

Making and impact

HMYOI Cookham Wood (OL) Finding a common agenda



HMYOI Cookham Wood facilitated youth council

At HMYOI Cookham Wood the Youth Council is facilitated by youth workers from Kinetic, an independent body. The youth council is strongly supported by the Governor and staff. Following a request from the young people, the Governor agreed the Chair and Vice Chair of the youth council could attend a section of the SMT meeting on a regular basis. The theme of the SMT meeting is given to the young people in advance and they are asked to think about a solution to a particular problem the SMT are trying to solve.

For example one problem was violence between young people from different gangs in education and other areas of the prison. Kinetic youth workers spent time with the Youth Council reps brainstorming and discussing solutions, collecting suggestions from other prisoners and formulating a final proposal.

The proposal for reducing gang violence that the young people suggested was to train some young people to assist with the prison inductions. They felt that young people coming into the YOI are more likely to open up to a peer about gang affiliations or issues, than to a uniformed officer or other staff member. By having this information, measures could be put into place to help ensure the safety of the young person but to also avoid setting up situations which may trigger conflict or violence.

Reducing violence and consulting with young people more led to positive comments in a recent prison inspection and Ofsted report. It is felt by the learners and the Governor that having an independent organisation run the youth council, rather than prison staff, is beneficial as it ensures the facilitation remains objective.

Other ways the youth council at HMYOI Cookham Wood have made an impact are:

- Bringing back the popular 'Motormex' class.
- Enabling more young people to get release on temporary licence to attend volunteering and college placements or to study online courses not available in the prison due to the lack of internet access. This has resulted in students being able to progress to higher levels than were available in the prison.
- Improved communication between the staff and young people. The young people of the Youth Council worked together with the staff to produce 'Re-code'; a series of short film clips used to train the young people and staff about how to better understand each other and how certain language, tone of language or body language can be interpreted.

HMYOI Aylsebury

The young people meet with their “party” once a month to share ideas and to formulate proposals. The staff from User Voice facilitate these sessions and help the young people to gain skills in how to conduct peer research. The proposals are then brought to the monthly meeting in the prison board room with the governor.

The governor chairs the meeting and goes through the minutes of the last meeting to feedback on actions taken and to update the young people about any information he can share with them about progress or reasons why something cannot be achieved. After the three parties each articulate their proposals, they then discuss amongst themselves which of the three proposals should be the one they give top priority. A vote then takes place and a proposal is agreed on by the parties.

The governor can then give his views on the proposal. If he has issues with the proposal or would like more detail he can ask that the party goes away and comes back to the next meeting having thought about certain issues. Alternatively if he is happy to implement the change, he will inform the young people of the actions he is going to take to try to progress the proposal.

Examples of positive impact from the Prison Council relating to learning and training includes:

- A fathers day family learning event for all the young people who are fathers.
- Setting up of a steering group of young people to meet with the new education provider and discuss the curriculum.
- The re-introduction of cooking lessons.
- Staff/prisoner charity sports event to improve relations between staff and prisoners and raise money for charity.