

Bradford and District YOT, in partnership with First Group buses, have received a national award in recognition for a pilot project using restorative justice to deal with young people caught dodging paying fares.

Baroness Scotland, Minister for Criminal Justice and Offender Management, and Salima Hafejee, Youth Justice Board Member presented representatives from the YOT and First Group with their Youth Justice Alliances Award at a ceremony at the Home Office on Tuesday 8 May.

The Youth Justice Alliances Awards recognise youth offending teams and secure estate establishments who have developed partnerships which are helping to combat offending and reoffending amongst children and young people.



Left to right, Salima Hafejee, Youth Justice Board Member, Paul Kirkham, First Group, Simon Lacy, Bradford YOT and Baroness Scotland, Minister for Criminal Justice and Offender Management.

Bradford and District YOT and First Group won the Best Corporate Alliance category for their innovative partnership approach to dealing with young people caught defrauding the bus company by using altered or invalid tickets and for fare evasion. First Group would normally have to pursue the prosecution of any young person caught defrauding the company, which could result in that person attending court and receiving a Referral Order.

The new system, which has been successfully trialed across Bradford, a former fare evasion hotspot, uses a restorative justice approach with the young person and their parent or guardian being offered the choice of attending a meeting with a representative from the YOT.

At the meeting the young person admits their crime and the consequences of their actions are explored, including the wider implications of fare evasion on the business and community it serves. The parent/guardian is asked to express their view on the incident and a written apology to First Group from the young person is expected. They are also assessed to identify risk factors such as a need for parenting support, referral to Youth Services or eligibility for prevention programmes run by the YOT's Young People's Support Unit.

Continued over...

"We are impressed by the results achieved so far, with a change in outlook on the part of the offenders being evident from the written apologies sent to the company. The scheme seeks to address the delicate balance of not criminalising young people but at the same time tackling the issue of fare avoidance amongst the young.

I am sure by working us together we can help the youngsters from re-offending and set them onto a path of a responsible citizens"

**Khadim Hussain
Operations Director, First Bradford**

Continued...

Simon Lacy, of Bradford and District YOT, said, "This pilot has seen us work together with First Group to develop a new way of ensuring young people face up to the consequences of their actions. The victim here is not just the bus company, but also the wider community who have to pick up the bill.

"By involving a parent and by discussing these issues we have had great success in making the young people involved understand that it is unacceptable behaviour, none of those we have dealt with this way have reoffended, they are assessed for further risks and importantly are not sucked in to the justice system.

"I am very proud to have received this award, we hope to continue with the scheme and to widen it see it being used across a wider area."

Paul Kirkham, of First Group, said, "First Group take fare avoidance very seriously as it is our customers who suffer when we are forced to pass on the costs. However, we feel that by using restorative justice we can appropriately deal with those who take up this option, preventing unnecessary and expensive court actions and stopping reoffending.

"The partnership between First Group and the Bradford YOT has worked well and I would be pleased to see the scheme developed further."

Salima Hafejee, YJB Board Member, said: "Youth offending services are built around effective partnership working and alliances. Across the system we can see many examples of the innovative ways local services are collaborating with a range of partner organisations.

"These awards recognise those excellent alliances which bring significant benefits to victims, offenders and the wider community and, most importantly, which help young people engage in positive activities, learn new skills and stop their offending behaviour.

"This project demonstrates creative, partnership working and those involved should be very proud of what they have achieved."

100% SUCCESS - NO RE-OFFENDING

This fruitful corporate alliance has stopped young people having a criminal record, freed up court time and YOT resources and saved First (Bus Company) a great deal of money. First as the victim of the crime are highly pleased with their involvement in the process and want young people to take responsibility for their actions, make amends through an apology and stay out of trouble in the future. After it's very successful trial in Bradford the model is now being used across the whole of West Yorkshire and is being consider in York.

"I'm very relieved that my son will not have to attend court... I was so ashamed when I learned that he had tried to avoid paying his fare. I think he has learned his lesson and certainly won't do anything like this again."

Mother of young person

Conclusion

With a 100% success record this pilot project has been valued such that we have made the arrangement with First ongoing, and the model is now being used across West Yorkshire with plans to extend it nationally. First are extremely satisfied with the financial savings and the demonstration of an effective deterrent, parents are pleased their children have learned a valuable lesson without going to court. Young people have made amends and avoided being criminalised.

**Paul O'Hara
Bradford YOT Manager**