young people mainly use the internet for entertainment and social networking and appear to be significantly less likely than other age groups to use it for formal information gathering and for getting advice.

... and have problems finding online information they can trust and understand

Many young people encounter problems finding relevant information and express concerns about whether they can fully understand or trust the information that they do find on the internet.

Some young people will nevertheless have a preference for getting their information online ...

Although most young people prefer more traditional forms of communication when accessing help, there is a small, and probably growing, group who are more likely to use modern communication technologies, including the internet. Reasons given for choosing the internet include that it is quick, anonymous, confidential and you can use it at any time.

... but relying on internet information services may not reach the most disadvantaged

There is evidence indicating that information websites may be most useful for

helping more capable people deal with their problems themselves and that disadvantaged young people are less likely to use the internet when seeking advice and support than other young people. It is worth noting that whilst 83% of AB households had access to the internet in 2007, this fell to 30% of DE households. Low users of the internet include boys; young people from ethnic minority backgrounds, particularly Muslim youth; and young people with disabilities.

Email advice can extend access but can be limited in its depth ...

Accessing advice by email can be attractive to people who are uneasy about talking to an adviser face-to-face or by phone. However, because emails are limited in the process of question and answer that can happen quickly by phone or face-to-face, it tends to be easier to provide generic information or initial advice rather than in-depth personalised advice via email.

... and requires a specialist approach

Email advice services appear to work best for young people when they are targeted specifically at this client group and are provided by specialist online advisers, often at a national rather than local level.

Social networking and internet forums

There are likely to be rapid developments in service delivery methods over the coming years as technology develops. Social networking may end up offering new opportunities for advice providers. Currently, young people tend to reject internet chat rooms as reliable sources of advice. However, tightly moderated message boards, delivered alongside self-help material, could become an effective way of providing peer support.

Printed information still has a role to play

Young people surveyed in the 2004 CSJS were more likely to use printed material than the internet to resolve their problems. It appears that disadvantaged young people may be more likely to use printed material than other young people, possibly due to the difficulties they encounter in using other media, such as the internet.

Sources of advice

Given young people's unique pattern of advice-seeking behaviour, it is vital to understand where young people turn when they want to get advice, and why.

Young people want to talk to someone they can trust ...

Key characteristics young people seek in any source of support include: friendliness; patience; an understanding of young people's issues; trustworthiness; respect for confidentiality; an ability to listen; safety; and a non-judgemental culture. Above all, a trusting relationship between client and adviser appears key to conducting any effective work with young people at risk.

... and are most likely to trust someone known to them

The overwhelming majority of young people, particularly younger young

people, approach people or organisations known to them. This reliance on familiarity leads many young people to approach non-expert sources of help, often family and friends, in preference to professional advice agencies.

When they do seek professional advice and support, it is often from non-expert, non-independent sources ...

Young people are much less likely than other age groups to approach an independent and appropriately qualified or trained source of advice, such as a solicitor or a Citizens Advice Bureau.

... including the local council ...

Young people, particularly disadvantaged young people, are more likely than other age groups to seek advice from the local council, probably due to the type of problems they experience and their ignorance of other sources of advice, rather than any preference for local authority advice.

... and youth professionals

Teachers and youth workers tend to be cited by young people as the most effective and approachable problem-solving adults after parents and carers. Youth workers, with whom young people have one million contacts each month, are an important source of help, particularly for the more disadvantaged and disaffected young people.

Many young people are reluctant to go to mainstream legal advice services

There is a considerable body of evidence, both from research with advice providers and with young people, confirming that young people rarely access advice services established for the general population, such as CABx and most solicitors. Research with such agencies typically finds that young people are the most under-represented client group of all. Access appears particularly poor for younger young people.

Young people want their advisers to specialise in working with young people ...

Due to a strong sense of belonging and identity, young people tend to be far more comfortable getting advice from advisers who are focused solely on their age group rather than on the public as a whole.

... and to be a 'powerful friend' who can advocate on their behalf

Whilst young people are rarely impressed by quality marks or qualifications, they value the ability of their advisers to get things sorted out.

Some young people may like to get advice from peers, but more research is needed

Given the Government's stated desire to see an increase in peer-to-peer advice services, there is a notable paucity of evidence to assist in gauging the extent to which peer advice services are either effective or desired by young people. Any peer advice clearly needs to be provided on a managed, moderated and professional basis.

Continuity of advice is important to young people

Services will need to find a balance between young people's desire to deal with a single worker and the need for advisers to have an appropriate level of knowledge and expertise. Continuity of service may be more important than continuity of adviser.

Locations

The location of an advice service is crucial to its accessibility. It often makes sense to integrate advice services alongside other support services already used by disadvantaged young people.

Advice needs to be available where young people already go ...

Due to the difficulties many agencies have in reaching out to young people, and particularly to disadvantaged and disaffected young people, it is sensible to locate advice services where young people already go.

... such as youth drop-in centres offering co-located support services in accessible and safe locations

Young people prefer to get all the advice they need within one building rather than being passed around different agencies. One stop shops and drop-in centres for young people located in the community – and not too closely linked to authority – tend to be most effective in reaching and engaging disaffected and excluded young people

Mainstream advice services may need to establish separate provision ...

Wherever possible, advice services for young people should be co-located with other relevant services for young people rather than co-located with advice services for adults.

... or conduct carefully planned outreach work

Establishing outreach advice services in youth settings is a realistic option for many mainstream services and can facilitate the 'trust transfer' between professionals that is necessary for effective referrals.

'Detached' youth work can reach the hardest-to-reach young people

Street-based youth work and mobile youth facilities are two of the most common methods for reaching isolated and disaffected young people and can be effective at reaching young people on their own territory.

Advice in schools may not reach the most disadvantaged

Although schools meet the essential criterion that advice should be delivered where young people already go, they tend to be too closely associated with authority for many young people. More disadvantaged young people often hold particularly acute confidentiality concerns about getting advice in schools. Nonetheless, school can be an effective location for delivering community education and reaching young parents and Asian young women.

Locating services can be particularly tricky in urban areas

Young people are often unfamiliar with anywhere outside the immediate areas in which they live and go to school. For young people in gangs it can be dangerous to travel through the territory claimed by another gang – an advice service in the ‘wrong’ area is effectively inaccessible.

Legal capability

Young people’s ‘legal capability’ – their knowledge, skills and attitudes – is highly influential on their advice-seeking behaviour and success. Psychological factors are particularly significant for adolescents.

Low awareness of rights is a major barrier to young people seeking advice

For people with a legal problem, knowledge of rights is critical, but levels of awareness amongst children and young people of the fact they have rights, let alone the detail of those rights, tend to be relatively low.

A lack of awareness of available services compounds young people’s inability to get advice ...

Young people’s awareness of structures for advice and the existence of local advice services that could help them is low, particularly amongst those young people who are most in need of advice. Low awareness of services renders young people less likely to take action to resolve their problems.

... and they lack awareness of the *relevance* of services to their specific problems

Most young people are unable to identify their social welfare problems as legal problems and are unaware of the difference between civil matters, criminal matters and issues where a legal remedy may not be appropriate. An additional barrier relates to young people’s perceptions of what services actually do.

Some young people lack key emotional and practical skills necessary for getting advice and resolving their problems

Many young people have difficulties identifying that they have a problem that requires advice and knowing when to get help. Their ability to resolve their problems can be further hampered by poor verbal communication skills; difficulties dealing with the emotional impact that their problems have on their lives; a lack of confidence; and lack of persistence.

Young people in transition may experience a number of psychological barriers to getting advice ...

There is evidence that psychological factors may play a highly significant role in young people failing to get advice.

... including disaffection ...

The general disaffection of Britain’s youth and their lack of engagement in social affairs and politics is also to be found in relation to a legal system and processes designed by and for adults. Disadvantaged young people with the

greatest experience of the legal system often view the law as something to be used against them rather than for their benefit. Early advice-seeking experience can be highly influential on future advice-seeking behaviour – a negative experience can put a young person off seeking help again.

... a sense of powerlessness to resolve their problems ...

Not thinking that advice would make any difference to the outcome is the most common reason given by young people in the CSJS for not seeking advice. Other reasons for inaction include: finding their problems too stressful to sort out; being scared of the consequences if they complain; not knowing what to do; and feeling that they won't be listened to or will have their problems trivialised by adult professionals. Together, these reasons indicate a strong sense of powerlessness.

... concerns about confidentiality ...

Assurances about confidentiality are key to building relationships of trust with young people. However, many young people hold strong concerns about their parents, teachers or friends finding out that they have sought help. Young men and those in lower social grades are particularly concerned about peer attitudes.

... and a fear of loss of control once personal information has been imparted to an adviser

Being told what is best for them or having someone doing things for them without adequate explanation and consultation can exacerbate a young person's sense of lack of control and further alienate those who are attempting to assert their independence and individuality.

Shortcomings in service provision and planning

Structural problems with the way services are currently planned and provided impact adversely on young people's access to advice.

Youth organisations can lack the focus, knowledge and skills needed to identify legal issues and provide good-quality advice ...

A wide range of youth professionals have a vital role to play in assessing young people's needs, providing assistance within the limits of their competence, identifying where a specialist intervention may be required and making appropriate and timely referrals – but many are ill-equipped to do so.

- Connexions' focus on education, training and work has been unhelpful – there is evidence that Personal Advisers often fail to identify a range of underlying issues that represent significant barriers to learning.
- Training of youth professionals rarely includes a substantial focus on rights-based issues, such as housing, homelessness, benefits and debt. Nor does it usually focus on the specific skills needed to provide rights-based advice.
- Youth workers are often reluctant to play the crucial advocacy role needed to enable young people to negotiate their way through complex bureaucracies.

- Youth organisations, in a mirror of the experiences of their clients, are often marginalised from mainstream advice sector structures and processes, so are not consistently or effectively integrated into relevant referral networks.

Statutory services can offer poor access and quality, as well as lacking the ability to advocate independently in young people’s best interests

- There is evidence of poor levels of access and service (including poor quality advice) experienced by some young people from statutory services, including local authorities, Connexions and JobCentre Plus.
- Young people generally express a preference for getting advice from voluntary organisations, where they tend to find services more approachable and responsive, as well as liking the independence on offer.
- There is anecdotal evidence that, in the transition of Connexions services to local authorities, the capacity of Personal Advisers to provide independent advice has been lost in many areas.
- In some disturbing cases, young people are being blocked from getting independent legal advice by local authority staff concerned about legal challenges to their employing body.

Mainstream advice agencies are not set up to deal with the range of non-legal issues on which young people also need support

Young people’s desire for holistic, age-specific services that can deal with a range of inter-related emotional, personal and health issues, as well as legal problems, poses major challenges to advice services established for the general public.

- Young people can be deterred by advice agencies’ intake systems – ‘rules’ set by agencies on how to contact them; long queues at drop-in sessions; intimidating waiting rooms full of adults; the offer of appointments two or three weeks ahead with no interim advice.
- Mainstream advice agencies suffer from an image problem – young people perceive them as unapproachable, stuffy, bureaucratic and old.
- Young people may perceive staff attitudes and skills as not being sensitive to their needs – unwelcoming; judgemental; not listening; and full of jargon.
- There can be a gap between the legal knowledge of solicitors and advisers and the kinds of advice that children and young people actually need.
- In practice, many advisers, particularly where they are funded under the current legal aid system, may not have the capacity to attend to young people’s wider needs beyond simple legal casework.

Mainstream advice services certainly have a very important role to play in ensuring young people receive good-quality advice, particularly on more complex legal problems. However, the evidence raises interesting questions about whether the current generation of young people might struggle to connect with services like CABx even when they are older, unless those services are able to better adapt to their needs.

Physical barriers can include transport difficulties and poor access for disabled young people

- Young people tend to travel relatively short distances to get advice.
- Transport difficulties – particularly the cost, safety and availability in rural areas of public transport – present a significant barrier to young people’s access to advice services.
- Physical barriers to services for disabled people can include: transport problems, such as lack of access to a car or problems using public transport; shortage of disabled parking spaces; lack of space for wheelchairs; ill-equipped and small waiting areas and interview rooms; and lack of suitable toilet facilities.

A lack of joined-up policy and planning is stifling development

- There is a distinct lack of any concerted attempt by the relevant government departments to produce a joined-up strategy for addressing young people’s access to advice.
- Planning of young people’s Information Advice and Guidance services tends to be highly careers-focussed and often overlooks young people’s wider social welfare advice needs, even though the evidence is growing that good legal advice could make a significant contribution across all five Every Child Matters outcomes.
- Young people are not a particular priority for the Community Legal Service and the legal aid system’s adult-centred funding models are not conducive to meeting the needs of children and young people, whose needs cut across areas of law.
- There may be scope for forward-thinking local authorities to link their own grants budgets for advice services with those for Integrated Youth Support Services and youth homelessness services, but none appear to have done so hitherto.
- Partnerships and referral relationships between youth services and advice services are under-developed.

Introduction

Background to this report

Youth Access' latest estimates,³ based on data from the Civil and Social Justice Survey, indicate that each year 16–24-year-olds will experience at least 2.3 million rights-related problems requiring advice, but fewer than half will manage to obtain advice. As many as 200,000 problems will result in young people trying, but failing to obtain advice, often because there is no service able to help them. This is despite evidence indicating that young people are more likely to need advice when they have a problem than other age groups, as their problems have a greater adverse impact on them and getting advice makes a bigger positive difference to the outcomes of their problems.

The cost of the country's collective failure to provide this vulnerable group with the rights-based advice services it needs is likely, based on existing research,⁴ to amount to several hundred million pounds a year.

Improving young people's access to high quality rights-based advice has been a strategic priority for Youth Access for the past decade. In that time, we have published a number of reports on the subject of young people's needs for advice, their access to advice, models of delivery and the impact of advice (e.g. Kenrick 2002; Balmer et al 2007; Kenrick 2007; MBA 2007; Kenrick 2009).

This report focuses solely on the second aspect of this broader subject: young people's access to advice. It sets out the available evidence on young people's advice-seeking behaviour and barriers to their access to services. It attempts to explain the implications of the evidence in greater detail than has been done before.

The **purpose** of the report is to provide a one-stop evidence resource for anyone wishing to understand this complex subject and respond appropriately. It is hoped that it will be used by:

- providers developing advice services for young people to inform their models of delivery and to refer to the most relevant evidence in their applications for funding;
- policy-makers in the legal and youth sectors to inform their policies, priorities and strategies;
- funders to ensure they focus their limited funding on projects that have been designed on the basis of the evidence available;
- researchers with an interest in the subject to inform further research.

The report is intended to be of particular relevance to the following initiatives in which Youth Access is currently involved:

- JustRights: the campaign for fair access to legal services for children and young people;

³ For details, see Appendix 1 of companion report, *The Advice Needs of Young People – The Evidence*, Kenrick, J., Youth Access, 2009.

⁴ See footnote 2.

- The Department for Children, Schools and Families' work on information, advice and guidance services for young people;
- The Legal Services Commission's work to develop access to legal aid for vulnerable groups;
- The Working Together for Advice project's Access to Advice workstream.

Scope

This report focuses on young people's access to advice in relation to **social welfare rights-based** issues, such as housing, homelessness, welfare benefits, debt, employment rights, education rights, social services and discrimination. The report does not generally focus on young people's access to information, advice, guidance and support in relation to issues such as careers, health or relationships, although it is acknowledged that such issues can, for some young people, have a rights-based aspect to them.

The report is intended to be of principal relevance to the young people's (non-careers) information, advice and guidance sector and the legal advice sector, although evidence cited is occasionally drawn from, and may have relevance, beyond these sectors.

The definition of 'young person' for the purposes of this report includes those between the ages of 13 and 25. However, due to the scarcity of robust data on under-18-year-olds, there is a greater focus in some parts of the report on the 18–24 'young adult' age group.

The report does not examine in detail, although it touches upon, issues relating to young people's needs for advice, the impact of advice for young people or successful models of delivery, as these are the subjects of separate papers already published, or due to be published, by Youth Access.⁵

Methodology

This report is based primarily on desk research. The author has tracked research evidence on the subject of young people's access to advice for more than eight years, although the bulk of the desk research for this report was conducted between July 2007 and July 2009.

In addition to desk research, the author has consulted extensively with colleagues and practitioners in the field, drawing on the expertise in Youth Access' network of over 200 member agencies, in order to gain a deeper understanding of the issues explored in this report and to ensure the evidence presented rings true to those 'on the front-line'.

Youth Access also conducted three focus groups with young people during 2008 focusing on access to legal advice. Although these focus groups were conducted to inform a separate piece of work and are not reported on explicitly in this report, they provided an additional opportunity to test young people's views on some of the emerging issues covered in this report.

⁵ All of Youth Access' reports on advice are available to download from www.youthaccess.org.uk/publications.

Data from the English and Welsh Civil and Social Justice Survey

The report draws extensively on both published and unpublished data from the English and Welsh Civil and Social Justice Survey (CSJS). The CSJS is a major, and increasingly influential, national private household survey of adults aged 18 and over focusing on people's experiences of everyday problems. It provides detailed information on the nature, pattern and impact of people's experiences of rights problems which were 'difficult to solve' and the use and success of problem resolution strategies.

Categories of civil law problems covered in the CSJS include: employment, housing (divided into problems to do with rented housing, and to do with owned housing), homelessness or the threat of being homeless, money/debt, welfare benefits, consumer, neighbours, personal injury, clinical negligence, discrimination, divorce, relationship breakdown, domestic violence, children, unfair police treatment, immigration and mental health.

Three main CSJS surveys have been conducted: in 2001,⁶ 2004⁷ and, on a continuous basis, from 2006-2008.⁸

Youth Access has worked with the Legal Services Research Centre (LSRC), which leads the CSJS, over a number of years to analyse data on 18–24-year-olds from the surveys, providing a unique insight into the nature and impact of young people's problems and how they try to resolve them.

6 Reported in Pleasence et al. 2004. Findings on young people are the result of analysis by Youth Access of data supplied by the LSRC.

7 Reported in Pleasence 2006. The main findings on young people are reported in *Young People and Civil Justice: Findings from the 2004 English and Welsh Civil and Social Justice Survey*, Nigel J. Balmer, Tania Tam & Pascoe Pleasence, LSRC/Youth Access, 2007.

8 Broad findings from interviews conducted in 2006 and 2007 are set out in annual reports available on the LSRC's website (www.lsrc.org.uk/publications.htm).

chapter 1

Seeking and obtaining advice

This chapter sets out the evidence about the likelihood of young people seeking advice, particularly in relation to social welfare problems. Young people are less likely to seek advice than are older people, and are more likely to fail to get the advice they seek. Interestingly, disadvantaged young people are more likely to seek advice; less positively, they are just as likely as their peers to fail to get advice when they do seek it.

It is important to note that whether or not a young person eventually ends up obtaining advice may be determined by a large number of factors, including their perception of their problem, their advice-seeking strategy and the availability and accessibility of suitable services. Many of these issues are explored further in Chapters 5 and 6.

This chapter is heavily reliant on data relating to 18–24-year-olds from the Civil and Social Justice Survey. No equivalent data on under-18s is available.

Young people are less likely to obtain advice when they need it ...

Since research by Genn indicating that 18–24-year-olds were three times less likely to have obtained advice on their legal problems than people aged 45–54,⁹ a growing body of evidence has emerged to confirm that young people are less likely than the population as a whole to obtain advice on the social welfare problems that they experience.

The most recent and robust data is provided by the Legal Services Research Centre's (LSRC) Civil and Social Justice Survey (CSJS). The 2004 CSJS indicates that 58% of 18–24-year-olds faced their social welfare problems without obtaining advice, compared to 47% of older respondents (Balmer et al. 2007). This is a slight improvement on the position in the 2001 CSJS, where 59% of 18–24-year-olds failed to obtain advice,¹⁰ but confirms that a minority of young adults manage to get help with what are typically complex problems.¹¹

It should be noted here that few of the 42% of young people in the 2004 CSJS who obtained advice did so from a recognised advice provider – see Chapter 3 for more details of sources of advice used.

⁹ Data extracted by Youth Access from data tables in Genn (1999) and reported in Kenrick (2002).

¹⁰ Unpublished analysis by Youth Access of 2001 CSJS data on 18–24-year-olds supplied by the LSRC.

¹¹ See the companion paper to this report, Kenrick, J. (2009), for details of the types of problems experienced by young people and their relative severity compared to those experienced by other groups.

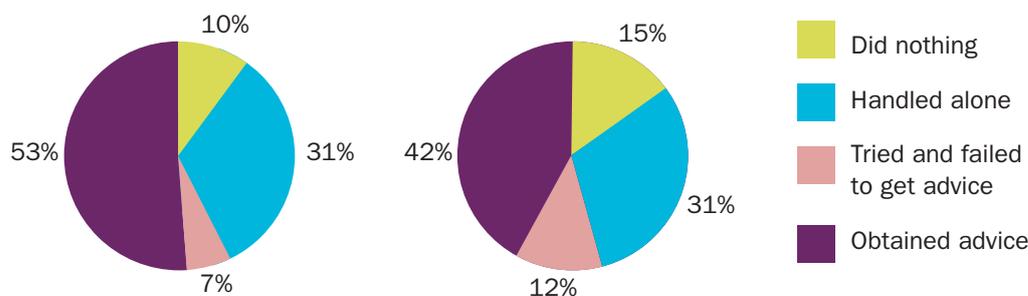


Fig. 1.1 25+ year-olds' advice-seeking strategy and success (Source: 2004 CSJS)

Fig. 1.2 18-24-year-olds' advice-seeking strategy and success (Source: 2004 CSJS)

Advice-seeking behaviour of NEET young adults

The LSRC have analysed the comparative advice-seeking success of 18–24-year-olds who were not in employment, education or training (NEETs) and other young adults (i.e. non-NEETs).¹² The NEETs group, which can be used as a proxy for disadvantaged young adults, was

- half as likely to have handled problems alone as the non-NEETs group (19% vs 38%);
- more likely to have sought advice;
- and, as a consequence, more likely to have obtained advice (51% vs 36%).

These differences may be partly explained by the NEETs group's greater likelihood of experiencing severe problems, the greater impact on their lives of the problems they were experiencing¹³ and their relative inability to deal with their problems without help.¹⁴ It is unlikely that NEETs are actually more skilled at advice-seeking; although some NEETs may be more familiar with 'the system' than non-NEETs, overall they were equally likely to try but fail to get advice.

Remarkably, despite accounting for less than one-fifth of 18–24-year-olds in the 2004 CSJS, once their greater likelihood of experiencing problems (and multiple problems)¹⁵ and their greater likelihood of seeking advice is taken into account, NEETs accounted for approaching half of all young adults seeking advice.¹⁶

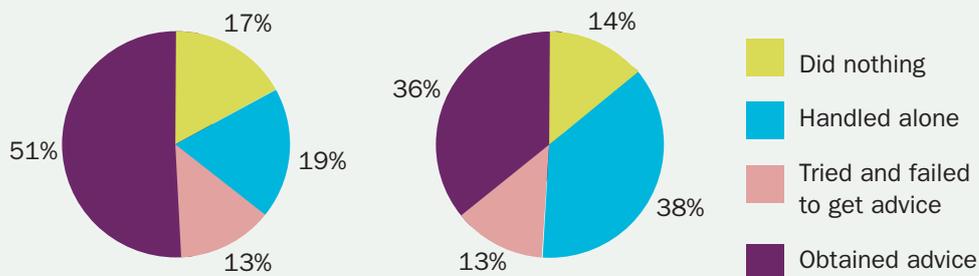


Fig. 1.3 18-24-year-old NEETs' advice-seeking strategy and success (Source: 2004 CSJS)

Fig. 1.4 18-24-year-old non-NEETs' advice-seeking strategy and success (Source: 2004 CSJS)

12 Unpublished analysis by the LSRC of data on NEETs aged 18–24 from the 2004 CSJS.

13 For example, 47% of NEETs in the 2004 CSJS reported experiencing stress-related illness as a result of their problems (compared to 27% of adults aged 25 and over); 62% worried all or most of the time about their problems (vs 38% of 25+); 26% reported physical ill-health (vs 15%); 11% reported violence aimed at them (vs 4%); 15% reported loss of home (vs 5%).

14 Garvey et al. (2009) point out that some of the most disadvantaged young adults experience such severe needs and face such extreme challenges that they are either compelled to seek help or they end up receiving help as a result of being picked up by existing support systems.

15 NEETs accounted for 39% of all problems, due to higher incidence of experiencing problems generally and of experiencing multiple problems – see Kenrick, J. (2009) for further details.

16 45% of advice-seeking by 18–24-year-olds was by NEETs and 48% of this age group who obtained advice were NEETs.

... particularly in key areas of social welfare law

Young people are more likely than older people to experience problems in relation to key areas of social welfare, but are less likely than older people to obtain advice on these problems.

The 2004 CSJS indicated that young people are reasonably successful in obtaining advice in relation to issues that are more commonly dealt with by private-practice solicitors.¹⁷ For example, 100% of 18–24-year-olds with problems concerning children and 79% with personal injury problems obtained advice (Balmer et al 2007).

In contrast, young people appear much less likely to obtain advice for issues related to the main areas of social welfare law dealt with by the not-for-profit advice sector and that are the focus of the Community Legal Service (CLS) (see Figure 1.5). This was particularly true with consumer problems, welfare benefits and money/debt problems. The figures relating to homelessness, discrimination, employment problems and rented housing problems are of equal concern, however, and are considerably higher than equivalent figures for the general population. Overall, only 37% of young people with problems in these seven categories managed to obtain advice.

This data must be read alongside equivalent evidence from the CSJS indicating that young people accounted for a disproportionate number of those people who had experienced problems in most of these same categories of social welfare law – see the companion paper, *The Advice Needs of Young People – The Evidence*, for full details. This should be of the utmost relevance to planners of Community Legal Services and services for young people, for it indicates a major failure on the part of funders and providers to meet the advice needs of this age group.

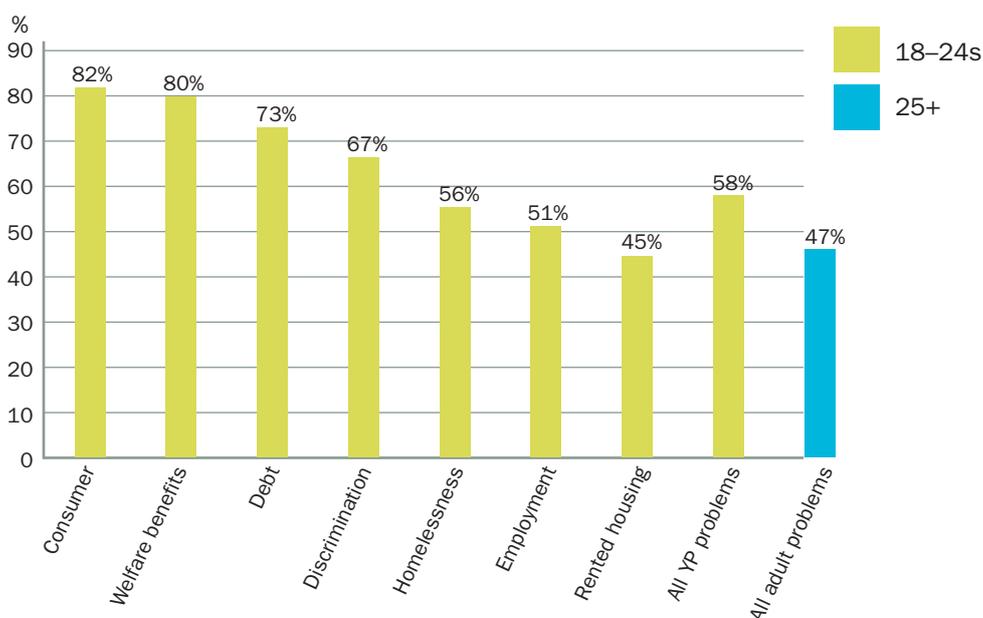


Fig. 1.5 Percentage of 18–24-year-olds with problems who did not obtain advice (Source: 2004 CSJS)

17 This may be partly explained by the fact that young adults with prior experience of the criminal justice and/or social care systems, in which they may have had previous encounters with private practice solicitors, have greater needs for civil legal advice.

In general, people are more likely to seek advice for relatively serious problems, such as homelessness.¹⁸ However, this association seems less clear in the case of young people. For example, in the 2001 CSJS only 7% of young people with homelessness problems managed to obtain advice, compared to 24% of young people with consumer problems (and 77% of people aged 25 and over with homelessness problems).

Interpreting CSJS data on advice-seeking strategies, behaviour and success

The CSJS asks all respondents who had experienced at least one 'non-trivial' problem a number of questions to explore their reaction to each of the problems they experienced, including whether or not they took any action and, if they did take action, what form that action took and how successful it was. For analysis, the data is broken down into a number of main categories:

- Took no action / did nothing to resolve their problems
- Handled their problems alone
- Tried to obtain advice, but failed and then took no further action
- Tried to obtain advice, but failed and then handled their problems alone
- Obtained advice successfully (whether or not at first attempt)

The first two of these categories contain people who **did not seek advice**; the other three categories can be grouped together to examine those who **sought advice**. Similarly, the third and fourth categories are sometimes grouped together for analysis of all those who tried but failed to obtain advice (see, for example, Figs. 1.1 to 1.4).

The CSJS contains further questions probing respondents' reasons for not taking action, where respondents turned for help, whether they were referred on and whether they met their objectives. Some of this data is cited later in this report.

Young people are less likely to seek advice than older adults

Figures from the CSJS indicate that young people are more likely than other age groups to take no action to resolve their civil law problems. In the 2001 CSJS 22% of 18–24-year-olds did nothing, compared to 19% of older respondents,¹⁹ whilst in 2004 the corresponding figures were 15% of young people and 10% of older respondents (Balmer et al. 2007). Corresponding research in Scotland similarly found that 16–24-year-olds were less likely to seek help than any other age group (Scottish Executive 2004).

The 2004 CSJS indicates that 54% of 18–24-year-olds with 'difficult to solve' social welfare problems sought advice, compared to 59% of people aged 25 and over.

More recent, although not directly comparable, data is available from a survey conducted for Citizens Advice in 2008. This indicated that, although 18–24-year-olds were more likely to have experienced a problem over the previous twelve months than any other age group (65% vs 53% of all respondents), and were only slightly less likely to have sought advice (54% vs 57%), they were

¹⁸ The LSRC have also pointed out that whether people obtain general advice and support or more specialised legal advice varies significantly depending on the *type* of problem being experienced. See, for example, Pleasence, P. (2006).

¹⁹ Analysis by Youth Access of data from the 2001 CSJS supplied by the LSRC.

the least likely age group to have sought advice from an advice-giving organisation (25% of 18-24 year olds, compared to 38% of all respondents).²⁰

Amongst the general population, those least likely to take action in the 2001 CSJS included people with mental health problems, men and people from BAME (Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic) groups, notably Asian groups (Pleasence 2004). In the same survey, young people were particularly unlikely to take action, compared to other age groups, in relation to homelessness, employment and domestic violence problems.

Even in the sphere of criminal advice, where there is a duty to be informed of rights, the take-up of advice by young offenders is low. It has been noted that take-up rates by young people of advice in police stations are as low as 32% (Brookman and Pierpoint 2003).

It is important to bear in mind again here that young people are not an homogenous group and there are interesting differences in advice-seeking behaviour within this age group. Thus, whilst disadvantaged young people appear more likely overall to seek advice than other young people, it is worth noting research by Prince's Trust (2003), which found that 21% of disadvantaged young people would not seek help or advice of any type from anyone, largely due to their intense mistrust of 'the system' and services generally.

Rates of action also differ according to age. Amongst the young people surveyed in the CSJS, younger young people emerge as significantly more likely to have taken no action. In the 2004 CSJS 37% of 18–21-year-olds did nothing or subsequently gave up, compared to 27% of 22–24-year-olds (Balmer et al. 2007). This was a repeat of a pattern identified from the 2001 CSJS, in which 18-year-olds were twice as likely as 23–24-year-olds to have taken no action.

Some young people deal with their problems independently

The 2004 CSJS showed that 31% of 18–24-year-olds handled their problems alone, i.e. they took some action, but did not seek advice (Balmer et al. 2007).

Research for Citizens Advice suggested that some people are determined to deal with their problems independently (MORI 2004). These people, the report says, tend to be better educated or believe in their ability to sort the problem out themselves, and if they do get advice, they are more likely to use the telephone or internet than other people. Also, people tend to be more likely to handle their problems alone if they have done so previously (Pleasence 2006).

Over 90% of people of all ages in the 2004 CSJS who handled their problems alone talked or wrote to 'the other side' and attempted to negotiate a solution. Given the knowledge and communication skills necessary to do this, there must be doubts about how many of the young people who end up handling their problems alone are actually able to successfully resolve their problems.²² Many people (again of all ages) obtained information from self-

20 Data prepared by BMRB for Citizens Advice (unpublished). The survey asked 1005 people aged 18 and over whether they had experienced any problems in twelve categories of problem type over the last twelve months. Of 18–24-year-olds, 65% had experienced at least one problem, compared to 53% of all respondents. The twelve categories were: health; problems with goods or services; employment problems; benefits; legal matters; housing problems; relationship/family matters; debts (including credit); tax issues; education; discrimination; citizenship/immigration.

21 Analysis by Youth Access of data from the 2001 CSJS supplied by the LSRC.

22 Evidence of young people's relative lack of confidence, knowledge of their rights, communication skills and literacy skills is highlighted in Chapter 5.

help guides or the internet or discussed their situation with friends or relatives prior to or while acting (Pleasence 2006).

Initial analysis by the LSRC of fresh data from CSJS respondents between January 2006 and September 2008²³ indicates that younger respondents are twice as likely to meet their objectives where they do manage to obtain advice in comparison to when they handle their problems alone.²⁴

Indeed, many young people regret not getting advice sooner. In the 2004 CSJS, 35% of young respondents (and 28% of older respondents) suggested that they regretted their problem resolution strategy, or lack of one. Most often young people said that they wished they had got advice, got more advice, acted sooner or tried harder to get advice (Balmer et al. 2007).

When they do seek advice, young people are prone to delay or give up ...

Anecdotal evidence from youth advice agencies suggests that young people who do obtain advice are prone to delay seeking help, often rendering their problems considerably more difficult to resolve. Many young people find their problems, and the thought of trying to resolve them, extremely daunting. The tendency is to put off dealing with the problem in the hope that it might go away, which can exacerbate the original problem and compound it with other related problems by the time they reach a professional adviser.

More than one in six people (of all ages) responding to the 2001 CSJS took more than three months to obtain advice. People with debt, benefits, rented housing or consumer problems were most likely to delay (Genn et al. 2004).

... and they are more likely to fail to actually get advice

Trying and failing to get advice is a useful indicator of service gaps and access barriers.

In the 2004 CSJS 18–24-year-olds were more likely to have tried and failed to get advice than people aged 25 and over (12% vs 7%) (Balmer et al. 2007).

Looking only at those who sought advice, young people were more than twice as likely to be unsuccessful in obtaining advice as the general adult population.²⁵

The LSRC has reported that trying but failing to obtain advice had a significant impact upon whether young people met their objectives for resolving their problems, with only 11% meeting all of their objectives, compared to over 40% for those obtaining advice or handling problems alone. Of 18–24-year-olds who sought advice but failed to obtain any, 41% said that they wished they had got advice. Common reasons for this were that advice would have improved the outcome and that problems were more serious than they appeared initially (Balmer et al. 2007).

Also, 22–24-year-olds appear to be particularly likely to fail in attempts to obtain advice (16% failed vs 8% of 18–21-year-olds in 2004) (Balmer et al. 2007).

In 2001, young people were most likely to try and fail to obtain advice in relation to homelessness and welfare benefits problems²⁶ – indicating that for many young people two of the most common areas of advice demand are not being met by appropriate service provision.

23 The CSJS is now a continuous survey. The LSRC analysed data for Youth Access relating to 9,591 adults aged 18 and over, including 841 young adults aged between 18 and 24, interviewed between 12th January 2006 and 31st September 2008.

24 This data indicates that, in contrast to the exceptional apparent effect of getting advice for young people, older adults meet their objectives only slightly more often where they obtain advice.

25 Further analysis by Youth Access of data from the 2004 CSJS indicates that 22.2% of 18–24-year-olds who sought advice failed in their attempts, compared to only 10.2% of survey respondents of all ages.

26 Analysis by Youth Access of data from 2001 CSJS. We have not had access to comparable data from the 2004 survey.

Young people are less likely to turn to courts and tribunals than other age groups

There is little evidence available regarding young people's use of the civil courts and tribunals system. However, what evidence there is suggests that they are considerably less likely to use courts and tribunals to resolve their problems and disputes than other age groups and, where they do, they are less likely to obtain representation.

Young people in the 2004 CSJS were significantly less likely to resolve problems through courts, tribunals and other processes such as mediation and ombudsmen. Only 5% of 18–24-year-olds used these processes, compared with 11% of people aged 25 and over (Balmer et al. 2007). It is unclear to what extent, if at all, this can be attributed to differences in the types of problems experienced by young people and older adults.

Research for the Lord Chancellor twenty years ago (Genn and Genn 1989) showed that only 14% of appellants aged under 25 were represented at social security appeal tribunals, compared to 25% of appellants aged over 25. This finding, although old, may nevertheless be instructive in the absence of more up-to-date data and must be a cause for concern given that study's finding that representation at tribunals considerably improves the likelihood of a favourable result.

A research study conducted by MORI for the Local Government Ombudsman (LGO) in 1999 found that only 12% of the complaints against local councils they had received were from people aged under 35 (MORI 1999). More recently the LGO has told Youth Access that they get fewer than fifty complaints a year from young people.²⁷ In response, the LGO has established a separate service specifically for young people.

27 This fact should be read in the context of young people being relatively major users of council services, due to the nature of the problems they experience, e.g. relating to homelessness, education and social services.

chapter 2

Modes of access

This chapter explains what methods of obtaining advice are preferred by young people and sets out what is known about the limitations for young people of particular methods, including online and telephone advice.

The internet and mobile phones have revolutionised how young people communicate and have affected how young people access services. Overall, it is clear that the greater the range of modes of access available, the more accessible a given service will be to young people. However, the available evidence raises a large number of issues for service providers and planners to consider.

Face-to-face

Most young people prefer to get advice face-to-face ...

There is no doubt that the internet and other new technologies offer exciting opportunities for improving young people's access to advice. However, Garvey et al. (2009) found that, despite the proliferation of new technology amongst young adults aged 16–25, a large proportion of this age group preferred more 'old-fashioned' means of communication when seeking advice and support, with face-to-face the most popular choice. The results from this study are particularly pertinent given that it was conducted online.²⁸

Research in the legal advice sector indicates strongly that young people are far more likely than other age groups to access advice in person rather than by other means. Whereas people aged 25 and over are more likely to make initial contact by telephone than face-to-face, the opposite is true for young people.

The LSRC's analysis of 2004 CSJS data showed that 67% of those aged 18–24 who accessed advice contacted first advisers in person in the first instance, compared to just 40% of adults aged 25 and over (Balmer et al. 2007) (see Figure 2.1). As a consequence, they were less likely than older adults to contact first advisers either by telephone (17% vs 27%) or by telephone and then in person (17% vs 33%). This tendency to contact first advisers in person was even more marked for 18–21-year-olds, of whom 71% contacted first advisers in person, with only 21% doing so by telephone and 8% by telephone and then in person (see Figure 2.2).

A number of other studies have confirmed young people's preference for face-to-face advice. For example, in a small qualitative study of young people who had received legal advice conducted for Youth Access, all 27 of the young people interviewed felt that receiving information and advice face-to-face was the best method of getting advice, whilst only three identified the telephone as one of the best methods for getting advice (MBA 2007).

28 nfpSynergy conducted research online among a nationally representative sample of 654 16–24-year-olds in late October 2007. The sample was drawn from nfpSynergy's Youth Engagement Monitor, which polls 1,100 11–25-year-olds in the UK every six months on a range of questions relating to young people's engagement with and awareness of charities and their work.

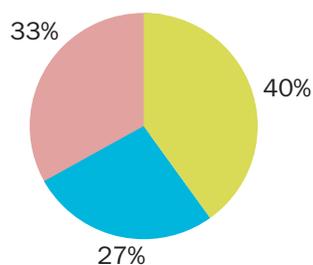
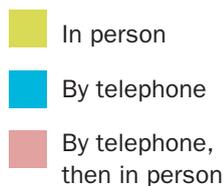


Fig. 2.1 Mode of initial access to advice on social welfare problems: Adults aged 25 and over (Source: 2004 CSJS)

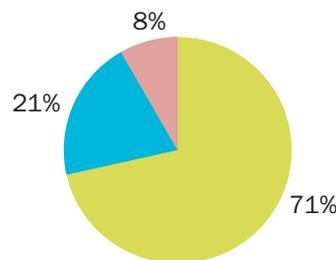


Fig. 2.2 Mode of initial access to advice on social welfare problems: 18–21-year-olds (Source: 2004 CSJS)

Research for the then Department for Education and Skills (DfES) relating to the Connexions Service (Joyce et al. 2003) and for Citizens Advice (Wintersteiger 2006) has also indicated that face-to-face advice was favoured by young people over other modes of access.

... due to their need to develop trust with their adviser and the severity of their problems

There are a number of reasons why young people prefer face-to-face advice, including the nature of their problems and communication skills, but trust appears to be the key issue. Several studies have produced consistent findings on this issue. For example, Wintersteiger (2006), reporting on focus groups with young people for Citizens Advice, concluded:

‘Young people articulate the need to develop relationships of trust and confidence which is not conducive to either telephone or email mediums.’

Similarly, research with young people conducted by BMRB for the DfES to assess the effectiveness of the Connexions Service concluded: *‘Preference for this type of contact [face-to-face] was due to the ease with which young people felt they could discuss issues and build rapport and this was said to have facilitated more open and detailed discussions.’* (Joyce et al. 2004).

This report suggests that other media were often more appropriate for follow-up contact, such as catching up or gathering some specific information.²⁹

In a qualitative study looking at access to not-for-profit advice agencies, Sefton (2008) reports that *‘the agency serving young people said that their clients tended to prefer to meet face to face when making contact for the first time. They often found it difficult to articulate their problems when dealing with strangers, and it was hard to establish the trust needed for them to do so if initial contact was by phone.’*

It is possible that the relatively severe nature of young people’s problems³⁰ is also a factor in them being more likely than other age groups to need face-to-face advice. Research by the LSRC indicates that adverse consequences of problems tend to be worse for people accessing advice in person than by phone and that people may be more likely to access advice in person for more complex or serious problems (Pleasence et al. 2007).

²⁹ It is worth noting here service usage data relating to the Connexions Service, including Connexions Direct, which offers advice to 13–19-year-olds via a variety of media, including face-to-face, telephone, email, SMS and online discussion services. Between April 2006 and March 2007 the Connexions Service dealt with over five million ‘interventions’ with young people, of which 62% were face-to-face (Hansard, answer given by Parmjit Dhandra MP, 4 June 2007).

³⁰ See companion paper to this report, Kenrick (2009).

Telephone

Cost, deprivation and communication skills are barriers to accessing advice by telephone ...

Young people consistently say in surveys and needs assessments that they would use the telephone to get advice. However, several studies have identified that the cost of mobile telephone calls acts as a major barrier to young people accessing telephone advice services in practice.

A consultation project conducted before the establishment of a legal information and advice service for young people in Caerphilly found that 47% of young people said they would text the service and 38% would phone. In practice, however, although a dedicated mobile telephone number was set up, usage was very low and the vast majority chose to access in person (Caerphilly CAB 2005).

Qualitative research for Dudley Community Legal Service Partnership (CLSP) (Welch et al. 2003) found that young people interviewed in a focus group said they would need any telephone service to be free to call, as they would be most likely to use a mobile phone, which could be very expensive.

Similarly, focus groups with young people conducted for Enfield Law Centre found that:

'Drop-in sessions and appointments were the most popular methods of service delivery, with nearly all participants saying they would like this form of help. The telephone could be useful, particularly if text messaging could be used. However, a number of people raised the issue of expense.'
(Braverman 2004)

Young people spend a high proportion of their incomes on mobile phones, but tend to choose call packages in which texting, the most popular form of communication by young people, is cheaper. Making a long call to an adviser, it has been found, might be prohibitively expensive for young people and use up too much of their airtime (EdComs 2007).

It is also important to note that not all young people have ready access to a telephone and that those who do not are more likely to be amongst the most disadvantaged with the greatest advice needs. Most teenagers now own a mobile phone (EdComs 2007). However, of the 'socially isolated' young people³¹ analysed by the LSRC from the 2004 CSJS, 8% did not have access to a telephone, compared to only 1% of other young respondents, who displayed significantly lower levels of need (Balmer et al. 2007).

Research for the DfES has found that the vast majority of callers (72%) to Connexions Direct were female, which may indicate a relative unwillingness amongst young males to access support and advice by telephone (Taylor Nelson Sofres 2006).

Research in the US has found clear differences in the capacities of different types of people to benefit from telephone advice. Those least likely to benefit included people with lower levels of education, language difficulties and lower incomes (Pearson and Davis 2002).

31 The LSRC defined socially isolated young people as 18–24-year-old respondents living apart from their parents or any other adult over the age of 24.

This evidence raises important issues for funders and planners of advice services about what proportion of finite resources to devote to telephone advice services, which can reach large numbers of people relatively cheaply, in comparison to face-to-face advice services, which are relatively expensive, but are better placed to conduct in-depth work with disadvantaged people.

... but the telephone remains an important means of accessing advice

Several studies (e.g. LSC 2004) have concluded that, whilst telephone advice is not appropriate for everyone, many users of telephone advice services would not have obtained advice elsewhere.

The telephone remains the most popular method of contacting advice services remotely. For example, 82% of young people who had contacted Connexions Direct, which offers multiple remote access routes to advice, had done so by telephone, versus 14% via email, 9% via webchat and 5% via SMS/text (Brunwin et al. 2004).³²

Findings from an evaluation of a telephone legal advice pilot in 2004 indicated that the telephone is particularly valuable for those who face obstacles to accessing advice by other means. Many people used the service due to distance, disability or mobility problems (LSC 2004).

Inevitably, some people will prefer telephone advice to other media. For example, a survey of lone parents found that many liked the speed, accessibility and anonymity of telephone advice. Some felt able to talk more informally about their problem on the phone, but there was a feeling that they needed face-to-face advice for more complex problems (Moorhead et al. 2004).

There are, of course, a number of successful national telephone helplines for young people, such as Childline, which are popular because of their focus specifically on young people and their anonymity. Many such helplines focus on sensitive personal, emotional and health issues rather than legal or practical issues.

Texting can be useful for initial access and keeping in touch with clients

Given the finding of The Media Literacy Audit that text messaging was the most popular form of communication for 16-24-year-olds, with 94% having sent texts during 2005 (Ofcom 2006), it is worth considering its potential role in the provision of advice.

The youth advice agencies consulted for this report said that providing young people with access to an adviser by text message can be limited in terms of their capacity to actually give advice, as there is normally a need for more detailed information to be exchanged than is possible by text.

However, several had found that texting could be a valuable tool for keeping in touch with young people where they have an ongoing case and for reminding young people about appointments. Additionally, some young people may choose to make initial contact with a service by text message.

³² The data shows that some young people had used more than one method to contact the service.

The internet

Do not assume that the internet will solve everything! Young people mainly use the internet for entertainment and social networking and are less likely to use it for information and advice than other age groups ...

Some of the studies we reviewed for this report, including many of the smaller local surveys, found that young people were generally enthusiastic about the idea of getting advice via the internet. However, the extent to which young people actually use online advice services in practice – and the extent to which advice, as opposed to information, is currently provided online – appears more limited.

Young people tend to view the internet more as a ‘toy’ than a general information tool (EdComs 2007). Consultations with young people conducted by The National Youth Agency (2006) found that much of young people’s use of the internet is social; that they most often visit entertainment and social networking sites³³ rather than formal educational or information sites; and that they prefer communication to information, interactivity to passive reception. Similarly, focus group and depth interview research for the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) found that the most frequent reasons for using the internet mentioned by young people were: socialising with friends, entertainment and researching schoolwork (Lambley 2007).

Use of the internet for seeking advice and information has increased rapidly over the last few years, but remains a minority activity. The LSRC has reported that only 4% of respondents (of all ages) to the CSJS with problems used the internet in the 2001 survey, rising to 11% in 2004 and 15% in 2006 (Pleasence et al. 2007).

Although they are major users of the internet overall,³⁴ young people appear to be significantly less likely to use it for formal information gathering and for getting advice than other age groups. In its report focusing on young people in the 2004 CSJS (Balmer et al. 2007) the LSRC reported that 62% of 18–24-year-olds had access to the internet, slightly more than for people aged 25 and over (56%), although when people of retirement age were excluded the difference was very small. Further, use of the internet to obtain information to try to resolve problems was far less common among young people than among older respondents (6% vs 11%).

... and have problems finding online information they can trust and understand

Many young people encounter problems finding relevant information and express concerns about whether they can fully understand or trust the information that they do find on the internet (MBA 2007).

Those young respondents in the 2004 CSJS who did make use of the internet were less successful in obtaining information than their older counterparts: 12% of 18–24-year-olds obtained all of the information they needed, compared to 25% of those aged over 24 (Balmer et al. 2007).

33 In 2008, Bebo, Facebook and MySpace were the top three social network sites most commonly used by young people (*Social Networking: A quantitative and qualitative research report into attitudes, behaviours and use*, OfCom, 2008).

34 In 2008, 68% of young adults, aged 16-24, had access to the internet at home and 77% were using the internet every day (*Internet Access: 2008 Households and individuals*, Office for National Statistics, 2008). Young people are more likely than most other age groups to use the internet, but spend less time online, accounting for only 10% of all hours spent online by the UK population (*The Communications Market 2007*, Ofcom, August 2007).

There is evidence that young people are not aware of the most useful sites (Parle 2009), get frustrated with internet searching and simply do not think to look online for advice and information (EdComs 2007). Even when young people reach websites that are relevant to their problems, it cannot be assumed that they will find the information they seek. Research by young people for the Legal Services Commission (LSC), which included a trawl of websites to ascertain how easy it was to find online legal information, found that much of the information available was not easy for young people to access or related to jurisdictions beyond the UK and so was irrelevant (LSC 2002).

Research by YouthNet, conducted between October 2007 and March 2008, confirms that relevance of content and trust are key issues for young people. Young respondents who had received advice from askTheSite had needed more personal, specific information than it was possible to find through standard web searches. One respondent (female, aged 21) commented: *'Other websites are either too technical and directed at adults who have been dealing with issues like this for ages, or not quite detailed enough.'*³⁵

Given young people's difficulty in finding information, a key issue with any website is raising awareness of its existence. The main source of awareness of websites amongst young people has been reported to be word-of-mouth rather than search engines (EdComs 2007), although research by YouthNet found that search engines, most commonly Google, were a major route to askTheSite.³⁶

A separate survey for YouthNet found that awareness amongst young people of information and advice sites was substantially higher where they had been the subject of major advertising campaigns (BrainJuicer 2007).³⁷ This research found high levels of awareness of TalktoFrank (70%), The Samaritans website (69%) and Connexions Direct website (66%), all of which have strong brands built up through national advertising campaigns. Actual usage of these sites was considerably lower – with the exception of askTheSite (www.thesite.org), only a minority of people who had heard of the websites had actually used them. The generalist advice websites had significantly higher usage than the sites focusing on a narrower range of topics.

The National Youth Agency (2006) and the DCSF (Lambley 2007) have both reported that young people are generally not inspired by public and voluntary sector websites. The Government itself recognises that '[g]overnment-funded websites are hard to find and difficult to understand' (DCA 2006), and an evaluation of the Connexions Direct website found that only 35% of young people who had used the site had found the information they were looking for (Lambley 2007).

Some young people will nevertheless have a preference for getting their information online ...

Garvey et al. (2009) report that further statistical tests³⁸ on their sample of young adults illustrated that, although most respondents preferred more traditional forms of communication when accessing help, there was a small group who were more likely to use modern communication technologies, including the internet.

35 askTheSite: Online Discussion Groups, October 2007-March 2008 (unpublished), provided courtesy of YouthNet.

36 Ibid.

37 This report relates to a survey of 1,000 16–24-year-olds. Respondents were asked if they had heard of the following sites:

www.talktofrank.com

(Government drugs site),

www.samaritans.org.uk

(independent emotional support site),

www.connexions-direct.com

(Government general advice and support site),

www.ruthinking.co.uk

(Government sexual health site),

www.brook.org.uk

(independent sexual health site),

www.thesite.org

(independent general advice and support site).

One of the YouthNet surveys (BrainJuicer 2007) found that the internet featured in the top three ‘places to go’ for advice in relation to all the health and personal subjects about which it asked young people, although the proportions of young people citing the internet were still relatively low for most subjects.³⁹ The research did not focus on social welfare issues, but produced some useful findings on what young people like about the internet as a source of advice. Regardless of the subject of the advice being considered, respondents who said they would choose the internet as their preferred source of advice were likely to say this was because you can get information quickly. Other reasons given for choosing the internet were that it is anonymous, confidential, unbiased, and you can use it at any time. Where other sources of information were preferred to the internet, this was likely to be because respondents liked to speak to someone face-to-face. Similarly, Garvey et al. (2009) cited the anonymity of the internet, which renders it less personal and socially-threatening, particularly if seeking help on ‘less acceptable’ issues.

Websites that can present youth-specific information brightly and attractively alongside interactive, fun and entertaining content are most likely to prove popular,⁴⁰ but are few and far between and the evidence suggests that the internet might best be used by many advice providers, particularly local providers, merely as a channel to advice services, e.g. by simply showing service details, rather than to actually provide detailed information or advice.

38 Garvey et al. refer to conducting factor and cluster analysis.

39 The survey found, for example, that the internet was cited by only 10% of respondents as the best place to go for advice on relationships and by 10% for mental and emotional health. However, it emerged as the most popular source of all in relation to drugs. Other research for YouthNet appears to confirm that the internet is more likely to be used by young people as a source of information relating to drugs than emotional issues (see *Towards understanding sources of help and advice for young people*, prepared for YouthNet UK by Naked Flame, July 2004.)

40 See, for example, askTheSite.org.

41 It is worth noting, however, that many young people without home internet or broadband access may use the internet at school, friends’ houses or youth agencies.

42 Unpublished analysis of 2004 CSJS data on NEETs by the LSRC.

... but relying on internet information services may not reach the most disadvantaged

There is evidence indicating that information websites may be most useful for helping more capable people deal with their problems themselves.

In general, households without access to the internet at home are more likely to come from poorer socio-economic groups. Thus, whilst 83% of AB households had access in 2007, this fell to 52% of C2 and 30% of DE households (EdComs 2007). 85% of 11–16-year-olds had internet access at home, but only half had a broadband connection at home.⁴¹

Indeed, while some 71% of non-isolated 18–24-year-olds in the 2004 CSJS had access to the internet, just 39% of ‘socially isolated’ young people did. Even more significantly, socially isolated young respondents used the internet to obtain information about only 2% of social welfare problems, compared to around 8% for other young respondents (Balmer et al. 2007), although there was little difference between NEETs and non-NEETs.⁴²

These findings are corroborated by a qualitative study conducted for Youth Access with young people who had received legal advice (MBA 2007). When asked to identify the best methods of getting information and advice, only one young person (out of the 27 interviewed, many of whom were experiencing multiple disadvantage) suggested obtaining information from the internet. Many did not have access to a computer. Similarly, a Prince’s Trust (2003) study found that disadvantaged young adults⁴³ were less likely to use the internet when seeking advice and support than other young people.

Meanwhile, research for the DCSF has identified the following groups as being under-represented amongst users of the Connexions Direct website: teenage boys; young people from ethnic minority backgrounds, particularly Muslim youth; and young people with disabilities (Lambley 2007).

Email advice

Email advice can extend access but can be limited in its depth ...

The development of an email advice service is often identified by agencies struggling to reach this client group as a seemingly obvious step, but evidence that it is actually one of the most effective media for providing advice to young people is somewhat mixed. Sefton (2008) reports: *'increased use of e-mail and dedicated web resources were among measures under consideration by [generic advice] agencies which had identified a need to improve access for young people. In view of this, it was notable that the agency exclusively serving young people said that they did not give much advice by e-mail – and that as with the phone, their clients tended not to like e-mail as a method of initial contact ... it suggested a need to critically examine any beliefs that because young people may tend to be 'techno-savvy', such savvy extends to seeking help with legal problems, and that use of IT will therefore necessarily provide a good way in for them.'*

Nonetheless, accessing advice by email can be attractive to people who are uneasy about talking to an adviser face-to-face or by phone and can therefore be an important alternative method of access for some young people.

An online survey by YouthNet found that the fact that its askTheSite service is an anonymous service operated via email was very important for some young people, particularly those suffering from low confidence or self esteem:

*'Being able to remain anonymous encouraged participants to share their problems and obtain advice they may otherwise have been too shy to seek.'*⁴⁴

An evaluation of a legal advice email service aimed at children and young people in Australia concluded that it had reached young people who would not have accessed legal advice in any other way, including many young people who had been abused, but that it could not 'replace fully funded specialist legal centres ... where children can obtain assistance from specially trained solicitors.' (Neil 2000)

Both the YouthNet survey and the Australian evaluation appear to reinforce the notion that some young people find email advice services extremely valuable. However, they would appear to have some limitations. For example, because emails are limited in the process of question and answer that can happen quickly by phone or face-to-face, it tends to be easier to provide generic information rather than in-depth personalised advice via email. An online legal advice project for young people in Norfolk reports that very few young people respond to further email exploration of the problem. Their email service tends to consist of information provision, quick one-off enquiries and signposting rather than ongoing in-depth casework (Wintersteiger 2006).

⁴³ The Prince's Trust study compared the experiences of unemployed young people, educational underachievers, offenders and young people in and leaving care with a group of young people without obvious disadvantages.

⁴⁴ YouthNet (unpublished) op. cit. (see footnote 35)

It may be that email advice is generally more useful, therefore, for relatively simple enquiries and, sometimes, as an additional initial access route to advice services, rather than for more complex legal advice provision.

... and requires a specialist approach

Email advice services appear to work best for young people when they are targeted specifically at this client group and are provided by specialist online advisers. Indeed, it is useful to look at email advice as a separate form of intervention from face-to-face advice, requiring different skills.

However, without personal interaction with the client group, there is a danger of email services becoming faceless and not gaining young people's trust. Some email services have reported benefits from conducting complementary face-to-face outreach work and they tend to also be more successful when delivered in conjunction with an information website (LSC 2006).

The significant capital investment required and difficulties controlling the geographical reach of an email advice and online information service, as well as the range of questions young people may ask, raise difficulties for the successful delivery of a local service and it may often make more sense for the infrastructure, at least, of online services to be centralised. YouthNet's askTheSite service has been very successful in offering a single national portal for 16–25-year-olds needing advice on a range of issues and makes virtual internal referrals to a range of email advisers based in specialist organisations, such as Shelter (for housing advice), Brook (for sexual health advice), the Samaritans (for emotional support) and a locally based Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB) (for money advice).⁴⁵

Social networking and videolink

There are likely to be rapid developments in service delivery methods over the coming years as technology develops. Two relatively new methods of delivery are internet forums (or message boards)⁴⁶ and video-conferencing.

It is probably fair to say that the potential role that the internet in general, and social networking sites in particular, could play in the provision of advice to young people remains largely unknown. Existing evidence indicates that young people tend to reject internet chat rooms⁴⁷ as good sources for advice, as they are often unmoderated and open to abuse. However, many say they would use moderated forums, to discuss personal issues and get advice (The National Youth Agency 2006). Jones argues that tightly moderated message boards, delivered alongside self-help material, could be an effective way of providing peer support, whereby people who have successfully dealt with problems could help others do the same: *'Most interestingly, discussion forums provide a collective support and solidarity which has always had its place as part of a community based approach to advice work.'* (Jones 2003)

Meanwhile, webcam technology (such as Skype), which can enable telecommunication by videolink over the internet, has been trialled in adult advice settings with mixed results (LSC 2005). Ofcom (2007) reports that

45 Enquiries to askTheSite break down thus: health (sexual, emotional, general, drugs, alcohol) – 43%; housing, money, legal and rights – 30%; relationships – 27%.

46 Internet forums and message boards are, essentially, online discussion sites.

47 Chat rooms differ from internet forums and message boards in that users need to be online simultaneously to view and contribute to chat rooms, whereas the content of internet forums and message boards tends to remain viewable for a longer period of time.

the technology still has relatively low take up in UK homes, but may take off over the next few years, encouraging more people to feel comfortable using it as a method of accessing advice, albeit unlikely to be appropriate in isolation from other methods.

Using print and other media for delivering information

Given the evidence that young people are less likely to find information on websites than is generally assumed, it is important to consider other media for delivering information and education messages to this age group.

Research for the DfES (EdComs 2007) concluded that trying to reach teenagers through detailed print information, e.g. in the form of leaflets, is rarely successful.⁴⁸ A recent survey commissioned by the Wales Committee for the Community Legal Service found that literacy levels amongst disadvantaged young people need to be taken into account:

'Learning and/or reading and writing difficulties appear to be a factor [in young people's access to advice]. Advice services, and any promotional activity, should take this into account. Low literacy levels appeared a key factor with young offenders, however this issue also appeared evident across some students.' (LSC 2008)

However, evidence from the 2004 CSJS suggests, perhaps surprisingly, that disadvantaged young people may be more likely to use printed material than other young people: 11% of NEETs (vs 6% of non-NEETs) tried to obtain information from a leaflet, booklet or book when they had a problem.⁴⁹ Disadvantaged young people's apparent relative preference for printed information may be partly due to the difficulties they encounter in using other media, such as the internet. Regardless, it is significant that young people overall surveyed in the CSJS were more likely to use printed material than the internet to resolve their problems.

In terms of reaching large groups of young people – for example with simple community education messages aimed at promoting a change in behaviour on a national scale – there is evidence that television and cinema are the most effective media (EdComs 2007). Embedding storylines in soaps watched by young people can be effective, particularly if the theme is long-running. Television and cinema advertisements can be effective at raising awareness of where young people can get further information and advice, e.g. by providing details of websites and helplines, although this option is likely to prove prohibitively expensive for all but the largest organisations. EdComs (2007) also reports that radio is the second most popular medium used by young people in terms of hours and frequency, but is not very effective for getting across messages, as listening tends to be too passive for serious issues to be heard.

⁴⁸ Magazines for girls were found to be the exception to this rule, although readership is fragmented.

⁴⁹ Unpublished analysis of 2004 CSJS data on NEETs by LSRC.

chapter 3

Sources of advice

Only a minority of young people with complex problems manage to get professional advice. Nevertheless, it is important to gain a firm understanding of where young people turn when they do try to get advice, and why.

This chapter describes the preferences that young people have indicated in research regarding sources of advice, including their greater likelihood of seeking advice from informal and non professional sources and their relative reluctance to use mainstream advice services. It also explains that young people want advice from someone they trust, but who can advocate in their interests; many want advisers specialising in issues affecting young people.

Young people want to talk to someone they can trust ...

Research in 1994 for Youth Access found that the key characteristics young people sought in any source of support included: confidentiality; friendliness; trust-worthiness; an ability to listen; safety; and a non-judgemental culture (Feaviour 1994).

More recently, research for the DfES concluded that a trusting relationship was key to conducting any effective work with young people at risk: *'Overall, the most negative reactions to the [Connexions] service found in this study were occasioned by a failure to listen to expressed needs ... where young people felt that Connexions had had a significant positive impact in their lives, the most frequent features of their cases were firstly, the high trust relationship with the PA.'* (Hoggarth and Smith 2004)

Young people seeking advice specifically on social welfare issues have been found to look for very similar qualities. Research by young people for the LSC concluded:

'The qualities which seem to be most important to young people in who they choose to talk to were definitely trust, understanding and someone who is friendly and approachable.' (LSC 2002)

Research by the Children's Rights Director for England on children and young people's views of advocacy services found that the top quality young people sought in a good advocate was being a good listener, followed by being able to put the young person's point across, respecting their privacy, getting other people to listen and knowing young people's issues (Morgan 2008).

Similarly, a study in Scotland asked 213 12–18-year-olds what personal qualities they thought the ideal legal adviser should have:

'Virtually all ... identified characteristics such as: patience, understanding, a sympathetic manner, being approachable, having good listening skills and being easy to talk to.' (Gallagher 1999)

That study also found that when young people were asked to identify factors making the source of advice more approachable, they mentioned trust, knowledge, confidentiality, having the problem treated seriously, not having a solution imposed, having positive action taken and a lack of jargon.

... and are most likely to trust someone known to them

Although young people tend not to cite familiarity as a factor they consciously look for in a source of advice, it appears that it may be the one thing that instils confidence that all the other characteristics they seek will be found. Hence, Gallagher (1999) found that the overwhelming majority would approach people or organisations known to them. Similarly, focus groups for Enfield Law Centre (2004) found:

'When they sought help at all, the young people interviewed turned to people they knew well. This was particularly true of younger people and those with learning disabilities.'

As a recent survey commissioned by the Wales Committee for the Community Legal Service found, this reliance on familiarity leads many young people to approach non-expert sources of help, often individuals, in preference to professional advice agencies:

'It would appear from the findings that ... [young people will] seek advice from those they feel they can trust, as opposed to those who may be best suited to deal with their problems.' (LSC 2008)

Young people most commonly identify family and friends as the people they are most likely to go to for advice on a range of issues. Kelley's (2002) findings are typical:

'... after family and friends, children and young people in all of the groups found it hard to think of anyone else they would personally seek help or advice from, something evidenced by the fact that one of the young people picked the author as their number three choice, having only just met.'

A study by the Prince's Trust (2003) found that parents were the primary source of advice for the 888 14–25-year-olds surveyed. Friends came second, teachers third and other family fourth, with professional support services some way behind. Many other studies have found a similar pattern (Gallagher 1999, Enfield Law Centre 2004, Wiltshire CLSP 2001, Garvey et al. 2009).

Parle (2009) concludes that young people's decisions to choose family members and friends as their sources of advice are in part due to convenience, as well as familiarity and trust.

The formal labels and qualifications that adults consider important are often irrelevant or meaningless to young people in comparison to simply knowing someone. Garvey et al. (2009), for example, report young adults' tendency to turn to peers (friends and siblings) for advice and support, even though 'young adults are not necessarily naturally equipped to provide this kind of support'. Parle (2009) identifies a similar phenomenon of young people relying on 'potentially incorrect information and advice from people who may also be unaware of legal rights and remedies'.

The characteristics of the young person and the nature of the problem influence their preferred sources of advice

Research has shown that people's choice of adviser tends to be heavily associated with the characteristics of the person seeking advice and the type of problem they are experiencing.

Disadvantaged young people, for example, display a slightly different pattern of advice-seeking behaviour to other young people. The Prince's Trust (2003) study found that disadvantaged young people were significantly less likely to turn to parents or teachers for support and were more likely to turn to friends and specialist support organisations. Friends came first, ahead of parents, for this group, with specialist support organisations third. Echoing Garvey and Parle, the authors point out that 'the parents and friends of disadvantaged young people are often socially excluded themselves, and are not necessarily best equipped to help'.

It is possible, of course, that the different pattern of advice-seeking displayed by disadvantaged young people can be explained in part by the different pattern of problems that they experience and the greater likelihood that their problems are of a severe or complex nature.

Research in the legal advice field has found that the nature of people's problems heavily influences their chosen sources of advice. Thus, people seeking advice relating to crime or divorce are very likely to turn to a solicitor, whilst people with rented housing, homelessness, benefit and debt problems are more likely to turn to an advice agency or a more informal source of advice (Genn et al. 2004).

There is little research specifically identifying young people's preferred sources of social welfare advice by subject type. However, research in other areas has shown that young people's preferred sources of advice differ significantly according to the subject. Research for YouthNet in 2007 found that, when asked to name the best place to go for advice on a number of health and personal subjects, friends were identified as by far the most popular 'place' to go for advice on relationships, whilst doctors were identified as the best source of advice on general and mental health issues and the internet was preferred for help on drugs issues (BrainJuicer 2007).

Many young people eventually seek professional advice and support, but often from non-expert, non-independent sources ...

Although they may delay seeking help and may not always approach the most appropriate source of help, Garvey et al. (2009) found that 'most young adults are at least intellectually open to the idea of seeking help from an external source such as a charity'.

The Prince's Trust (2003) study found that 57% of disadvantaged young people would seek help and advice from specialist support agencies and youth charities at some stage. Use of these organisations significantly increased with age, from 45% of 14–17-year-olds to 72% of 22–25-year-olds. Of the four groups of disadvantaged young people studied,⁵⁰ those in and leaving care were the most likely to seek out specialist support organisations (70%).

50 See footnote 43.

The LSRC has reported that 42% of 18–24-year-olds in the 2004 CSJS with ‘difficult to solve problems’ went on to obtain advice (Balmer et al. 2007). These young people used a multitude of advisers (see Figure 3.1), many of whom were not formal providers of advice. For example, they were more likely than people aged 25 and over to go to the local council or their employer and less likely to approach a solicitor, a Citizens Advice Bureau, a Trade Union or a health worker. Only one in seven (of those who obtained advice at all) obtained advice from a CAB, a solicitor or an ‘other advice agency’, i.e. from a recognised specialist independent source of advice.

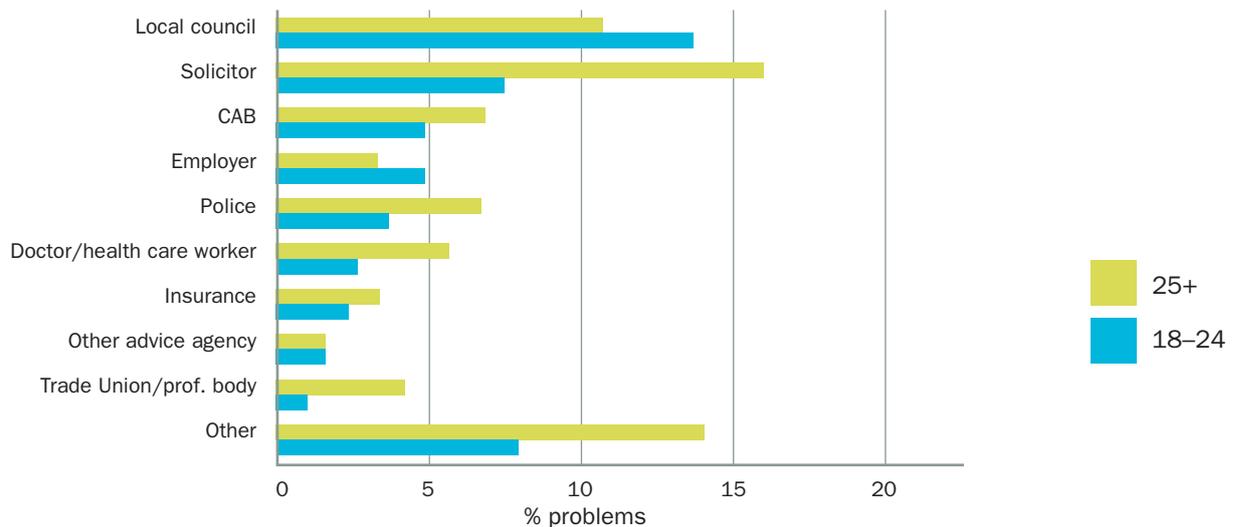


Fig. 3.1 Advisers from whom respondents obtained advice, weighted to control for problem type (Source: Balmer et al. 2007)

Research by the LSRC shows that the nature of the advice people receive is influenced by the source of advice. Thus, whilst people making general enquiries to the local council or seeking advice from health workers and social workers tend to receive general support and advice, a majority of approaches to CABs and solicitors results in the provision of legal advice.⁵¹ Thus, it would appear that when young people do seek advice for their social welfare problems, they are much less likely than other age groups to get good quality legal advice.

... including the local council ...

The 2004 CSJS found that 18–24-year-olds were most likely to turn to the local council and were more likely to do so than other age groups. This was particularly the case for socially isolated young people, of whom 20% with social welfare problems sought advice from the local council (Balmer et al. 2007). Similarly, research conducted for Citizens Advice found that 16–24-year-olds were more likely to go to the council for advice than other age groups (MORI 2004).

It is important to note that young people’s relatively high use of local authorities for advice does not necessarily indicate a *preference* for statutory sources of advice. On the contrary, research for Youth Access found that young people were often unhappy with the service they received at the council and generally preferred to go to voluntary organisations, where they

⁵¹ Data relating to all age groups from the 2006 CSJS (reported in Pleasence et al. 2007) indicates that legal advice was included in 27% of instances of advice received from local council general enquiries; 30% from local council advice services; 35% from health workers and social workers; 49% from ‘Other advice agencies’; 55% from CABs; 78% from solicitors; 100% from barristers.

tended to find services more approachable and responsive, as well as liking the independence on offer (MBA 2007). Young people's frequent approaches to councils are more likely to be linked to the type of problems they experience, particularly the prevalence of housing and homelessness problems, as well as their ignorance of other sources of advice – see Chapter 5 for further information about awareness of services.

... and youth professionals ...

Unfortunately, it is not known how many of the young people in the CSJS sought help for their problems from youth workers, Connexions Personal Advisers and other youth professionals, although it is likely that such workers account for some of those in the 'Local council', 'Other advice agency' and 'Other' categories. However, there is much evidence to suggest that youth workers are an important source of advice, particularly for the more disadvantaged and disaffected young people who are most likely to come into contact with statutory and voluntary youth services. For example, research for a Community Legal Service Partnership (CLSP) found: *'the overwhelming majority [of young people] said they would seek advice from their detached youth workers across all subject areas.'* (Darlington CLSP 2001)

Gallagher (1999) found that youth workers came third behind friends and parents as the most trusted source of advice. She reported that children and young people found youth workers approachable, non-judgemental and 'on the same wavelength' and trusted them to keep confidentiality.

Similarly, Kelley (2002) found that teachers and youth workers were cited by young people in focus groups as the most effective and approachable problem-solving adults after parents and carers, largely because they were the ones in their everyday lives. She comments that '[y]outh workers were the professional adults given the most detailed praise as potential problem solvers, again, specifically because of the character of the relationship.'

Most significantly, as research for the Department of Health has noted, young people have one million contacts with youth workers each month, presenting a valuable opportunity to offer information and advice that tends to be missed by mainstream providers (Shribman 2007).

Whilst most youth workers and other youth professionals do not possess the specific knowledge, notably on legal matters, to provide a competent in-depth advice service, they will inevitably continue to be approached by young people for advice and should be considered, therefore, by professional advice providers and policy makers as vital conduits for any information, advice and community education (or 'Public Legal Education'⁵²) targeted at young people. Developing the competence of youth advice workers and other youth professionals with an advice-giving role, whether formal or non-formal, to provide good quality information and advice should be a priority. (See Chapter 6 for a discussion of the shortcomings of youth service provision.)

... but many, particularly under-18s, are reluctant to go to mainstream legal advice services

Compared to people aged 25 and over, 18–24-year-olds in the 2004 CSJS

52 For a definition, see the final report of the Public Legal Education and Support Task Force, *Developing capable citizens: the role of public legal education*, available at www.pleas.org.uk.

were less likely to use most types of adviser, including recognised mainstream legal advice services, when they had a problem (see Figure 3.1). Taking solicitors and Citizens Advice Bureaux (CABx) together, young people were about half as likely to use such services.⁵³

Access to mainstream advice services appears even worse for under-18s, and particularly for 16- and 17-year-olds. For this report, the client profiles of several mainstream advice agencies and targeted legal services for young people were examined. A remarkable difference emerged in the age profiles of the two types of services. Whilst 16- and 17-year-olds typically comprised around 40–50% of clients seen by targeted services, the vast majority of young people seen by mainstream agencies were aged between 20 and 24, with under-18s typically comprising a fraction of 1% of all clients and around 5% of all under-25s seen.

There is a considerable body of evidence, both from research with advice providers and with young people, confirming that young people rarely access mainstream advice services. See Kenrick (2002) for a more detailed examination of this issue.

Research on access to advice conducted with advice agencies in 2007 for Advice Services Alliance found that, whilst black and minority ethnic clients, lone parents and people with disabilities tended to be over-represented in the client profiles of mainstream advice agencies, ‘the group most frequently said to be under-represented was young people (generally meaning aged under 25)’ (Sefton 2008). Earlier research by CLSPs had also identified this phenomenon. A report for Bristol CLSP, for example, stated: ‘... our findings are alarming. A number of providers reported that they rarely dealt with young, single people, and stated that they wondered where they got their advice.’ (Carlton et al. 2000)

Similarly, a needs assessment focussing on young people that was carried out by Darlington CLSP (2001) found that ‘no respondents said they would go to the CAB and only a small proportion said they would go to a solicitor’.

More recently, a ‘non-client’ survey of young people conducted by a CAB in the northeast – which, unusually for CABx, offers a targeted youth advice service – found that, although 83% had sought some kind of advice, often from multiple sources, only 8% had sought advice from formal legal advice sources (Robinson 2006).

Young people want their advisers to specialise in working with young people ...

In a survey for Age Concern of public attitudes to ageism, young people had by far the greatest sense of identity with and belonging to their age group (Ray et al. 2006). This strong sense of belonging and identity impacts upon the way young people access services. They tend to be far more comfortable accessing advice services that are focused solely on their age group rather than on the public as a whole (see Chapter 4 for further details).

They also want the individuals giving them advice to be focused on young people. A qualitative study for Youth Access found that respondents

53 Data from the 2004 CSJS and reported in Balmer et al. (2004) indicates that only 12.6% of 18–24-year-olds with law-related problems had sought advice from either a CAB (5.1%) or a solicitor (7.5%), compared to 23.4% of respondents aged 25 and over (7.1% CAB; 16.3% solicitor).

overwhelmingly rejected the idea of getting legal advice from an adviser or lawyer who doesn't specialise in young people: none chose this option. Similar numbers favoured a youth worker with good legal knowledge or an adviser or lawyer specialising in young people (MBA 2007).⁵⁴ Young people who had received advice from a specialist adviser reported that they liked the advice they had received because the advisers were polite, made them feel comfortable, calmed them down if they got upset and treated them like adults:

'Many of the young people had expected to be judged by the agency, and were surprised that they had not been. They felt that the advisers really listened to them and were impressed that the advisers kept in touch with them ... It was evident from all the interviews the advice workers ... had built up solid and trusting relationships.'

Gallagher's earlier study had found that young people in Scotland were generally wary of approaching solicitors who didn't specialise in young people for advice because

'[t]hey were perceived as too formal, remote and not concerned with the problems with which many children and young people have to deal, the opposite qualities to those identified in people such as youth workers.'
(Gallagher 1999)

Similarly, Kelley (2002) found that, whilst some young people recognised solicitors were powerful, and therefore potentially able to help them change things, they were not perceived as child-friendly and therefore were not seen as being helpful.

There is some evidence that even mainstream advice services that are not traditionally accessed by young people can vastly improve the service they can offer to this client group through the presence of a specialist young people's worker within the organisation. An evaluation by the LSC of youth advice projects it had funded through its Partnership Initiative Budget found: *'Other workers could refer clients to [the specialist worker] or seek advice or information. This new focus in the organisation led to an upskilling of the whole workforce.'* (LSC 2006)

... and to be a 'powerful friend' who can advocate on their behalf

Although the possession by an agency of a quality kitemark is unlikely to impress a young person,⁵⁵ the expertise of the individual adviser and their ability to get things sorted out appear to be key qualities sought by young advice-seekers.

Research for the Department for Constitutional Affairs (DCA) found that the majority of clients (of all ages) of advice agencies felt the most important quality was that the adviser had the relevant knowledge of the law to deal with their problem, provided this was accompanied by good communication skills, so the knowledge could be passed on to them (Johnstone and Marson 2005). Similarly, a 'non-client' survey conducted by Stockton CAB (Robinson 2006) found that 80% of young people agreed that it was important that advice is accurate and expert.

54 Of the 24 young people responding to the question 'Who would you like to get legal advice from?', twelve favoured getting advice from a youth worker with good legal knowledge, ten from an adviser or lawyer specialising in young people. Two said they didn't mind, whilst none chose the option of an adviser or lawyer who doesn't specialise in young people.

55 See Kenrick (2002) (p.14) for a discussion of the relative lack of importance in the minds of young people of organisational and technical competence in comparison to softer qualities such as trustworthiness and friendliness.

However, there is evidence that many young people recognise that youth workers, who possess most of the other skills they seek in a source of advice, often lack the knowledge, expertise and clout needed to achieve the outcome they are seeking. (Kenrick 2002)

Similarly, a report on the Connexions Service for Joseph Rowntree Foundation found that some of the most effective work was conducted by targeted Personal Advisers who undertook an advocacy role:

'Young people described them as offering them a 'powerful friend' in dealing with other agencies. Sometimes this involved challenging other workers or agencies about their failure to deliver appropriate services or support – commonly financial support or other entitlements.' (Coles et al. 2004)

Disturbingly, the researchers also found that many Personal Advisers did not refer young people with complex needs on to more specialist workers. Even targeted Personal Advisers tended to lack the clout needed to resolve some problems.

A housing client of a specialist Law Centre for young people sums up the extra dimension that can be brought to bear on a case by the intervention of a specialist legal adviser:

'The big boss came and apologised to me for the way I was treated. He only did it because he knew I had got a solicitor involved.' (Streetwise Community Law Centre 2006)

Some young people may like to get advice from peers, but more research is needed

There has been increasing emphasis within the youth sector in recent years on the concept and efficacy of young people-led services. Indeed, in 2007 the Government signalled, in its *Children's Plan*, its own desire to see an increase in peer-to-peer advice services:

'Young people particularly value support and advice from other young people ... We will expect these forms of guidance – peer advice and mentoring, and opportunities for tasters and other 'experiential learning' to be available to young people across the country.' (DCSF 2007)

Given this bold policy pronouncement – although it is less clear precisely what is meant here by 'advice' – it is perhaps surprising that there is a paucity of evidence to assist in gauging the extent to which peer advice services are either effective or desired by young people, although there do appear to be many examples of successful peer-led projects in the wider youth sector. Of particular significance here are schemes offering peer education, peer advocacy and peer mentoring, all of which seem to be reasonably well-established interventions.

Recent research on youth homelessness by the Centre for Housing Policy at the University of York reports that support providers and young people alike consistently emphasised the added benefit of utilising peer educators. It quotes a voluntary sector practitioner:

'Peer education is a massively valuable tool ... allowing advice and information to go to young people in a manner that they're going to take it

up. It brings credibility. Young people want to hear from other young people who've been through similar experiences.' (Quilgars et al. 2008)

The same research found that young people in focus groups agreed almost unanimously that peer education was a 'good idea', but often warned that such schemes will not benefit young people universally, due to a lack of involvement in education amongst many of the most vulnerable young people and the fact that some young people will fail to see the relevance of the messages being put across to them at the time.

Peer mentoring has also been widely promoted as an effective intervention, particularly to reduce crime amongst disadvantaged young people, whilst in November 2007 the Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families announced a £3m scheme aimed at tackling bullying through testing a range of different approaches to peer mentoring to see which are most effective.

There are also several examples of peer advocacy schemes, including an established programme in Australia run for and by young people who are or have recently been in care.⁵⁶ An evaluation of peer advocacy programmes in the UK by National Children's Bureau reports that most schemes take place within a group context, where children and young people who share similar experiences are brought together to learn how to advocate for themselves and/or on behalf of their peer group. It found few examples of one-to-one peer advocacy schemes, most of which have focused on supporting young disabled people, and identified a number of barriers, including problems recruiting suitable advocates with the confidence to take on such a role, young people's reluctance to be associated with other young people in a similar position to themselves and problems for peer advocates in engaging with service providers and other people in authority, often due to resistance from adult-led services (Harnett 2004).

A recent report on children and young people's views of advocacy services by the Children's Rights Director for England found that some children and young people thought an advocate was more likely to be a good listener if they had similar experiences to their own. However, whilst some expressed a desire for advocates to 'not be too old', others wanted advocates who were 'not too young to have relevant experience' (Morgan 2008).

The only evidence available specifically relating to peer-led social welfare advice appears to suggest a certain ambivalence amongst young people about the concept. Young people in focus groups run by Stockton CAB commented that they thought it would improve access if the person answering the telephone sounded like a young person and said they liked the idea of a young advisers' website where young trained advisers could answer e-mail queries. (See also the passage on discussion forums in Chapter 2.) However, some were concerned that young people entering a service might be put off by seeing advisers of their own age or younger and may lack confidence in their ability to 'know things' (Robinson 2008).

The suggestion that remote forms of peer advice might be more effective than face-to-face seems to be supported by evidence of the effectiveness of online services providing peer advice on personal issues. For example, Tynes

⁵⁶ <http://www.create.org.au/>

(2007) suggests that online peer advice and support from people who have been through similar experiences recently may be effective in helping teenagers navigate relationships and sexual health issues. Similarly, YouthNet's TheSite.org hosts a successful online community that enables users to access peer-to-peer advice on relationships. It is unclear whether subjects requiring more specific expert technical knowledge would lend themselves so well to this form of intervention. Indeed, more research appears to be needed on the subject of peer advice generally.

As Garvey et al. (2009) caution, any peer advice clearly needs to be provided on a managed, moderated and professional basis:

'For many issues, especially those where specialist knowledge is crucial to treatment and resolution, [informal] advice from peers can at best be inadequate. At worst, it can be damaging and leave the help-seeker in a worse position than before.'

Continuity of advice is important to young people

Young people tend to be unhappy when they feel they are not receiving a personalised service. Research for the DfES in 2006 into what worked in the Connexions Service found:

'Some of the young people we spoke to ... had been put off from any further use of Personal Advisers due to getting a different advisor each time they had an appointment.' (ECOTEC 2006)

Earlier research for the DfES in 2003 had concluded that Connexions Partnerships should do all they can to ensure continuity of adviser (Joyce et al. 2003).

The Prince's Trust (2003) research found that 79% of disadvantaged young people felt that they would like to speak to the same person each time they come in contact with a support organisation. The concept of a single point of contact and ongoing support had considerably wider appeal amongst the disadvantaged young people in the survey than the control sample.

Similarly, 83% of young respondents to Stockton CAB's 'non-client' survey felt that the same person should deal with a case from beginning to end. Interestingly, the young people in Stockton were not keen to see different advisers for different inter-related problems: 79% felt that the same adviser should deal with all types of problems they might bring in (Robinson 2006).

Clearly, services will need to find a balance between young people's desire to deal with a single worker and the need for advisers to have an appropriate level of knowledge and expertise. The ability of agencies to provide high-quality, yet co-ordinated, help on a number of issues can often best be achieved by having a range of advisers working closely together within the same service. The DCA and the DfES (2003), in a rare joint paper, identified 'the need for both generalist and specialist [legal advice] provision within the Connexions setting, because providing only one of these can be problematic in terms of continuity and seamless service'. Indeed, continuity of *service* may be more important than continuity of *adviser*.

chapter 4

Locations

This chapter describes the range of sites at which advice for young people is located, such as schools and drop-in centres, and explains what young people's preferences are in terms of location of advice.

Advice needs to be available where young people already go ...

Due to the difficulties many agencies have in reaching out to young people, and particularly to disadvantaged and disaffected young people, it is sensible to locate advice services where young people already go.

Parle (2009) found that participants in a qualitative study with disadvantaged young people emphasised the importance of getting advice from people they know and trust in a place that is familiar and used by young people.

Pleasence (2007b) argues that mainstream advice services need to mirror the behaviour of their target groups in order to be 'physically and intellectually accessible' and can often most successfully do so by taking advice to those who need it, rather than hoping that they will look for, locate and make use of already existing advice sources.

A similar conclusion was arrived at by the LSC (2006) in an evaluation of advice projects focusing on young people that it had funded:

'Young people's [legal advice] services need to be located somewhere already accessed by young people.'

Similarly, research conducted by young people for the LSC concluded that legal advice for young people should be located 'where everyone knows ... and in a place that it is easy to get to.' (LSC 2002)

... such as youth drop-in centres offering co-located support services ...

The experience of Youth Access' national network of agencies strongly supports the contention that drop-in centres located in the community tend to be most effective in reaching and engaging disaffected and excluded young people. Many have their roots in youth work and so possess the service characteristics required to attract hard to reach groups of young people.

Gallagher (1999) found that local youth drop-in services that provided information and advice were by far the most popular source of advice (even preferred over parents) for children and young people where they were given a choice.

Similarly, consultations as part of the Make Space Youth Review in 2007 found:

'A clear majority agreed that they would be more likely to visit a 'one stop shop' for support services, from which they could be directed or referred to the right agency whatever their issue or concern.' (4Children 2007)

Qualitative research for Youth Access with disadvantaged young people who had received specialist legal advice found that they wanted all the advice they needed to be provided within one building rather than different organisations. Many of the respondents said they would prefer to go to a voluntary organisation, where the staff were seen as more approachable (MBA 2007).

Whilst there is strong evidence that the provision of advice tends to work well when delivered alongside other support services for young people, the evidence on the effectiveness of providing advice in more general youth settings, such as youth clubs and youth centres which are focused more on offering opportunities for 'positive activities' than support services, is somewhat mixed. The Make Space Youth Review found in consultations that 84% of young people indicated that they would be more likely to access support services if they were offered in the same place as wider activities and clubs (4Children 2007). However, the experience of Youth Access' members suggests that providing intensive interventions, such as advice and counselling, in youth clubs providing wider activities can work less well in practice unless there is a very clear separation of the intervention-based support services from the activities (see Verma and Wilkins 2009).

... in locations that are accessible, safe and local

The location of services is a paramount consideration. Kenrick (2002) identified that services ideally should be:

- near public transport links;
- visible, even prominent (e.g. shopfront), but discreet (e.g. on a side street from the main road);
- where young people spend time (e.g. near a high street or in a shopping centre);
- in a safe location, where young people will not feel threatened;
- near other services young people need or already access; and
- away from adults and authorities in a location which 'belongs' to young people.

Even within accessible areas, there are locations that will put some young people off, for example opposite a police station or within main council offices, which may be seen as too closely linked to authority.

It is also important that advice is provided as locally as possible. The LSRC have reported that people of all ages tend to travel relatively short distances to get advice (Genn et al. 2004). Young people are likely to have particularly restricted areas of travel and data from the National Travel Survey shows that young people aged 16- 25 make fewer trips overall than older age groups (Taylor et al. 2007).

In urban areas in particular, young people are often unfamiliar with anywhere outside the immediate areas in which they live and go to school. Parle (2009) reports that a number of the young people in his focus groups said they spent most of their time in their local street or neighbourhood:

'it was clear that for some of them, who have a fear of violence if they move from their local area where they feel safe, or who are uncomfortable

travelling to unfamiliar places, where help and supported is located would play a large part in whether they would choose to use it.'

Similarly, focus groups conducted by Youth Access in 2008⁵⁷ found that for young people in gangs it can be dangerous to travel through the territory claimed by another gang. An advice service in the 'wrong' area would effectively be inaccessible to these young people.

Mainstream advice services may need to establish separate provision ...

Wherever possible, advice services for young people should be co-located with other relevant services for young people rather than co-located with advice services for adults.

A study conducted for Youth Access with disadvantaged young people aged 16–25 who had received legal advice found that most (71%) would prefer to get advice in a youth setting, such as a youth information, advice and counselling service, a Connexions centre or a youth centre. Only a minority (19%) expressed a preference for a mainstream advice setting, such as a CAB, a law centre or a solicitor's office (MBA 2007).

The Prince's Trust (2003) concluded:

'Support agencies must structure their services to ensure that provision for children, adolescents and adults are distinct.'

The Citizens Advice service in Northern Ireland, in a report outlining the reasons why young people aged 16–25 do not use or become involved in the service, concluded that the best way to address this issue was to establish a separate section within the Citizens Advice service specifically to target the youth market (Northern Ireland CAB 2002).

Stockton CAB's Youth Advice Service found that young people responding to a 'non-client' survey would be more likely to use its services if they were located in a separate building for young people rather than in the main bureau (Robinson 2006). In response, the agency has re-launched its service for young people with a new name (The Cabin) in completely separate premises, where it can be better integrated with other local services for young people.

Research by young people for the LSC in the north east also concluded that 'it would be a good idea to combine [the ideal legal service for young people] with another legal service, but have a separate section for young people.' (LSC 2002)

It is worth noting that one of the most successful specialist legal advice services targeting young people, Streetwise Community Law Centre, is based in a youth drop-in centre that offers a range of information, advice, counselling and support services.

... or conduct carefully planned outreach work

Interest in the potential of outreach services to improve access to advice for marginalised and so-called 'hard-to-reach' client groups has been growing within the legal advice sector. Pleasence, drawing on an evaluation of money

⁵⁷ A summary of findings from these focus groups is available from Youth Access on request.

advice outreach pilots for adults, has argued that such services that are co-located with other public services can be effective at reaching the most vulnerable as a result of their ability to effect the ‘trust transfer’ between professionals that is necessary for effective referrals (Pleasence 2007b).

A recent study by Youth Access and Law Centres Federation has confirmed that, where mainstream advice agencies have insufficient resources to develop entirely separate provision for young people, establishing outreach advice services can be a realistic and effective option (Verma and Wilkins 2009). The research, which included qualitative interviews with 14 advice agencies and focus groups with 29 young people to ascertain best practice in the provision of outreach legal advice delivered by mainstream advice agencies in youth settings, found that:

- Outreach sessions need to be delivered in a venue that young people know, use and trust. Youth information, advice and counselling services were most commonly cited by mainstream advice agency interviewees as appropriate locations.
- Outreach services that are structured around rigid or infrequent appointment sessions tend to be unsuccessful. The high proportion of emergency cases necessitates a good deal of flexibility on the part of legal advisers to respond outside fixed outreach session times.
- Although young people are more likely to use the mainstream agency’s advice centre for follow-up work once the initial relationship has been established, further appointments or contacts often need to be conducted at the outreach venue.
- In order to maximise use of resources, there needs to be a clear division of labour between the host and delivery agencies, with staff from the youth agency available to support young people in relation to emotional and other non-legal issues, in order to enable the legal advisers to focus on legal casework.

‘Detached’ youth work can reach the hardest-to-reach young people

Whilst young people are undoubtedly far more likely to access advice in a dedicated youth setting than an adult advice setting, there is evidence that some of the most excluded young people are unlikely even to access drop-in youth centres.

The Government’s recent ten-year youth strategy recognises that ‘detached’ or ‘outreach’ youth work can be effective in engaging highly disaffected and challenging young people who are unlikely to access youth centres and other services (HM Treasury 2007). A national survey of 564 detached youth work projects for the Joseph Rowntree Foundation found that a large proportion of service users were not in education, were in receipt of benefits, had criminal histories or were living in inadequate or temporary accommodation. Most were in the 13–19 age group and nearly two-thirds were boys, who are less likely than girls to access building-based services (Crimmens et al. 2004). A central feature of detached and outreach methodology is that workers are proactive in approaching young people to introduce themselves and to explain why they are there and what they can offer (Wylie 2004).

Street-based youth work and mobile youth facilities are two of the most common methods for reaching isolated and disaffected young people and appear effective at reaching young people on their own territory, whether it be the estate on which they live, a shopping centre or an area of open space, and in settings where the use of a suitable building is not feasible. Mobile youth facilities can be particularly useful in rural areas⁵⁸ and typically involve a converted bus which is driven regularly to different housing estates or villages to provide a base in which young people can meet or receive services.

Evaluations of street-based and mobile services (e.g. Crimmens et al. 2004) indicate that they can be relatively expensive to deliver – and providing advice outside the office may be seen as too unconventional and informal by mainstream legal advice services – but the potential benefits and outcomes from conducting effective work with the hardest to reach young people may be significant.

Advice in schools may not reach the most disadvantaged ...

Schools appear an obvious location for delivering services to young people, as they come with a captive market. The Government, moreover, has identified the potential of schools to become hubs for the community and is keen for a range of services for children, young people, parents and the wider community to come together under its 'extended schools' policy. However, the research evidence suggests that the success of services in schools depends largely upon the precise nature of the service, the target group and the school environment.

Although schools meet the essential criterion that advice should be delivered where young people already go, they tend to be too closely associated with authority for many young people, whose concerns about advice in schools tend to centre around trust and confidentiality, notably in relation to personal and sensitive issues.

Research for the DfES on the Connexions Service found that privacy was a particular issue for young people seeing their Personal Adviser in schools, and even relates incidents of interviews taking place in the same room where teachers were working (Joyce et al. 2003).

Confidentiality concerns about getting advice in schools appear to be particularly acute for more disadvantaged young people, who may be more likely to have come into conflict with authority or even been excluded from school and therefore are less likely to feel part of the school 'community'. Indeed, in several needs assessments conducted by local advice agencies with disadvantaged young people, school has emerged as an unpopular location for advice, with one even concluding that school was 'not a suitable venue for advice' at all (Braverman 2004).

Later research for the DfES (Hoggarth and Smith 2004) into the impact of the Connexions Service on disadvantaged young people found that both Personal Advisers and young people reported that work in schools often limits the scope for developing more individualised and person-centred approaches to work with young people at risk. One Personal Adviser noted:

58 It is worth noting, however, that there are some good examples of very successful mobile advice services in urban areas as well – see, for example, Croydon Drop-In's Talkbus service: <http://www.croydon.dropin.org.uk/page3.html>

'If you ask them things in school they don't always tell you. Often it is easier to find out when the barriers come down like when we [young people and Connexions PA] meet in the youth club or even when we are sitting on the bus. You have to build trust, otherwise it is very difficult.'

Research by the Institute of Education found that building a sense of ownership and inclusiveness may be more likely in environments not linked, or perceived to be linked, to schools and raised the need to offer activities in diverse contexts if services for young people are to be personalised (Sorhaindo and Feinstein 2007).

... but school can be an effective location for delivering community education and reaching young parents and Asian young women

Whilst school may not be the most appropriate location for a legal advice service targeting disadvantaged young adults, it nevertheless remains an important venue for educating and informing many young people.

Many of Youth Access' members have delivered a range of successful educational programmes to young people in schools on issues ranging from drugs awareness and sexual health to money management and avoiding homelessness.⁵⁹ There is certainly scope within the current Citizenship and Personal, Social and Health Education curriculum to expand work focused on informing young people at an early age about their rights and responsibilities and how to avoid and resolve problems.

School also represents a convenient location for many young people. Careers advice for those integrated within mainstream education has traditionally worked well in schools and colleges, due in part to the relevance of the subject matter to their normal school activity. Schools, particularly primary schools, have also been found to be an effective location for delivering advice on housing and benefits to parents, including young parents (e.g. Islington Schools Advice Project 2004) and evidence of a correlation between housing, income and educational attainment may lead to an increase in such schemes.

One other group that research evidence indicates may be reached through schools is Asian young women. The Dudley CLSP (Welch et al. 2003) found that Asian young people wanted legal advice at the college they attended, whilst a report for the DfES suggested that extended schools may be more successful than current provision in overcoming the cultural barriers associated with Asian young women participating in positive activities (PricewaterhouseCoopers 2006). The reasons appear to be linked mainly to the fact that some Asian young women had to come straight home after school and were not allowed to go out in the evening, rendering other locations for advice inaccessible.

⁵⁹ See examples at:
<http://www.plenet.org.uk/public-legal-education-projects/> and
<http://www.communities.gov.uk/youthhomelessness/prevention/preventionadvice/communityeducation/>

chapter 5

Legal capability – knowledge, skills and psychological barriers

This chapter describes a range of obstacles to seeking or obtaining advice that are related to young people’s level of ‘legal capability’.⁶⁰ These include young people’s common lack of knowledge and awareness of rights and services; and their lack of emotional and practical skills necessary for resolving social welfare problems. In addition, there are significant psychological barriers to accessing advice, including disaffection with the legal system, a sense of powerlessness and a lack of trust in adult services.

Awareness of rights and services

Low awareness of rights is a major barrier to young people seeking advice ...

In order for someone to take action to resolve a problem, they must first recognise that they have a problem and that there is something that can be done about it. As has been pointed out by Pleasence (2007b):

‘The possession of rights is meaningless if people are unaware of their existence or of the means through which they can be effected.’

For people with a legal problem, knowledge of rights is critical, but levels of awareness amongst children and young people of the fact they have rights, let alone the detail of those rights, tend to be relatively low. A recent qualitative study⁶¹ conducted by Independent Academic Research Studies with disadvantaged young people to assess their ‘legal capability’ found that: *‘The participants had little or no knowledge of most basic rights and entitlements; in particular they seemed unaware of any system of civil law to which they had recourse.’* (Parle 2009)

Gallagher (1999), meanwhile, found that, although the Scottish children and young people in her study tended to know that they had rights, ‘the majority had only a vague idea of what those rights were’. Similarly, focus groups conducted by Enfield Law Centre found:

‘In general, participants [in focus groups] were not aware of their rights, particularly younger [young] people.’ (Braverman 2004)

Research by the LSRC has found that the lowest levels of awareness of rights (amongst all age groups) are to be found in relation to mental health, homelessness and neighbour problems (Buck et al. 2007).

60 ‘Being legally capable simply means to be able to perform our role as equal members of society while being aware of our basic rights and responsibilities’ – Dr. Theo Gavrielides, writing in the foreword to Parle (2009).

61 This study consisted of four focus groups with a total of 30 young people aged between 15 and 25 in inner city areas of England, complemented by face-to-face interviews with a smaller number (10) of young people from particularly disadvantaged and marginalised backgrounds.

... but young people have a keen interest in their rights (that is not matched by adult society's attitude to them possessing rights)

The phenomenon of low awareness of the possession of rights appears not to be linked to any lack of interest in the concept of rights on the part of children and young people themselves.

On the contrary, a needs assessment conducted by Save the Children in 1999 found that children and young people in focus groups 'wanted to know more about rights and how to use them' (Chapman et al. 1999). A study by the Office of the Children's Rights Commissioner for London found that many children and young people either possessed strong views about rights or were delighted to discover they had them at all (Sharpe 2002). Similarly, focus groups conducted by Enfield Law Centre found that *'[m]ost participants would like to learn about their rights and many were really keen. Indeed, one participant seemed to engage for the first time when this was discussed.'* (Braverman 2004)

It could be argued that young people's awareness of rights has been hampered by a reluctance amongst adults to afford rights to a group it suspects of being unable to exercise them responsibly. A survey by Save the Children concluded: *'Our young people are passionate about rights but our survey suggests there are gaps in their knowledge and in the general willingness of adults to observe their rights.'* (Wicks 2004)

In their survey, 8% of young people said they thought they had no rights as a young person and a further 6% weren't sure. Only 27% felt their rights were respected quite often or always, whilst 33% said 'not often' or 'never'. Their research with adults suggested that adults knew even less about children's rights than did young people themselves (Wicks 2004).

Youth Access has argued that gaining knowledge of rights and responsibilities at an early age is essential if young people are to grow into informed and responsible citizens capable of avoiding problems, exercising their rights and playing a positive and active role in society.⁶² Encouragingly, the final report of the Public Legal Education and Support Task Force (2007) highlights the benefits to individuals, wider society and various government strategies of developing 'legal capability'.

The development of the Citizenship and Personal, Social and Health Education curriculum and the recent introduction of the new theme of Economic Well-being and Financial Capability into the secondary school curriculum represent welcome steps. There may also be considerable scope for the youth sector's proud history of developing innovative and effective community education approaches with excluded young people to be routinely extended into the field of legal rights and responsibilities.

However, Gallagher's (1999) findings contain a warning that such progress may prove hard in relation to some groups. Underlying the 'lively interest' in their rights displayed by most young people, she found a cynicism amongst those with the greatest needs for advice born of experiences of their rights failing to be respected by adults:

⁶² See *Developing young people into capable citizens*, News release, Youth Access / The National Youth Agency, 10th July 2007.

'The majority were enthusiastic, keen to know more about their rights and wanted to have access to information on their rights and the law, so that they could exercise their rights with greater confidence. However, some who had specific legal needs, such as those who were involved in the children's hearing system, tended to be apathetic and cynical.'

A lack of awareness of available services compounds young people's inability to get advice ...

A lack of knowledge of how to exercise rights and of help services available compounds the inability of many young people to obtain a solution to their problems. There is substantial evidence suggesting that young people's awareness of the existence of local advice services that could help them is low. For example, a report based on a needs assessment conducted with young people in Medway noted that

'many young people appear to be unaware of the services which are available to them ... much work needs to be done with this client group to raise awareness.' (Medway CLSP 2001)

Research on tribunals for the DCA (Genn et al. 2006) and on consumer rights for the Office of Fair Trading (2005) also both found that young people had the lowest awareness of sources of advice.

Parle (2009) found that young people in his study had 'little knowledge of existing structures for advice' and thought that this would affect their problem resolution strategies. This is a conclusion supported by data from the CSJS: 23% of young respondents in the 2004 CSJS who were unable to correctly identify any advisers in their locality did nothing to resolve their problem, compared to 9% of those who were able to (Balmer et al. 2007).

Levels of awareness of services will clearly be affected by local factors, but may also depend on the nature of the problem and the age of the young person. A study in North London found that, whilst awareness of services able to advise on training and careers was relatively high, use and awareness of rights-based advice services was much lower. Significantly, under-18s were found to have lower recognition of their need for advice and to be substantially less likely to know where to obtain it than older young people (Gold 1998).

Garvey et al. (2009), who found that young people had particular difficulties knowing where to go for advice on housing and homelessness,⁶³ provides an explanation of the impact of age on awareness of services:

'they are expected to be able to self-refer or access pertinent sources of information on their own initiative. In reality, they may be unable to do this because of a lack of life experience, confidence and a range of other positive facets they have yet to develop.'

It seems likely that levels of awareness of services may be lowest of all amongst those young people who are most in need of advice. For example, a Children's Society (1999) report cited the lack of information available to young people on where to seek out confidential advice, both before and after they run away, as a significant contributory factor to the problem of young

63 See Kenrick (2007b) for further exploration of young people's access to housing advice.

runaways. Meanwhile, research for the Prince's Trust (2003) found that 45% of disadvantaged young people were confused about where to go for help. Indeed lack of awareness of services was, along with issues of trust, one of the two most commonly cited barriers for the 24% of disadvantaged young people in the survey who said they would never go to a specialist organisation for help.

... and they lack awareness of the relevance of services to their specific problems

It should be noted that simply raising awareness of the existence of services may be insufficient and should be supplemented by firming up the understanding of young people about precisely what advice services do and the type of service they need for the specific problem they are experiencing.

The initial barrier here relates to how young people view the nature of their problem. It is common for young people and the services they are trying to access to classify problems in very different ways. For example, askTheSite, an advice and information website aimed at young people, has reported that its users will very often select its 'family and relationship' advice option even when the focus of the advice required relates to a separate, but related subject, such as housing or benefits.⁶⁴

Braverman (2004) reported that young people in focus groups held for Enfield Law Centre tended to be unaware of the difference between civil matters, criminal matters and issues where a legal remedy may not be appropriate. Similarly, research conducted by young people for the LSC North East Regional Office found that many young people were confused between civil and criminal law. Respondents also found the name of the Community Legal Service confusing – most young people assumed it was about criminal rather than civil law (LSC 2002).

Wintersteiger (2006) suggests that young people who do not use the CAB service may not identify their problem as legal at all. Research by the LSC supports this contention:

'At first, many young people that attended said that they had never experienced any type of legal problem. After we told the young people what types of legal problems they could experience, nearly everyone had a story to tell. They just did not realise you could do anything about it.' (LSC 2002)

An additional barrier relates to young people's perceptions of what services actually do. There is evidence, for example, that young people tend to know very little about the work of mainstream advice agencies, such as Citizens Advice Bureaux and Law Centres, and that their typical perception that such agencies are 'not for us' are partly reassessed once they have gained first-hand knowledge (Kenrick 2002).

MORI research for Citizens Advice found that 72% of 16–25-year-olds (compared to 47% of all age groups) who had either not approached a CAB in the last year or had used a CAB but felt that it had not resolved their problem would consider approaching a CAB if they had improved information about the service (MORI 2004).

⁶⁴ As reported in Wintersteiger (2006).

Research by Stockton CAB found that of young people visiting Connexions, 40% had never heard of the local CAB and, of those who had, 67% did not know where it was located (Robinson 2007). Similar research by the CAB service in Northern Ireland found that just over a third of young respondents knew where their local CAB office was and only 13% of those had used the service. The key issue was the lack of awareness regarding the issues on which the CAB provides advice (Northern Ireland CAB 2002).

Young people's use of the Connexions Service similarly seems to be related as much to their *perceptions* of what the service does as the actual services offered. In theory, Connexions offers advice to young people on virtually any subject, but DfES research indicates that the vast majority of calls received by Connexions Direct related to careers, education and learning, with only 10% of enquiries related to money or housing (Taylor Nelson Sofres 2006).

It could be argued, of course, that young people's perceptions of services, far from being rooted in myth, are often likely to be based upon the experiences of friends or even their own direct experience and may have some factual foundation. (Chapter 6 explores evidence of structural shortcomings in service provision.)

It is suggested that raising awareness of rights (including their existence, detail and potential usage) and of agencies that can help young people (including their location, opening hours, services and the nature of their work) should be a priority for policy makers, planners and providers of advice services.

Careful thought, taking account of local factors, is needed to devise successful methodologies for 'marketing' services to this client group. The involvement of local young people in any awareness-raising strategy is key in helping to determine the messages, methods and designs that will succeed. Citizenship education delivered by teachers as part of the Citizenship and Personal, Social and Health Education curriculum, community education and Public Legal Education delivered by youth workers and advice workers, strategic use of new technologies and targeted publicity certainly all have roles to play.

Skills

Some young people lack key emotional and practical skills necessary for getting advice and resolving their problems

Wintersteiger (2008), arguing for the development of Public Legal Education initiatives aimed at young people as a means of improving their access to justice, has identified the following list of specific skills, knowledge and qualities as key to young people's legal capability:

- knowing when to get help;
- effective verbal and written communication skills, including negotiation style;
- managing correspondence and record-keeping;
- confidence, determination and persistence; and
- know-how to achieve desired outcome.

There is evidence confirming the relevance of some of these issues to young people's ability to access advice services.

Knowing when to get help

Identifying that one has a problem that requires advice and knowing when to get help is cited as important to young people's help-seeking by Garvey et al. (2009), who comment that:

'Seeking help means an individual has identified a problem that is hampering their life and may affect their future. But the ability to identify problems and see their detrimental effect is an instinct that tends to be honed in later adulthood ... Unless young adults are encouraged to become more self-aware, to identify problems as they arise, to talk about any problems they are experiencing and to seek help where relevant, their needs may remain hidden.'

Garvey et al. highlight the relevance of the 'generalist/multi-discipline/"one stop shop"' approach for young people who may not be sure what their problem is.

Communication & emotional skills

Parle (2009) concluded that the ability of participants in his study to resolve law-related problems would be adversely affected by their poor verbal communication skills. Interestingly, he found that their lack of skills in this area led many young people to say that they would use aggression and threats to resolve their problems. The majority of participants in focus groups that explored young people's responses to a consumer rights scenario said that they would react with anger or even violence if they were told that they would not be entitled to an exchange or a refund when returning a faulty CD to a shop.

Research in the fields of mental health and adolescence has established that the possession of 'soft' or non-cognitive skills, such as communication and understanding of others and the ability to deal with tasks, make decisions and solve problems is becoming increasingly important to young people's ability to develop 'resilience' – a concept encompassing a set of personal qualities that makes people more able to withstand the negative effects of particular events or circumstances.⁶⁵

Yet, recent research in the field of cognitive behaviour and adolescent brain development indicates that the brain's centre of reasoning and problem-solving is among the last to mature, meaning that even into their twenties young people may think and process emotions very differently from older adults (Jones 2005). In short, they can effectively be denied important problem resolution skills by adolescent physiology.

Wintersteiger (2008) argues that developing young people's emotional skills is of crucial importance to the process of avoiding and resolving legal problems, but is something that can be easily overlooked by service providers and policy makers focused on advice delivery.

Parle (2009) found that young people in his study, particularly those who had housing problems, often felt 'lost and helpless' and had difficulty dealing

65 For further reading on the concept of resilience see, for example, Rutter, M., 'Resilience concepts and findings: implications for family therapy', *Journal of Family Therapy*, vol.21, pp.119–44, 1999.

with the emotional impact that law-related problems had on their lives. He argues that the ability to cope with stress and anger are important aspects of legal capability and points to the need for counselling to be available to young people with legal problems as well as advice.

Confidence & persistence

Making – and following through – a decision to seek advice requires a certain level of confidence and motivation.

A recent survey commissioned by the Wales Committee for the Community Legal Service found that low self-esteem and lack of confidence were common barriers cited by young people to their getting advice (LSC 2008).

For anyone who does go on to seek advice, persistence is a useful quality to possess. Many people needing advice simply give up whilst trying to negotiate an ‘advice maze’ before obtaining the advice they need. The LSRC has identified the phenomenon of ‘referral fatigue’ in which the likelihood of people actually obtaining advice after having been referred on by an adviser declines as people visit more advisers:

‘The phenomenon of referral fatigue suggests a degree of exhaustion among members of the public as a result of being pushed from adviser to adviser.’
(Pleasence 2006)

Many advice services report particular difficulties with receiving and making successful referrals of young people, as young people are prone to failing to follow referrals through without active support from the referring agency. For example, a local CAB in Wales, in a report on an advice project for young people run in partnership with a youth advice service, states:

‘Ensuring that a client actually follows through with a referral has been a persistent problem whether the referral is to or from us ... but [we] are assured by other agencies that it is normal for this group.’ (Caerphilly CAB 2005)

Parle (2009) found that the seriousness of the problem being experienced could affect the persistence of young people. Where there was little at stake, young people were less likely to persist. However, there was also some limited evidence that young people were less inclined to persist where a problem seemed particularly complex.

Psychological barriers

Young people in transition may experience a number of psychological barriers to getting advice ...

In analysing the behaviour of the general public, Genn (1999) identified a number of reasons, going beyond simple lack of awareness, why some people failed to seek advice. The most common reasons included: a feeling that nothing could be done about the problem or that it was too much trouble to get advice; the inaccessibility of good quality advice; previous negative experience of legal advisers or legal processes; a sense of powerlessness to overcome some problems; and alienation from the legal system. Many of these reasons clearly have a psychological dimension.

The remainder of this chapter will examine evidence that psychological barriers to advice may be particularly significant amongst young people.

Garvey et al. (2009) have suggested that the process of adolescence itself can make advice-seeking anathema to some young people. In transition from children to autonomous adults, young people must re-make the rules and boundaries of many of their relationships, including learning to make more and more decisions for themselves, whilst coming into increased conflict with authority figures:

'In this context, asking other people (apart from peers) for help presents a challenge to this desire for independence. Seeking help can almost be a contradictory impulse at this time of life.'

Garvey et al. also highlight the pressure felt by many young adults to appear mature – as if they know where they are going – and how, as a result, 'life crises can often go ignored'.

... including disaffection ...

The general disaffection of Britain's youth and their lack of engagement in social affairs and politics has been well documented⁶⁶ and can be evidenced in, for example, the low turnout rates in General Elections amongst under-25s. Such disaffection is also to be found in relation to the legal system.

Research conducted by the Consumers' Association found that, when compared to other socially excluded groups, 'young people had the worst experiences and the worst opinion of the legal system'. Their report put this down to: 'the cynicism and the complete lack of trust in the legal system ... The level of disenfranchisement was such that the young people in this sample just scorned the idea that legal safeguards could exist for their protection' (Consumers' Association 2000).

Gallagher (1999) found that children and young people who had encountered the legal system and processes in Scotland neither understood them nor felt they were user-friendly to children or young people. Most felt peripheral to and alienated from the whole process, but felt they had no alternative other than to accept what was provided: 'Many [children and young people] ... viewed the law negatively – as a system to be used against them rather than for their benefit.'

Similarly, an inquiry into children and young people's marginalisation from the legal system in Australia identified that the assumptions of an adult legal system about the legal capacities of children and young people to participate – and the legal processes themselves, which were designed by and for adults – acted as formidable barriers. The inquiry found that many young people who had complained about abuse and maltreatment from statutory services reported their complaints getting 'lost', ignored or dismissed by officials and that even lawyers acting for them rarely listened to them or asked for their opinions:

'Young people emphasised to the Inquiry that they found the legal system practically incomprehensible ... No aspect of the legal system escaped these consistent and persistent allegations of marginalisation ... According to one

⁶⁶ See, for example, Margo and Dixon (2006).

practitioner, as a result of these problems many young people are more damaged by the legal system designed to help them than by the activities that led them there in the first place.’ (Australian Law Reform Commission 1997)

It is hardly surprising, in this context, that many young people are not motivated to pursue their rights with the aid of a legal adviser. The result can be apathy and an ineffectiveness in making demands, either individually or collectively, for support to meet their needs, a phenomenon that appears to be most acute in relation to disadvantaged groups of young people with the greatest experience of the legal system, such as those in the care system.

As Garvey et al. (2009) explain, a young person’s early advice-seeking experience is highly influential on their future advice-seeking behaviour: *‘For a young adult who overcomes all of the obstacles to seeking help their first experiences tend to define and shape how they feel about asking for help ... A negative, unsupportive or inappropriate first experience of help-seeking tends to limit future help-seeking and encourages a young person to believe they have to cope with life’s challenges alone – that there’s no one out there to help ... Organisations need to be particularly conscious of the support they provide to people reaching out for the first time.’*

... a sense of powerlessness to resolve their problems ...

Young people’s alienation from the legal system is but one of several psychological barriers to getting advice, although it clearly has an influence on many of the other barriers.

In the 2004 CSJS, which asked respondents who had taken no action to resolve their problems why this was so, the single most common reason for inaction amongst young people was not thinking that advice would make any difference to the outcome: 29% of 18–24-year-olds gave this reason, slightly higher than amongst respondents aged 25 and over (Balmer et al. 2007).

Not thinking that advice would make any difference to the outcome was also the most common reason given by young people in the 2001 CSJS – 33% of 18-24 year olds cited this reason.⁶⁷ Other reasons for their inaction given by young people in the CSJS include: the problem was not very important; there was no dispute; it was too stressful to sort out; they were scared;⁶⁸ they thought the problem would resolve itself; or they didn’t know what to do.⁶⁹

Many of these reasons point to an overall sense of powerlessness on the part of many young people to resolve their problems.

The National Children and Youth Law Centre in Australia has attributed children and young people’s relative powerlessness in society generally to a failure to involve them in decision-making:

‘Adults very often make significant decisions about children without consulting them or seeking to involve their participation in the decision-making process. They are rarely informed or consulted about new laws and policies which will impact upon them. They are frequently denied rights and opportunities which other members of the community take for granted.’ (NCYLC 1995)

⁶⁷ Unpublished Youth Access analysis of 2001 CSJS data supplied by LSRC.

⁶⁸ Feeling scared has been associated particularly with domestic violence and neighbour problems; see Genn et al. (2004).

⁶⁹ Unpublished data from the 2004 CSJS supplied to Youth Access by the LSRC.

Kenrick (2002), in discussing the reasons for young people's sense of powerlessness to deal with their problems, refers to the impact of young people's perceptions of not being listened to or having their problems trivialised by adult professionals and the lack of confidence and self-esteem felt by many young people.

Similarly, Kelley (2002) found that the primary barrier for young people to access to legal support 'consisted of seeing their problems as worth solving, or potentially solvable at all'. She attributes this to 'the impact of our societal disregard for their problems – they felt that their own problems were too trivial to merit specialist support'.

Kenrick (2002) points out:

'Such feelings of worthlessness, helplessness and powerlessness were typical characteristics of Genn's 'lumpers', representing the 5% of the general public she identified as failing to take any action to deal with their legal problems ... [I]t is extremely likely that a far more significant proportion of young people might fall into this category, since their very dependency and lack of autonomy in many areas of their lives can feed a sense of powerlessness.'

The research of Genn (1999) and Pleasence (2004; 2006) indicates that a sense of powerlessness to make a difference is an even more common reason for not getting advice than a lack of awareness of rights or services, but that a sense of powerlessness may actually in some cases be the result of a lack of awareness, or of being scared to take action.

The Australian inquiry into children and young people's marginalisation from legal processes also identified the significance of young people's reluctance to complain or seek redress because of fear for the consequences. It attributes this fear partly to an obvious power imbalance between the young person and the adult individual or authority against whom they are complaining and the fact that the young person may know that they will have to deal with that individual or authority again later (Australian Law Reform Commission 1997).

... and a lack of trust in adult services to offer respect and confidentiality

As outlined in Chapter 3, a pre-requisite for any service wanting to carry out effective work with young people is the ability to gain young people's trust. However, there is a perception amongst many young people that society does not respect them – a perception that is not without foundation, according to recent research by Barnardo's showing that a substantial proportion of adults view children and young people as vermin.⁷⁰ Young people may be used to being treated as a problem – and, sometimes, discriminated against – by legislators, employers, officials, parents and shopkeepers alike, and they may have learnt not to expect to be listened to by adults.

In such an environment – which arguably demands urgent action to tackle negative stereotyping of young people so that they are perceived as, and can be empowered to become, competent citizens rather than victims or villains – it is perhaps rational for a vulnerable young person not to expect equal

⁷⁰ See Barnardo's press release, *The shame of Britain's intolerance of children*, 17 November 2008, highlighting findings from a YouGov poll of 2,021 adults.

treatment or a sympathetic ear at a mainstream advice centre, for example, which is likely to be run by and primarily for adults.

Key to building relationships of trust with young people are assurances about confidentiality. Gallagher (1999), for example, reported in her study of children and young people's views of the legal system in Scotland that '[w]hether they could be offered confidentiality significantly influenced who they would approach for advice.'

Many young people hold strong concerns about their parents, teachers or friends finding out that they have sought help, particularly if their enquiry concerns a problem at home or school. They may fear the stigma attached to seeking help or may fear acute embarrassment if the nature of a sensitive problem, concerning abuse or bullying for example, is discovered by their peers.

Garvey et al. (2009) report on the significance of peer attitudes. Whilst most young adults said that they thought their friends would be supportive of a decision to seek advice, some cited serious concerns which might prevent them from seeking help if they needed it. As many as 27% said their friends would 'probably' or 'definitely' think that they can't cope on their own, 18% that their friends would think they were weak, 9% that their friends would look down on them for having a problem and 7% that their friends would not want to be their friend anymore. Many more responded that their friends 'maybe would/maybe would not' respond in those ways. Young men and those in lower social grades were more likely to feel that their friends would not be supportive.⁷¹

Research in the health sector has found that many young people are deterred from seeking health advice because of concerns that sensitive information will not be kept confidential by adult professionals. Young people were concerned about deliberate breaches of confidentiality (i.e. where an adviser might feel obliged to share information) as well as inadvertent breaches by staff (e.g. gossiping receptionists) and parents intercepting confidential information sent to them in the post (Royal College of GPs 2000).

The Prince's Trust (2003) found that only 45% of socially excluded young people said that they would complete all questions in an assessment truthfully when providing personal details and would only divulge personal information provided they understood why it was needed and how it would be used.

Kelley (2002) also found that confidentiality was one of the major barriers to access to legal services and comments:

'It is clear that if we want to maintain services that have the confidence of children and young people, then we must strike a careful balance between adhering to a high level of confidentiality, and sharing information for child protection purposes.'

Many young people may wish to test out a service before investing trust in it, perhaps by starting off with a relatively minor or trivial enquiry before

71 Based on responses from 654 young adults aged 16-25 to the question 'What would your friends think of you if you contacted an advice service (e.g. helpline, website etc) about a problem?'

pursuing the more sensitive enquiries that may have caused them to seek help in the first place. Research by Citizens Advice found that, *'... to use the Service with confidence, they would need a way of checking out confidentiality and trust issues with the adviser. It was suggested that this checking could be done by going to the Bureau with another type of query and gauging the kind of response they got and how they felt about the adviser.'* (NACAB 1995)

The attitudes and skills of staff are vital in this process. Users will be looking for signs that advisers will listen to them, understand them and take their problems seriously. Demonstrating respect, confidentiality and independence are all prerequisites if trust is to be built.

A further psychological barrier can be a fear of loss of control over what will happen once personal information has been imparted to an adviser. Aside from fears about confidentiality, many young people may be feeling confused by events in their lives or oppressed by adults when they seek advice and may need to feel they have some kind of self-determination. Being told what is best for them or having someone doing things for them without adequate explanation and consultation can exacerbate this sense of lack of control and further alienate young people who are attempting to assert their independence and individuality.

chapter 6

Shortcomings in service provision and planning

This chapter explains the impact on young people's access to advice from the way services are planned and delivered. Issues explored include the underdevelopment of youth services' advice-giving role, young people's mistrust of statutory services and the adult-focused service characteristics of mainstream advice services. In addition, young people experience physical barriers, such as lack of transport and poor access for disabled people. Finally, structural problems, such as the impact of a lack of joined-up planning and provision, are discussed.

Young people's services

Youth organisations can lack the focus, knowledge and skills needed to identify legal issues and provide good-quality advice ...

Given that disadvantaged young people are far more likely to come into contact with a youth organisation than a specialist advice agency when they have a rights-based problem, a wide range of youth professionals have a vital role to play in assessing young people's needs, providing assistance within the limits of their competence, identifying where a specialist intervention may be required and making appropriate and timely referrals. Genn et al. (2004) note:

'The position of these first points of contact or 'problem-noticers' in the fluid structure of advice-seeking and advice-giving is absolutely pivotal. Providing the right sort of information and help at the earliest possible stage must be a central objective in developing an effective policy for the provision of information, advice and assistance to members of the public involved in justiciable problems.'

However, many youth professionals are, for a number of reasons, ill-equipped to perform their problem-noticing role in respect of rights-based issues. First, many are working in services whose core focus is elsewhere. For example, the Make Space Youth Review found that the focus of many Connexions advisers, unhelpfully, has been on education, training and work rather than on the barriers to learning:

'The effect of this has been less emphasis on effectively tackling social and emotional problems – many of which are tied into the conditions that make training and work much more difficult in the first place.' (4Children 2007)

This problem had been identified early on in the lifespan of Connexions. Research by BMRB for the DfES in 2003 found a lack of clarity about the role and purpose of the service and that education, training and employment was often the 'sole focus' of interviews:

'even at the point of qualitative research interview, young people were sometimes unaware that Connexions dealt with any type of personal

problems or issues aside from education, employment and training.' (Joyce et al. 2003)

This report also confirmed fears that many Connexions Personal Advisers were failing to identify a range of underlying issues that represented significant barriers to learning. Whilst 37% of users of the Connexions Service were found to have been referred on to other agencies by their Personal Adviser, the vast majority of these referrals were to the Jobcentre, training providers, college courses and employers. The number of referrals for 'other' issues, such as housing, was minimal (Joyce et al. 2003).

A second reason why many youth professionals are not well-equipped to perform their problem-noticing role in respect of these other issues is that their training rarely includes a substantial focus on rights-based issues, such as housing, homelessness, benefits and debt. Nor does it usually focus on the specific skills needed to provide rights-based advice and, where it does, it tends not to equip workers to provide in-depth advice on those issues. This is true even within parts of the youth advice sector, where many advisers have been trained as youth workers or social workers rather than as advice workers.⁷²

A third reason is that youth organisations, in a mirror of the experiences of their clients, are often marginalised from mainstream advice sector structures and processes, so are not consistently or effectively integrated into relevant referral networks. Genn et al. (2004) highlight the need to address such separations:

'The evidence discussed here shows how varied are the initial advice sources approached and highlights the need to pull into the ambit of the Community Legal Service a wider range of advice sources.'

... whilst traditional training can discourage youth workers from playing the crucial advocacy role needed

The classic 'problem-centred' model adopted by many mainstream advice services, in which there is a tendency to promote the adviser into the role of the expert problem-solver who knows what is best for the client, is relatively unhelpful in the context of the provision of advice to young people, as the loss of control by the young person can lead them to distrust the adviser. Equally, however, there can be dangers in too 'youth work-ey' an approach.

Advisers who have been trained as youth workers are likely to have been ingrained with a philosophy of empowering young people to make their own decisions, whilst avoiding being directional. However, this may lead in some instances to an inappropriate level of empowerment when it comes to tackling complex problems. Moorhead and Robinson (2006) found that often empowerment of legal advice clients does not work well because *'[c]lients coping with years of social exclusion or dramatic worsening in their health or lifestyle and poor levels of educational attainment and self-esteem are often ill-equipped to deal with complex bureaucracies or hostile opponents.'*

Young people often need more active assistance than is always available from youth professionals:

⁷² For a comprehensive overview of workforce issues affecting the youth advice sector, see *The Youth Advice Workforce: Now And In The Future*, Youth Access, 2009. It should be noted that Youth Access has developed a national youth advice training programme aimed at equipping youth advice workers with the skills and knowledge required to provide good-quality advice; see www.youthaccess.org.uk/events

'Proactively assisting young people to make their case is very important in helping young people obtain their statutory entitlements, for example, in challenging decisions by statutory services and representing clients at tribunals.' (LSC 2002)

Youth Access advocates an approach in which equal value is placed on the use of young person-centred process skills and the possession and application of knowledge. The client can thus be supported in making decisions and choices for herself/himself without being provided with a pre-determined solution that fits the adviser's view of the best way forward, but will not be left to navigate the system without an appropriate level of support and, where required, advocacy.

Characteristics of YIACS

Youth Access' network of members agrees to abide by nationally agreed values and principles which ensure a service's credibility with young people (these are contained in Youth Access 1999). There are a number of important characteristics and aims which youth information, advice and counselling services (YIACS) share with mainstream advice providers, including being independent, impartial, confidential, accountable, professional and free at the point of access/delivery. The following represent some of the service characteristics which are more specific to YIACS:

- Specialist services are offered for young people – no adult clients.
- Wide range of help is available to cater for holistic needs of young people.
- Provision is flexible to ensure responsiveness and availability.
- Care is taken to ensure the psychological as well as physical access to the service.
- Informal setting is provided to build confidence and respect.
- Level of and respect for right to confidentiality are provided, which are difficult to provide in mainstream services.
- Voluntary participation and self-referral by users are ensured.
- User involvement – young people are involved in design and delivery of service.
- Balance between empowerment of clients to make their own choices and decisions and provision of active assistance and advocacy where required to achieve a result.

'Making information, advice and counselling accessible is at the very core of such work. Agencies have been designed to encourage this ... Clearly confidentiality, informality, independence, a generalist approach and a positive image work toward accessibility and are important to young people.' (Feaviour 1994)

Statutory services

Disadvantaged young people's prior experiences can lead to deep mistrust of statutory services ...

A number of reports highlight the impact of young people's previous negative experiences of statutory services. For example, research for the DfES on the impact of Connexions on young people at risk found:

'The experience of being let down in the past ... shapes the orientations of young people ... The hardest to reach, we were repeatedly told, want informality, confidentiality and anonymity, and are often mistrustful of any statutory or "professional" organisation.' (Hoggarth and Smith 2004)

Similarly, as Bateman (2007) reports, JobCentre Plus has been the subject of criticism from teenage parents needing benefits advice:

'Many service users had had negative experiences with some Jobcentre Plus staff who were variously described as being: "rude", poorly informed, "prejudiced" against teenage parents.'

Meanwhile, an evaluation of youth advice services for Youth Access, which found that disadvantaged young people tend to prefer to get advice from voluntary organisations, reported:

'A number of negative comments were made about Government Agencies and local authorities. Young people reported some staff can be very rude to young people, often just pass young people around, promise to contact them and don't and generally treat them like children.' (MBA 2007)

... and statutory services can offer poor access and quality ...

There is some evidence of the inaccessibility of and poor levels of service provided by some statutory services.

Evidence from the CSJS suggests that those who seek advice from the local council are the least likely to obtain advice for their law-related problems (Pleasence et al. 2004).

Hoggarth and Smith (2004) identified a tension between the professional needs of the statutory Connexions Service and its accessibility to its client group:

'To be attractive and accessible to young people Connexions needs to lean towards informality and flexibility in presentation and practice. However, the more it does this, the greater the difficulty it will have in functioning as a rational public service able to account for its activities and achievements.'

Meanwhile, concerns about the quality of advice provided by statutory services have been raised by both Bateman (2007), who reports that JobCentre Plus staff 'allegedly gave incomplete or inconsistent advice' to teenage parents, and the LSC (2006), which, in an evaluation of youth advice projects, reported:

'A number of projects were surprised by the lack of knowledge of some statutory sector staff in agencies set up to deal with young people and their problems.'

... as well as lacking the ability to advocate independently in young people's best interests

Having access to independent sources of advice is seen by young people as extremely important to them. Recent research by the Children's Rights Director for England concluded:

'Independence was important to many children and young people, mainly because the advocate would not be involved with the issue, would be less judgemental and it would be more private. Many children and young people expressed very strong views about this.' (Morgan 2008)

Statutory services are often unable to provide a truly impartial and independent service to young people, particularly where advice is sought in relation to a dispute with the same statutory body. However, as the LSRC have reported, many people with legal problems try to obtain advice, at least in the first instance, from the 'other side' (Pleasence 2006). In the case of disadvantaged young people, who are particularly prone to rented housing, homelessness and benefits problems, the 'other side' is frequently the local council or JobCentre Plus. Indeed, as noted in Chapter 3, young people, particularly those who are socially isolated, are more likely to turn to the local council than other sources of advice and were more likely to do so than other age groups (Balmer et al. 2007). Yet turning to the authority with whom one has a dispute is rarely as valuable as getting independent advice:

'Although it is possible that sometimes an opposing party in a dispute might provide a person with dispassionate and valuable advice or an internal complaints process, it seems unlikely that advice from an opposing party could ever be as dispassionate and valuable as advice from an independent adviser.' (Pleasence 2006)

Research for the DfES has also recognised the crucial role of independent advice within Connexions and Children's Trusts:

'The role of offering one-to-one advice across a range of issues by an agency that was neither local authority nor a formal government body was identified by Connexions stakeholders as one of the valuable aspects of the service.' (ECOTEC 2006)

However, there is anecdotal evidence from Youth Access members that, in the transition of Personal Adviser services from Connexions to Children's Trusts, far from such evidence being taken on board, the capacity of Personal Advisers to provide independent advice is likely to be lost in many areas. Most 'targeted' Personal Advisers, many of whom were previously employed by independent voluntary organisations or Connexions Partnerships, have been absorbed within, and are now directly managed by, local authorities' children's services departments. This raises an important question regarding whether such advisers may be compromised in their ability to advocate in the best interests of their clients, or to make appropriate referrals, due to conflicts of interest.⁷³

73 The author is aware of disturbing anecdotal evidence that in some local authorities, social workers, youth workers and Personal Advisers have been instructed by managers, fearful of legal challenge to their employing body, that making a referral of a homeless young person to their local legal advice service would be a dismissible offence.

Mainstream advice services

Mainstream advice agencies are not set up to deal with the range of non-legal issues on which young people also need support

The companion paper to this report, *Young People's Needs for Advice – The Evidence*, highlights young people's needs for holistic, age-specific services that can deal with a range of inter-related problems. This can pose major difficulties to mainstream services attempting to meet the needs of this client group.

Research commissioned by Citizens Advice several years ago into young people's scarce use of CABx identified that a major barrier was bureaux' inability to deal with the emotional aspects of their problems:

'The young people seemed to be asking for counselling support as much as factual information and were concerned that they might be referred on to someone else by the Bureau.' (NACAB 1995)

A survey commissioned by the Wales Committee for the Community Legal Service similarly found that young people needed 'advice with emotional support' (LSC 2008).

More recent research by Citizens Advice identified that young people approaching the service often want advice on issues related to their legal problems, but on which the CAB service is unable to help, such as regarding education options, sexual health issues and problems with friends and family, and questions 'CAB ability to ensure appropriate holistic provision, and indeed effective advice giving to this group of service users' (Wintersteiger 2006). The report then quotes an unpublished report on a focus group with young people on the subject of unmet need for the CAB service:

'Often secondary or knock-on problems are emotional, health, relationship or stress-related issues which the bureaux are perceived as either not able to address, or to be not good at dealing with ... Several informants claimed from experience that advisers also tend to narrowly focus on single advice needs rather than probe their wider implications or create a space for clients to feel comfortable to open up about related personal matters (e.g. by coming out, or confiding about depression or domestic violence).'

Moorhead and Robinson (2006), in research into how mainstream advice agencies dealt with clients of all ages with clusters of problems, confirmed that law centres and solicitors shared CABx' narrow focus in dealing with wider issues:

'Practitioners' understandings of holistic provision appeared to be confined ... Broader notions of holistic practice, such as tackling social as well as legal problems, were not accorded much attention by the practitioners to whom we spoke.'

Such evidence suggests that most mainstream advice workers are not in a position to play the role of 'trusted adult', identified by the Social Exclusion Unit and the DCSF as necessary for providing holistic support to and co-ordinating services for disadvantaged young people. Youth advice workers

often play this role, but advisers in mainstream advice services, particularly where they are funded under the current legal aid system, rarely in practice have the time to do anything much beyond simple legal casework (Verma and Wilkins 2009).

However, mainstream advice services certainly have an important role to play in ensuring young people receive good quality advice, particularly on more complex legal problems. Caerphilly CAB (2005), reporting on its experience of developing a specific service for young people, concluded that this was possible if CABs both adapt their service characteristics and work with partners in the youth sector to provide a complementary service: *'The CAB is focused on the whole situation, while the youth worker is focused on the whole person ... The youth worker provides the constant and informed support that allows the whole person to grow and develop over a far greater timescale ... CABs do not need to be youth work agencies to provide an effective service to young people, they need to meet the desirable service characteristics identified by Youth Access, all of which are already close to the heart of the CAB service, and they need to work closely with and understand the values of youth workers and youth focused agencies.'*

Young people can be deterred by mainstream advice agencies' opening hours and intake systems ...

Kenrick (2002) lists the following barriers related to advice agencies' intake systems:

'Problems getting through to agencies by telephone, long queues at drop-in sessions, the offer of appointments two or three weeks ahead with no interim advice and "rules" set by agencies on how to contact them are likely to deter those with least trust in adult services or uncertainty about the merits of their case from persisting in their attempts to make enquiries.'

Recent research by Advice Services Alliance has highlighted that the root cause of many of the perceived barriers for the public in accessing mainstream advice agencies is a simple lack of capacity on the part of the agencies (Sefton 2008). However, the service characteristics of advice agencies established for the general public undoubtedly present some specific access issues for young people.

Caerphilly CAB (2005) identified a number of the difficulties CABs have with providing good access for young people:

'Young people do not want to enter a closed door; they do not want to be labelled by entering a specific area; they do want easy access to information and advice in an informal setting with people they trust.'

Citizens Advice's report on young people for its Access Strategy recommends improving opening times, telephone access and reception services for young people and consideration of specific advice sessions for young people 'to avoid [the] deterrent represented by a waiting room full of adults' (Wintersteiger 2006).

In a MORI (2004) report for Citizens Advice, young people were slightly more likely than other age groups to cite opening hours as an access barrier; 32%

of 16–25-year-olds said more flexible opening hours would make them consider visiting a CAB in the future.

It is common for mainstream advice agencies to open mainly during the day, with perhaps one or two evening sessions, often established specifically for adults in employment. Many young people, however, are at school, college or work during the day and can be frustrated by their inability to obtain help at other times.

Evidence suggests that the most popular opening times with young people can be in the late afternoon or evening and at weekends, although significant numbers do choose to access services during the day as well. By definition, the longer the opening hours, the greater the access offered, although funders must recognise the resource implications for providers – even many youth advice agencies that have identified a need to open outside normal office hours have been unable to do so due to a lack of resources or staff willing to work unsociable hours. Agencies should also consider issues of client and worker safety relating to evening opening.

Advice agencies' reception systems, typically involving long waiting times in crowded waiting rooms full of adults for brief advice followed by the offer of an appointment, tend to offer a stark contrast to young people's preference for informal drop-in access. Robinson (2008) reports that many of the young people participating in focus groups held in 2007 by Stockton CAB said that they had had problems in the past approaching the main CAB service because they found approaching the waiting room and the reception desk intimidating. One young person is reported to have commented: *'It's intimidating to call into a waiting room with everyone [staff and other clients] staring at you. They're saying like why are you here.'*

Instead of waiting rooms with chairs and reception desks, the young people in these focus groups wanted the CAB to make the environment 'casual with sofas' and wanted someone to meet and greet them informally before being taken to a confidential separate room (Robinson 2008).

Complex appointment systems can be a particular problem for the most vulnerable young people, who are more likely to lead chaotic lives. One author has pointed out that 'young people [who] are striving for autonomy and individuation from the family' are often disconnected from parental and other support that might facilitate appointment-keeping (French et al. 2003).

Many young people are not averse to the offer of early appointments, which can give individuals security that an appropriate worker will be available to devote their time to them. However, young people may only seek help at a very particular moment, when their need is acute, and their will to tackle problems can dissipate relatively quickly where there are delays. Many advice agencies established to meet young people's specific needs have therefore developed their systems carefully to avoid the commonly reported syndrome of young people failing to turn up for appointments. Key to overcoming this phenomenon appears to be a high degree of service flexibility. Sefton (2008) reports:

'In the agency serving young people, though advice was advertised as being

available at specific times, advisers would wherever possible respond to enquiries from young people outside of these hours. This would include the giving of substantive initial advice ... [The agency] cited the main reason for their approach as being to ensure that their system fitted the needs of their client group.'

... and by staff attitudes and skills that are not sensitive to their needs

Research shows that, compared to adults in other countries, adults in Britain are more likely to blame young people for their behaviour (Margo and Dixon 2006) and many commentators are becoming increasingly concerned at the negative attitudes to young people shown in the media. These attitudes are likely to have an effect on how young people are perceived and treated by adult services.

Research conducted by young people for the LSC (2002) found that the frequently unwelcoming attitude of staff was a key barrier to mainstream advice services:

'[Y]oung people want to be treated with respect. There should be more staff that are helpful and will explain things in a language that they can understand.'

A focus group held as part of this research specifically to find out what young people would want in an ideal legal service concluded that staff should be: friendly, open-minded and willing to listen; include a mix of younger and older staff; and should be people who will understand young people. The focus group also thought there should be a staff member to see you when you walk in.

Caerphilly CAB (2005) concluded that improving the design of reception and the training of receptionists, who are often the first point of contact, was crucial if young people's access to Citizens Advice services was to be improved.

Some studies have highlighted the negative impact on young people's access of the skills, attitudes and traditional approaches of many advisers and solicitors in mainstream agencies. Overly bureaucratic approaches that involve the adviser noting down lots of details at the beginning of a formal interview, for example, can make young people feel like they're not being listened to and can even scare them.

Gallagher (1999) reports that the children and young people she surveyed found solicitors judgemental, old-fashioned and unapproachable and notes that solicitors' use of legal jargon and their lack of explanations tended to alienate younger clients. She also found a gap between the legal knowledge of solicitors and the kinds of advice that children and young people had identified as being important and relevant to them, recommending that solicitors' skills and knowledge gaps could be addressed through practical training.

Kelley (2002) comments that advisers and lawyers often lack skills or confidence in dealing with young clients, inhibiting them from providing a child-centred service, but suggests that they should be capable of developing

the required skills: 'Working in a child-friendly, accessible way is something that can be realistically achieved by all adults, including advocates and legal practitioners.'

Youth Access recommends that all staff in advice agencies who are likely to come into contact with young people should receive basic training to understand young people's unique needs and behaviour and to develop the specific skills needed to engage and communicate with young people effectively.⁷⁴

Mainstream advice agencies suffer from an image problem: young people perceive them as unapproachable, judgemental, bureaucratic – and old

A common theme in research is young people feeling excluded from accessing mainstream services because of their age.

Shelter (2007), in research into barriers to housing advice for people from black and minority ethnic communities, found:

'Many young people, particularly young males, reported feeling misunderstood and looked down upon by advice providers ... [S]everal said that advice services could be improved by becoming more approachable and less intimidating. Young people accessing advice ... felt that they were patronised because of their age, and that they were put 'under the microscope' or interrogated by advice providers as if they were lying about their situation ... [T]here was a perception that the system has been set up in a way that excludes young people from accessing services.'

Services that are seen as being primarily for adults can often seem unwelcoming for young people. Parle (2009) reports that some young people 'were suspicious of advice professionals "in suits" who don't necessarily speak the same language as them or share similar experiences'.

Research for Citizens Advice has revealed that young people perceive the CAB as overly bureaucratic – 'a bit like the DSS' – and as a well-meaning organisation characterised by elderly staff – 'like the Women's Institute': 'It's run by silver-haired old ladies, wearing glasses on the end of their nose, surrounded by a load of books and all the rest of it' (young person, quoted in Wintersteiger 2006).

This research also highlights young people's mistrust of CABx:

'The young people group have a general lack of familiarity with the Citizens Advice service ... The young people trust the youth group workers because they have built up a rapport with them and they are valued as nonjudgmental ... The group perceive the Citizens Advice service as for adults and as middle class, they are sceptical about its ability to meet their needs.' (Wintersteiger 2006)

Altering the age profile of staff has been identified by Citizens Advice as a key challenge if it is to improve its accessibility to young people, but it has a long way to go: in 2005 only 0.7% of volunteers and 0.5% of paid staff in the CAB service were aged under 25 (Wintersteiger 2006). Highlighting the CAB service's difficulties, Wintersteiger quotes the findings of a youth focus group held to inform her report:

74 Agencies and practitioners interested in receiving such training should contact Helen@youthaccess.org.uk

'The question of how to diversify the profile of bureaux volunteers is a chicken and egg scenario. The Citizens Advice service will not be able to attract sufficient volunteers from excluded and hard-to-reach groups if its service is not perceived to meet their advice needs. However, if it does not recruit volunteers from excluded communities it will find it difficult to convince these communities that it has the knowledge and understanding necessary to address their needs.'

Wintersteiger's research also raises the interesting question of whether the current generation of young people may struggle to connect with the CAB service even when they are older.

Physical barriers

Physical barriers can include transport difficulties ...

Research for Youth Access has identified transport difficulties as one of the most significant barriers to young people's access to information, advice and counselling services (Wilson 2001).

Inadequate public transport appears to be the most commonly cited problem. For example, the Make Space Youth Review reported that many young people felt services were out of reach due to inadequate transport links, with particularly high levels of complaints about the cost and availability of public transport. This was particularly the case in rural areas, where services were often centralised in bigger towns or conurbations (4Children 2007). Research by The National Youth Agency identifies a number of barriers to young people's use of buses, including cost, availability and safety (Barker 2007).

Research by the Department for Transport (Taylor et al. 2007) has found there are important differences among young people in how much autonomy they have regarding when, where and how they travel. Some enjoy a great deal of autonomy, either as drivers or as active users of good public transport. Others are reliant on lifts from family and friends, including for regular and essential journeys. Cost is a major barrier to car ownership for young people and the groups whose choices are most constrained by transport are those living in rural areas, young parents and those who are out of work. Kenrick (2002) has pointed out that young people can be reluctant to ask their parents or another adult for a lift to an advice agency as they may want to keep the fact or nature of their visit confidential.

... and poor access for disabled young people

The Make Space Youth Review found that '[t]oo often services are developed without consulting with disabled young people ... leading to isolation and social exclusion' (4Children 2007).

Physical barriers to services for disabled people can include: transport problems, such as lack of access to a car or problems using public transport; shortage of disabled parking spaces; lack of space for wheelchairs; ill-equipped and small waiting areas and interview rooms; and lack of suitable toilet facilities.

In order to comply with the Disability Discrimination Act 2005, which places new duties on public buildings with respect to accessibility for those with physical impairments, advice services may need to offer home visits and develop physical access to and within their premises, e.g. by installing ramps and disabled toilets.

Some deaf young people may need British Sign Language (BSL) interpreters, hearing loops or videophones to communicate using BSL, whilst those with visual impairments may need information provided in large print.

There is some evidence that people with visual impairments may be more likely to prefer face-to-face contact (FSA 2000), whilst people with physical disabilities are greater users of telephone advice and may find appointment systems more accessible than drop in services (FIAC 2002).

Fragmentation of policy and services

Partnerships and referral relationships between youth services and advice services are under-developed

Kenrick (2002) highlighted several years ago the poverty of relationships between services for young people and mainstream advice services and its significance as a barrier to young people receiving timely help from an appropriately qualified source:

'In many cases, referrals from YIACS and other youth providers to more specialist providers do not take place at the point at which the limit of the referring agency's competence has been reached. Sometimes the reasons for this are sound ... In other cases, the agency's failure to refer may be based more on ignorance of the specialist services available or on a misplaced feeling that it should or can itself help the client further.'

Kenrick identified an urgent need to develop far closer working relationships between youth professionals (particularly youth workers, youth advice workers and Connexions Personal Advisers) and mainstream legal advice services.

Since then, a good deal of progress has been made. Initiatives that have proved successful include:

- the development of new services based on the 'Youth Access Law Centre'⁷⁵ model;⁷⁶
- the development of outreach advice services in youth settings by several Law Centres in London;⁷⁷
- the delivery of training to youth professionals on identifying legal issues, providing accurate generalist-level advice and making timely referrals;⁷⁸
- the provision of second tier telephone support by legal advisers to youth professionals.⁷⁹

Developing firm relationships and effective partnership working clearly takes a considerable investment of time and effort by the agencies involved, but there nonetheless appears to be a need to roll out such initiatives on a national basis.

75 The Youth Access Law Centre model has been developed by Youth Access and the Law Centres Federation and aims to combine the accessibility of youth advice services with the technical expertise of legal advice services.

76 See, for example, The Cabin, a new advice service for young people established by a CAB in Stockton-on-Tees.

77 Many of these services have been developed as part of Law Centres Federation's London-wide Young People's Project (<http://www.lawcentres.org.uk/projects/detail/young-people/>).

78 The first ever national youth advice training programme was developed as part of Youth Access' Rights to Access Project.

79 Streetwise Community Law Centre reported receiving a large increase in referrals from youth workers and Connexions Personal Advisers as a result of their provision of training and second tier support, through which they were able to prove the value of their service. See *Streetwise Capacity-Building Project Evaluation Report* (2006) (<http://www.youthaccess.org.uk/news/Streetwise-Capacity-Building-Project-Evaluation-Report.cfm>).

A lack of joined-up policy and planning is stifling development

Kenrick (2007) has highlighted the difficulty of improving young people's access to high-quality social welfare advice without a concerted attempt by the relevant government departments to produce a joined-up strategy for addressing the issue.

The most relevant strands of policy appear to be:

- the Community Legal Service (CLS) (which is the responsibility at national level of the LSC and the Ministry of Justice);
- Integrated Youth Support Services, particularly the sub-strand relating to the provision of Information, Advice and Guidance services (DCSF);
- Youth homelessness services (Communities and Local Government).

The potential for joining together the work of the CLS with that of the Connexions Service was identified by the relevant departments several years ago. The then Lord Chancellor's Department (2002) concluded that '[a] much closer working relationship between Department for Education and Skills, Connexions, and the CLSPs should be instigated'.

A year later, a joint paper by the DCA, the LSC and the DfES was published, describing work in progress to promote a closer relationship between the CLS and Connexions, focusing on joint projects in four regions (DCA/LSC/DfES 2003). Unfortunately, it has not been possible to obtain any information from the relevant departments on the outcome of this initiative and progress towards meaningful joining up has remained elusive.

In 2007 Youth Access held a policy seminar bringing together key funders and policy makers to debate the issue of how to improve the co-ordination of young people's rights-based advice services. There was general agreement of the need to join up legal advice services and young people's services more strategically. It was felt that local authorities (through advice services budgets and Children's Trusts) had a clear responsibility to fund generalist-level advice services for young people, whilst the LSC were responsible for funding the more specialist casework end of provision (through legal aid), yet neither were taking adequate steps to ensure that young people's social welfare advice needs were being catered for.

Although the LSC itself has identified the need to 'develop a more strategic, and sustainable, approach to funding advice services for vulnerable groups' (LSC 2006), only a tiny proportion of legal aid funding is currently targeted towards services specifically for young people. Kelley (2002) has suggested that the legal aid system itself, at least in its current form, may not be conducive to meeting the needs of children and young people as their legal needs cut across areas of law, making them difficult to assess and provide for through conventional adult-centred models. The cross-departmental paper similarly recommended that consideration should be given to making LSC contracts more flexible to help meet the needs of young people (DCA/LSC/DfES 2003). Kelley recommended children and young people being treated by the CLS and Criminal Defence Service as a key client group, rather than as minority interests across specific categories of law.

Meanwhile, legal advice is struggling to get on the radar of Children's Trusts, even though the evidence is growing that good legal advice could make a significant contribution across all five Every Child Matters outcomes (see, for example, MBA 2007).⁸⁰ Unhelpfully, the thrust of the DCSF's policy in relation to Information, Advice and Guidance services has been very strongly focused on education and careers at the virtual exclusion of other issues.

Many youth advice agencies – funded primarily through local authority budgets for young people's services – tell Youth Access that they provide advice on social welfare issues 'because our young people need it', even though they are not specifically funded to do so and therefore do not always have the capacity to provide the standard of service required.

Part of the solution would appear to lie in better co-ordination of local authority funding. There certainly appears to be scope for forward-thinking local authorities to link relevant budgets in order to jointly commission youth advice services. Kenrick (2007a) proposes that Local Area Agreements could be used to pool relevant aspects of budgets for legal advice services, Integrated Youth Support Services and youth homelessness services.

Indeed, such an approach has been trialled successfully in Cornwall, where funding for improving youth advice services has come from the alignment within the Local Area Agreement of several existing budgets. Strategic links are made in the Cornwall Local Area Agreement to the cross-cutting contribution of the service, to the Every Child Matters outcomes and to the CLS. The development of youth advice services has been identified through the Local Area Agreement performance management process as a 'high flyer' due to the resulting increase in the number of enquiries from young people seeking information and advice and a reduction in the number of young people not in education, employment or training.⁸¹

In the continuing absence of any co-ordinated planning or guidance from central government, it appears that young people's prospects of enjoying improved access to justice may depend on the willingness of local government to manufacture such innovative local solutions.

80 Youth Access are currently engaged in work to develop outcomes monitoring tools for youth advice agencies.

81 Further details are available on the National Youth Homelessness Scheme website:
<http://www.communities.gov.uk/youthhomelessness/prevention/preventionadvice/joinedupservices/>

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Feedback

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Youth Access is the national membership organisation for a network of 200 youth information, advice and counselling services.

Through its members, Youth Access is one of the largest providers of youth advice and counselling services in the UK, dealing with over 1 million enquiries a year on issues as diverse as sexual health, mental health, relationships, homelessness, benefits and debt.

Youth Access provides the training, resources, research, campaigning and other infrastructure support to ensure high quality services exist to meet young people's diverse needs.

For more information about Youth Access, including a national directory of youth information, advice and counselling services, go to www.youthaccess.org.uk

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