

COMMUNITY COURTS TO ADDRESS YOUTH OFFENDING: A LOST OPPORTUNITY?

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Abstract

This article presents an account of the work of community courts in the USA (in Red Hook, Brooklyn) and the UK, specifically to examine the ways in which youth offending is, or can be, addressed. It is pertinent to explore the work of these courts, in light of cuts to youth services and concerns about the use of prison for young people in the UK. Community courts, like many community justice initiatives offer an alternative way to address low level but more prevalent offending which affects citizens' quality of life (Wolf, 2006). They adopt a problem solving approach, in dialogue with the defendant and offer the support and means by which to address their needs and enable desistance (Karp & Clear, 2000). This article suggests that young people at risk of offending and young offenders in particular could benefit from this approach as it offers a form of intervention, diversion from the YJS and problem solving approaches, more in line with the ethos of youth work (Wood & Hine, 2013). It examines the work of Community Justice Centres (CJCs) and community courts in the framework of desistance and social capital theories, to understand how they can offer a viable alternative to current provisions.

Keywords

Youth; community justice centres; community courts; desistance; social capital.