

The network as a safety valve?

Procedure in prevention projects promoting on an integral approach to juvenile delinquency

Summary

In late 1994 Arnhem, Deventer and Lelystad launched prevention projects intended to avert and curtail juvenile delinquency. The projects develop an integral approach involving local institutions dealing with juveniles (e.g. education, bars and dancings, children's welfare services and law and order) in prevention policy. The aim is to identify problem behaviour early and to ensure a unanimous response. The resulting network of institutions serves as a safety valve. The projects have instigated several measures to be implemented by the network's various institutions. These measures concern education, neighbourhood and youth employment projects, bars and dancings, methods of dealing with perpetrators, central registration and football.

The investigation explores the extent and manner of execution of these measures. In March and November 1996 project coordinators were therefore interviewed and group discussions held with representatives of network institutions.

The research shows that while networks have arisen in the three cities, the process has been more time consuming than anticipated. A few potential network institutions, especially bars and dancings and schools, were initially disinterested in the delinquency issue. Their position changed when the subject expanded to quality improvement (bars and dancings) and safe surroundings (schools).

After establishing the networks, the parties jointly implemented the measures. On education, all secondary schools joined forces in drafting an action protocol. The document contains agreements stipulating a code of conduct for students and sanctions on violations. Another action protocol addresses neighbourhood and youth work projects and commits institutions to launch certain programmes to deal with juveniles disturbing the neighbourhood. The results include supervision by police and city patrols and organizational outreach programmes that focus on juveniles. Virtually no measures have been implemented with respect to bars and dancings. This branch proved reluctant to invest any time or money in the effort. Nevertheless, municipal authorities have grown more interested in drafting an integral policy for bars and dancings. A host of measures address methods of dealing with perpetrators. The police have included the use of a social questionnaire in their interrogation of minor suspects; any problems observed are quickly brought to the attention of assistance services. The Public Prosecutor uses an accelerated procedure for cases involving recidivist suspects. Other guidelines address sanctions to be imposed for each offence and category of perpetrator. Central registration promotes the exchange of information between the justice system and other institutions. This system is still relatively undeveloped because of the multitude of obstacles that have arisen. The football measures implemented consist of training stewards to supervise matches and drafting football club regulations and sanctions on violations. If necessary, individual football fans are contacted and advised.

Because of the additional time required to establish networks, fewer measures were implemented than anticipated. The actual project objective - curtailing juvenile delinquency - is unlikely to be met during the three-year project duration. The institutions concerned benefit from the project through the network established. They also appreciate the new contact with one another and their joint quest for solutions.

Een netwerk als vangnet? Een procesbeschrijving van preventie-projecten gericht op een integrale aanpak van jeugdcriminaliteit

W.M. Kleiman, G.J. Terlouw

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