'Youthful misbehaviour: To condemn or to understand?'

by Peter Wilson, Consultant Psychotherapist and Clinical Advisor to The Place2Be

I feel very honoured to be invited to give this lecture by the Blom-Cooper family to mark the life and work of Jane Blom-Cooper who so tragically and prematurely died three years ago. Jane and I were good friends and I, like all those who knew and loved her, still feel a great sense of loss. She was an immensely generative woman with a remarkably spirited talent of exciting and stirring and linking ideas so that all those who were touched by this were left with an uplifting sense of possibility. She was courageous, highly perceptive and funny.

I am delighted too that the Blom-Cooper family has united with Benita Refson, Chief Executive Officer of The Place2Be. Though not directly involved, Jane knew of the work of The Place2Be through me and approved of it greatly. The Place2Be is now in its seventeenth year. During its lifetime, it has firmly established itself as a unique and potent force in the world of children's mental health. It is a charity that provides a comprehensive school based service for children and teachers in which counselling, training and support is provided to children and all school based staff and parents. It is now established in 172 schools in 20 local areas in England, Scotland and Wales. We believe that, through our work, particularly in primary schools in which we are mainly based, we are making a significant contribution to preventing the extent of anti-social and delinquent behaviour in adolescence.

I should also like to thank UBS for its invaluable support to The Place2Be and for the use of this lecture hall this evening.

At the centre of our attention this evening are young people – and it was mostly in connection with them that Jane and I knew each other. We met in many different places through associations of different kinds with the Peper Harow Therapeutic Community in Surrey, the Mulberry Bush School in Oxford, Thornby Hall in Northampton, the Brandon Centre in London (where I was Director appointed by a Selection Board, chaired by Jane) and YoungMinds which I co-founded and ran for fourteen years.

The title of this lecture was arrived at by Louis Blom-Cooper and me. We wanted to capture an area of interest close to Jane's heart and to frame it in such a way as to key into a central dilemma. The first two words of the title were chosen to keep the subject alive and light as it were – to rise a little above the pejorative intonations of 'the youths of today' or 'the young offender'. There is more to the fullness and misbehaviour of youth than just problematic criminal behaviour. I think that both Louis and I had in mind that Jane herself had a remarkably youthful spirit that may well have led her into moments of behaviour that some might have considered amiss. This reminds me of something that Lord Asquith said in 1923 that 'youth would be an ideal state if it came a little later in life.' And then we thought of taking a passage from a speech John Major gave during his reign as prime minister in the 1990's and as part of his 'back to basics' campaign in which he said that perhaps we should condemn criminal behaviour a little more and understand a little less. This was largely taken by many to be an ominously reactionary statement. In fact in the context of his thinking at the time, I think he was trying as best he could to address an age old dilemma and slightly adjust the scales of justice in favour of the victims of crime, as he and others encountered a worrying increase in crime at that time.

The main thrust of this lecture is to attempt to link the tension between the young and the old and the tension between condemnation and understanding with a plea for some kind of integration, for holding the opposites together.

The concept of youth has been on people's minds for a very long time. Socrates some 2,400 years ago observed that young people 'scoff at authority and lack respect for their elders'. Shakespeare too is well known for his exclamation 'I would there were no age between ten and three and twenty, or that youth would sleep out the rest; for there is nothing in the between but getting wenches with child, wronging the ancientry, stealing, fighting '(The Winters Tale). Many people over the years have dwelt on the often vexing relationship between the old and the young. Sociologists have had a particular interest in intergenerational power relations, seeing youth as essentially a social construction with a variety of prevailing scenarios played out in different societies. They have drawn out the consequences of industrialisation and the secondary socialisation processes of educating the young that have undermined the 'holding connection' between young and old in families and that has led to a distinct youth culture so

much heralded in today's commercial environment. More recent commentators such as Christine Griffin have begun to question whether in effect, in this increasingly complex world of today, in which traditional structures have lost their strength and an increasingly wide range of values and practices in multi-cultural societies have confounded any sense of coherent order, 'youth has become invisible.' All we seem to have left are individualised young people, loose collectives of 'tribes' and caricatures (Jones 2009).

To this we might add the extraordinary impact of the internet that has enveloped us all in ways barely imagined but a few years ago. The sheer intensity and vividness of the world of the virtual now is transforming the ways young people are learning and conducting their lives – far removed from the real world of their parents, the majority of whom have absolutely no idea what is going on with that machine in the bedroom upstairs, and some of whom barely know how to turn on their own machines. The gulf between young and old is expanding by the day. I gather there is a vernacular developing among the kids as they peer into the secrets of their computers… POS standing for Parents over Shoulders; and NP, Nosey Parents.

In a very separate but related vein, the followers of Carl Jung have mused creatively on the nature of fundamental unconscious archetypes in the psyche of the individual. The Puer Aeternus, as defined by Jung (CW5), the essence of eternal youth, immersed in the present and as personified in an array of mythological figures, stands in contrast to Senex, representing maturity, order, time, history and authority. I have always been struck by the Jungian view that in adolescence, something new is born, something that has lain nascent during childhood that then comes to life. As Moore (1979) has written 'Whenever new movements of the soul come to life, stir and press upon consciousness, Puer may constellate. One is then close to virgin soil, flailed perhaps with the spirit of adventure, excited, nervous and unsteady – like a colt on shaky legs, eager to run but awkward and unpredictable'.

Amongst psychoanalysts, Anna Freud was probably one of the most insightful. In her seminal paper on Adolescence, (Freud A. 1967) she highlighted the adolescents' need to separate emotionally from their parents – a need which she saw propelled by the necessity to defend against the incestuous ties of childhood. Through reversing affects from love to hatred, through seeking belonging amongst friends rather than parents and through various forms of narcissistic retreat ('I am sufficient unto my self. I don't need anyone'), the adolescent slowly carves out his or her identity. Numerous other psychoanalytic writers such as Ericson, Blos and Greenberg have expanded on this theme. Adam Phillips, as ever innovative in his psychoanalytic thinking, focuses on the issue of truancy and betrayal. The truant as defined in Chamber English Dictionary is a child who stays away from school 'without leave or good reason' As Phillips sees it, the truant, the delinquent, betrays his or her loyalty to his or her parents and to that part of himself that has internalised the rules and values of his parents. 'The adolescent is the person who needs to experiment with self-betrayal; is the person who needs to find out what it is, or what it might be, to betray oneself. Which is not what it means to break the rules, but what it means to break the rules that are of special, of essential value to one self. And in order to do this you have to find out what these really are. So-called delinquent behaviour is the unconscious attempt to find the rules that really matter to the individual. And this is one of the most – if not *the* most – frightening quests'.

What do we make of all these observations? One conclusion of course is that all misbehaviour is inherent in the phenomenon of youth. The emphasis here has to be centre on the prefix 'mis' – suggesting that the behaviour has gone wrong or badly or unfavourably in some way. But, wrong and bad and unfavourably in whose eyes? For the most part, in the context of generational conflict and the Puer-Senex tension, it is in the eyes of the older, the Senex. The young have broken away from their loyalties to the values of their elders. It is of interest here too, to note that the etymology of the word 'delinquent' derives from the Latin, 'delinquere' – to leave, forsake or abandon. The delinquent if you like takes leave from his or her parents and elders; and takes leave of his or her obligations owed to the family, the group, the community and society. There are very few of us here who as children and adolescents did not break rules, who did not tell untruths, who did not take what was not ours, who did not defy around them. All children and young people, from time to time, do what they are not supposed to; they try the forbidden and test the limits in the interests of their growth and curiosity. They break new

ground, often ruthlessly and regardless of constraints and consequences. There is in the very process of becoming social, an anti-social necessity. Delinquency in this sense is part of being a young person and expresses itself basically in three different ways – through stealing, deception and violence of one sort or other. All constitute an attack or an abandonment of the other: all, in effect, 'leave' the other.

And so, how frightening, disturbing, exasperating can it be for those of us who, the parents and elders, are at the butt end of such leaving and attack from the young? Clearly, the response will not be neutral. Some balance may be achieved but the polarities of response are well known. At one end of the spectrum is a kind of benign, generative celebration of youth as the holders of beauty and idealism, of unbridled creativity and unbounded potency. At the other end of the spectrum is a kind of equally unbounded and unbridled denunciation of youth as the harbingers of chaos, anarchy, revolt, disrespect, superficiality and ignorance. Envy no doubt is at the heart of this, which in turn may well be linked to a sense of relative poverty in the adults. 'If only I could have what they have got or what I had that I haven't got'. Some of us may own up to our envy, the most pernicious of emotions, and sit back and enjoy the emergence of our children's energy and learning. Others however may not own up so well and hate it.

Let's look for a moment, for example, through the windows of the houses of those families living with growing adolescent children. The chances are we will either cry or laugh at what we see, for there in front of us is the stuff of what we might well described as an everyday tragic-comedy. The tragedy resides simply in the manifest contrast in those houses between the bodies of the old and the bodies of the young. At the very same time as when the adolescents' bodies are growing in strength and beauty, the parents' bodies may well be moving let us say in the opposite direction. What can the mother do as she witnesses her daughters budding breasts and slim and shapely body, whilst her own breasts may not be what they were and her hips and bottom are spreading let us say uncontrollably beyond shape? Or what can the father do as he suddenly realises he is now looking up to, instead of down upon, his son, now physically taller and with rippling muscles that could well take care of any opposition that the father might put up to him? Few parents sit comfortably with these and other poignant observations. Some play with the absurdity of it all and rejoice that the children they have raised are capable of such flowering and possibility. Others can't bear to be left out and slither and slide about in a desperate attempt to join in or compete, to become as adolescent as their children. And others simply can't bear to be rejected, scorned, rebuked, attacked and resort in an unremitting defensive manner to pour contempt on the young and seek to banish them.

It is of course within this spectrum that the choice of whether to condemn or to understand the young sits. It is a central issue inherent in the intergenerational relationship. When it comes to thinking about the criminal behaviour of young people, however, this choice it becomes something rather more acute – not just delinquent behaviour in the widest sense in which I have been using the term, but more specifically in relation to a minority of young people who are significantly and seriously offending against the rules and order of society.

We read regularly of horrendous crimes being perpetrated by young people. One evening of CrimeStoppers on TV is enough to disturb sleep for a year. But let me take one such story, not as appalling as many, but nevertheless reprehensible and one such as to provoke a very negative public reaction. It is the story of a 67 year old man, Ekram Haque, standing outside his local mosque last year in South London minding his own business with his 3 year old granddaughter, Marion. Suddenly, in a moment from nowhere, he is attacked by a group of teenagers and left dying on the pavement. There is clear CCTV video recording of the whole incident.

I want to quote here from an article on this incident in The Spectator, by Ron Liddle, who some of you may know to be outspoken. 'The teenagers lounged on the metal barriers beside the road chattering... and then the human filth struck, so rapidly and devastatingly, like a swarm of insects. They ran at Ekram and savagely beat him about the head while Marion looked on uncomprehendingly. The thing happened so quickly, Ekram falling to the floor, the scum running away. Marion hurrying to her grandfather's side, the scum coming back quickly to take a few more pictures on their mobile phones, the scum running like hell, out of utter cowardice. The

moment on the video that really hurts, that really digs in – if you are a human being rather than an ape – is when Marion runs to the prone and inert body of her grandfather and, bending down, distraught, implores him to move, pawing at his body with her hands. She is so small and ineffectual against this sudden new thing in her life, death'.

His response to the crime is strong, emotional, unequivocal and powerfully condemnatory. And of course it comes as no surprise that he was none too pleased that 'the kids who did it – yep, they were, in the main, kids – were sentenced to fantastically inadequate terms in prison for 'manslaughter'. They'll be out in a few months – maybe you'll come across in the not too distant future. Even if you don't you can watch them on YouTube already. They were members of the Park Lane Riders gang who recorded a video as they cycled about mouthing largely incomprehensible braggadocio to one another.'

Various comments on his page on the Internet applauded his sentiment. 'Anyone who attacks someone like Mr Haque or Jamie Bulger alike deserves to be left in prison and never be able to be eligible for release. Animals like that don't deserve human rights'. And so on. I wonder how many of you here tonight might share some of this thinking. I, for one, am none too amused in having my car window smashed, in having my house burgled – and these are but minor crimes compared with the one I have described. You will see that at such times I am not the most serenely understanding of such behaviour. Punishment must be meted out to fit the crime - if not to damnation itself, then at least to some place uncomfortable.

But, what of understanding? That is to say, what of trying to reach some sort of clue as to why these appalling and baffling juvenile crimes happen at all. Might we not find a way of preventing these things happening in the first place? And might we not become better informed as to how to deal with these young people once they come to justice? But, before we settle those questions, there is perhaps a more challenging question we have to face. Can we really bother to know about these kids in the first place – or are we more interested in nursing our sense of outrage and stoking our fantasies of revenge? And can we really bear to really listen to the pain and terror that so often lies behind the acts of pain and terror that these young people inflict on others?

The fact is there have been numerous reports and enquiries into juvenile offending and anti-social behaviour. And we do know a fair bit about what lies behind so much juvenile crime. We of course don't know everything and as Rutter, Giller and Hagell make clear in their excellent review of research into anti-social behaviour by Young People, 'it is quite simply meaningless to talk of, try to explain, or treat anti-social behaviour as if it were only one type'. In broad terms, a useful distinction can be made between 'life- course persistent' anti-social behaviour that has an early onset which persists into adolescence and adulthood; and 'adolescent-limited' anti-social behaviour that arises in the teenage years and more usually fades out in the early twenties. Unsurprisingly, the 'life-course persistent' offenders constitute the group that cause us all the main concern. A recent Home Office study categorised 4% of young people as 'prolific offenders' who commit 32% of all offences, including most of the serious offences.

However, having set these caveats in place, it is important to say that there is enough evidence around now to point to a group of individual and environmental factors that taken together or in various clusters, make life particularly onerous for children growing up leading them to getting into trouble along the way. Rutter, Giller and Hagell (2009) list a number of individual factors such as hyperactivity, cognitive impairment and temperamental features such as impulsivity and aggressivity. Most offending among young people is not premeditated. It is committed on the spur of the moment, often under the influence of alcohol or drugs and young people assume they will not be caught. There can be no doubt that criminality cannot be separated in our thoughts from issues of mental health, no matter how oppressive social conditions may be. A study by Oxford University (2009) found that the suicide rate among male offenders aged between 15 and 17 years was around 18 times higher than that of the general male population of the same age.

The family and social environments of these children that have contributed to their difficulties are to say the least, by and large not favourable. They cover a broad range of circumstances.

Major risk factors in the family include parental psychopathology and criminality, discordant family relationships and divorce, inconsistent parent supervision, harsh and erratic punishment, physical and sexual abuse and neglect and lack of emotional warmth. To all of these, the social and cultural dimensions of children's lives can either alleviate or exacerbate these circumstances. Disadvantaged and violent neighbourhoods, community disorganisation and neglect, the availability of drugs, poverty, poor schooling and unemployment all play a significant part.

What probably is one of the most decisive in how things turn out is the degree to which parents, and especially mothers in the early years, are able to cope with adversity; this in turn is dependant on the stability of their relationships with partners, spouses and others in the community who care for them. A great deal of attention has been paid in recent years to the nature of the early attachments between baby and child and mothers and fathers. This has followed a great deal of thought and observation by psychoanalysts and child development specialists during the last century who have explored the nature of the primary relationships of the young growing human being. What is the nature and intensity of early childhood fears (of loss, separation, annihilation, disapproval)? How do they deal with these fears? What do they make of those around them? How do they internalise and construe what the world is about? We are only just beginning to take in the enormity of these primary experiences and seeing the need for much greater investment in early intervention programmes supporting the young parent/child interaction and building it through nursery and primary schools - way before the full power of the adolescent tumult and the delinquent solution.

If we are truly to understand the more serious crimes that young people carry out, we simply have to take into account what they have been through in their lives. The impact of maltreatment – whether it be physical, sexual or emotional - is essentially traumatic, overwhelming children with sensations, tensions and feelings they cannot possibly assimilate and exposing them to primitive anxieties over which they cannot achieve mastery. Children essentially feel betrayed by parental failure, failure to safeguard their safety and integrity. In response, they become resentful and on guard, without faith in those around them and without care whether to comply with social requirements or not.

Delinquency represents the attempt to defend against these anxieties and give expression to this resentment. I wrote some time ago an article about the thoughts of Winnicott, perhaps one of the most influential psychoanalysts of the 20th century, on what he called 'the anti-social tendency'. He inspired me to write this:

'The awesome characteristic of delinquency is its obduracy; for the time that it lasts, it is stubborn and impenitent. Paradoxically, in its very act of wrong doing, it carries with it an unswerving sense of rightness. In the moment of stealing, there is a mark of justification – 'it's mine'. In the strike of violence, there is a sound of vindication 'that settles it'; and in the course of deception, there is a note of defiance 'why not?' The delinquent act, in other words, has purpose. It is make a statement, standing up for something and not letting be. With this in mind, rules will be broken and those who uphold them confounded. It is no surprise the delinquent is a thorn in the side of the reformers and therapists; by definition, non compliant; in effect, destructive - and for the most part, lacking remorse or inclination to change' (Wilson 2000).

Winnicott had much to say about the delinquent mind. Essentially, he saw the anti- social tendency and the delinquent act that followed as something positive, self-affirming and above all hopeful for the individual. The young delinquent was not to be regarded in his view as feckless, bad or evil but as an individual seeking to rectify that which did not feel right outside and inside. 'The anti-social tendency thus stands as a reminder of a hurt or a disturbance brought about by environmental failure. What is at stake here is a sense of personal injustice and a refusal to give up in the face of such injustice. To do so, would be to acquiesce and comply and to loss of integrity and despair' (Winnicott 1963). 'The anti-social child is searching in some way or another, violently or gently, to get the world to acknowledge its debt' (Winnicott 1961). Let's put it simply in the language of our title today – it is the young delinquent who maintains that he or she has good grounds for complaint against us, the adults, and it is the young delinquent who is condemning us and who is not interested in understanding the story behind the parental failure.

Some commentators have criticised Winnicott for being overly romantic and for laying too much stress on parental failure at the cost of taking into account genetic and societal factors. He has however opened our minds to seeing the world as the young delinquent might and made us think about what it will take to provide the most effective and helpful response to the delinquency that faces us. And it is very important to emphasise that he was not in any way 'soft' or 'soppy' in what to do. He made it clear that therapy with a delinquent was a tough undertaking, both in understanding the nature of the anti-social tendency and withstanding its demands. The challenge of therapy or indeed of any helpful response is to 'meet the anti–social tendency. To meet it as an SOS, a cri de couer, a signal of distress' (Winnicott 1963).

The word that Winnicott often uses here and elsewhere is 'to meet'. And this is a word I would like to dwell on for a moment. For it seems to me it is key to dealing with this issue of whether to condemn or understand. My dictionary produces an array of meanings that all seem so pertinent. 'To come face to face with', 'To come into contact with or join the company of', 'To be in opposition against', 'To come together in negotiation', 'To encounter or pass when approaching from different directions'. And the etymology? Anglo Saxon; to find. Whatever we do, whoever we are, it comes down properly to doing all these things in our dealings with the adolescent and delinquent.

This lecture has been struggling with the tension between two entities. Condemnation and Understanding. Youth and Older Age. How do they meet? The first tension is constantly being played out in argument between welfare and justice in the youth justice system. I will quote here from the excellent report by New Philanthropy Capital, Trial and Error: Children and Young People in Trouble with the Law (2010). How do you balance the needs of the offender against the rights of the community and the broader public interest? Where do the priorities in decision-making lie between punishment, public protection, rehabilitation and child welfare? Should government respond to children and young people foremost as 'offenders' or as 'children in need'?

Legislation in England and Wales attempts to balance welfare and justice needs. However, critics – particularly in the charity sector – argue that an emphasis on punishment has become too dominant. Concern for the community and the wider public has manifested itself in 'tough' talk about youth crime; high numbers of children sentenced through courts; and use of custody for non-violent offences. Though custody protects the public in the short term, high re-offending rates suggest that these measures have not been very successful at preventing crime or reforming young people.

Scotland has a very different youth justice system for England and Wales. Up to the age of 16, the Scottish youth justice system is more welfare-oriented, with high rates of diversion and low levels of custody. Children in Scotland who commit crimes are designated as 'looked-after children' or 'children in need' and only the most serious offences are prosecuted in criminal courts – the majority of those under 16 are diverted to the 'children's hearing system'.

This tension between those who veer towards condemnation and punishment and those who lean towards understanding and rehabilitation is heavily influenced in turn by our second tension between Youth and Older Age. From how I began this lecture, there can be no doubt that we the elders look up or down upon our young with a mixture of rapture and trepidation. Much of this seems to revolve around our envy and fear of them; and according to how we deal with that, we either idealise or scorn them. And all too often, that latter prevails. This, of course, is none too new. Take for example the sombre warnings of the vicar of St. Giles in 1672. He wrote 'This coming generation will bring in such a torrent of vice and corruption as will overrun the world with rudeness, lewdness and extreme barbarity'. An awesome prospect indeed; as much, no doubt, of his own awesomely vigorous mind as of any appalling external reality. And so it goes on. Recently, Barnardo's in 2008 carried out a survey of British adults views of children. 54% thought that British children are beginning to behave like animals. 49% agreed that children are increasingly a danger to each other and adults. And 49% of people disagreed with the statement that children who get into trouble are misunderstood and in need of professional help.

And so when it comes to peoples thinking about youth crime, it is no surprise that according to a recent British crime survey, the public felt that young people commit up to half of all crime when in actual fact young people are responsible for 12% of crime. Three in four people believe that crime is increasing when in fact it has been falling steadily since the mid 1990's. The danger with this kind of public sentiment is 'that government policy becomes designed to ally public fear, rather than to prevent crime effectively' (New Philanthropy Capital). 'Certainly, since the 1990s, a generally tougher approach to youth offending took place with the number of children sentenced to custody more than tripled between 1991 and 2006. Changes to policing and sentencing became stricter and more children were drawn into the criminal justice system for minor offences'.

Whether this trend will proceed or not is difficult to predict. It all costs a great deal of money, to questionable effect, and this may be a deciding, if not the most enlightened factor in turning the tide. It is still true after all that a good 50% of adults do not hold such negative views. And there are a whole range of initiatives to build on, designed to reduce crime and divert young people away from the court system. Some community based rehabilitation schemes and intensive multi-systemic intervention approaches are proving remarkably effective. So too is Restorative Justice. There is much to learn from these schemes. But perhaps the most crucial of all is the importance of ensuring that committed and well trained and supportive staff are involved to carry out fully the essentials of such approaches. It takes a great deal of personal resource and maturity to withstand the attacks of disaffected and angry youth. It is all too easy to react back or walk away much to the detriment of the young people. A recent ITV documentary exposed with one of their secret cameras an appalling failure of staff to supervise and make demands on the young people to pay back in a constructive way to the community.

I want to draw to an end this lecture with a plea for greater integration of the good and the bad as it were in this whole debate. To begin with, let's hear John Major who made the remark to set us off in the first place. In his autobiography, he writes that the criminal 'must be treated with understanding and even with mercy, but never with a disregard for what has been done or for those who have been hurt. To ignore culpability is to affront the victim, to offer to other potential offenders a shrug of the shoulder, and to devalue the individual's own capacity for moral judgement and right behaviour. To know all is not to forgive all' (Major, 1999).

This seems reasonable enough. The key issue relates to our commitment to and readiness to meet the misbehaviour of our children and young people – with both condemnation (in the sense of censure and disapproval) and understanding. How well or right we get the balance between these two will depend to a large extent on our overriding attitudes to the young and people in general. John Major, for example saw the sixties as doing 'something to teach Britain about tolerance, about understanding and about the conditions in which crime breeds'. But the nineties he believed 'had something to teach about personal responsibility and individual values'. And so it was in this respect that he called for a bit more condemnation and bit less understanding.

What matters above all in my view is that we don't abandon our young and our troubled and troubling delinquents – whether it be through indifference, exasperation or excessive punishment. Winnicott stressed the importance of responding to the anti-social tendency with firmness and compassion rather than to destroy its spirit with punitive retribution. 'Harsh or vindictive management' forecloses on the possibility of change. In my experience as a psychotherapist who has spent a lot of time with young people, adolescents above all seek to discover themselves through testing, challenging, contrasting themselves with others and adults. And they look to the adult to declare their credentials of caring by remaining firm. To condemn or understand, the issue becomes congested if you like in the muddle of the adolescent paradox. Adolescents in my experience by and large need to find their own way and not be called too much to account; yet they need attention, guidance, limits - someone in other words to watch over them. They infuriatingly want to be listened to and understood; and yet do not. They want licence; and yet call for boundaries.

The young need us and we need the young. To return to the Jungian archetypes 'The Puer – Senex archetype is the union of youth and old age, a composite where one is always influencing

the other. Without the enthusiasm and eros of the son, authority loses its idealism'. And without the wisdom and grounding of Senex, youth loses its direction (Frankel, 1998). Or let's put the latter more simply with two quotes. The first I can't remember exactly and I can't find it at the moment. It is a Woody Allen story. He is giving a lecture to students and he says to them: go forth, seek adventure, raise your consciousness, aspire to lofty ideals, transcend to higher realms, transform the nature of who you are - but get back home in time for dinner at 6!! The other quote is simpler. It is by Ogden Nash. He says

'Children aren't happy with nothing to ignore.
And that's what parents were created for'.

I shall bring this lecture to an end with two brief stories. Both are from my clinical experience. And both occurred in organisations in which Jane played a prominent part. The first occurred in the Peper Harow Therapeutic Community, a residential establishment for very disturbed and delinquent young people. Jane was a trustee; and I was the Consultant Psychotherapist. Sadly, the community had to close in the early nineties. The second occurred in the Brandon Centre, a community based psychotherapy and counselling centre in central London. Jane was chairwoman of the trustees; and I was its Director for 8 years.

The first story took place in a community meeting in the Peper Harow Therapeutic Community. The practice was to hold community meetings every morning to take stock of, and think about the life of the community. Usually, there would be about 50 people in the room, sitting in a circle, about 30 residents and 20 staff.

On this particular morning, a 17 year old girl who I will call Rachel was sitting at the centre of everyone's attention, crying. Some of her girl friends knew that something awful had happened the night before but were not sure what to say. Rachel refused to say anything and everyone was on edge. Suddenly, she got up and tried to leave the room. She was beside herself with rage. She yelled at everybody, swearing and cursing and accusing everyone, not least the staff, of not caring. Despite all this, her close friends and others stayed close and stopped her from leaving the room. They were gentle and tried to calm her. Eventually, she collapsed back into her seat and cried uncontrollably. Those around put their arms around her, sensing the fight had gone out of her. The rest of the community were for the most part silent. For a moment, one of the boys called her a slag, that she was selfish and ungrateful. But the rest pretty well told him to shut up.

This was a highly emotional experience. What emerged from it all, from what was behind all her crying and vehemence, was a story of her having had a very unpleasant sexual experience the night before off grounds, and of how this tapped into her childhood experiences of sexual abuse and neglect. This was all shared and known in the community meeting, facilitated and held by the staff and supported by all the young people present. At the end of the meeting, Rachel learnt a bit more how 'acting sex' got her nowhere; she finished by saying she felt a bit more 'together now'.

Whatever this account might mean to you as you listen to this, for me, the essence of what was therapeutic in this moment was that Rachel was met, she was not allowed to leave by those around her. They together stayed with her and, as she put it, she felt together now.

The second story is about a moment that occurred when I was seeing a 15 year old boy in individual psychotherapy in the Brandon Centre some years ago. This boy who I shall call Paul was a smart streetwise kid. He was quite charming in an artful sort of way and got on well with many of his friends. He was however getting increasingly involved with the police, mainly for theft of cars and house burglary. His home background was not as chaotic as many, but he had grown up with family strife and a father who regularly let him down. For a long time, Paul in the therapy was superficially co-operative but I had the feeling that he was stringing me along to keep me and his mother happy. However, it turned out after about six months of therapy that he had been caught for breaking into the house of a friend of his mother and taking quite a lot of merchandise. In the session that followed, he didn't mention this until I told him that his mother had rung up to inform me of what had happened. Initially, he smiled, made a joke or two; it

wasn't him, his mother fretted too much. I said that I was listening but somehow it didn't add up too much to convince me. Paul smiled again and picked a pen on the desk. He mimed at smoking it like a cigarette and asked uncertainly what I was getting at. I repeated what I had said and added that I thought that he kidding himself as well as his mother and me about what he had been up to. Paul was at first quiet, but then, suddenly and violently, threw the pen across the room and got up to walk toward the door. He swore at me, accusing me of being 'a flash Harry, a twisting bastard, a bully who couldn't give a toss' (not unlike how he had had described his father). He was fuming. He opened the door and was all ready to charge out.

And at that point, I simply said as firmly as I could make it 'Stay - don't leave this'. He paused, turned round, glared at me, said nothing, picked up the pen, returned it to the desk, sat down. And cried.

I was scared in the middle of this. I didn't know what was going to happen next. He was furious. And it was tempting to just let him leave, to hell with him; if that's the way he is going to carry on. Condemn. But in my gut and my compassion and psychotherapeutic duty, I did my best to stick with him. Stay. Understand. And he did. And it helped.

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