

# Turning the tide of youth offending

Ex-offender Charles Young tells **Lynne Wallis** how he's trying to give young people the chances that he never had

It has been 17 years since Young's last stretch inside, six months in a single cell at Elmley prison in Kent. With over 40 convictions for robbery, fraud and burglary, he clocked up around 15 years behind bars between the ages of 19 and 40. Since his release, and inspired by a television programme he saw in prison about an ex-con in Glasgow talking to schoolchildren about jail, Young has used his experiences of prison life to educate young people, who may glamorise the criminal lifestyle, towards a more fulfilling existence. 5

He conveys the brutality of prison life through presentations he takes to youth clubs, schools and colleges, during which an "inmate" sits locked in a mocked-up cell on a stage while Young hammers home what prison is really like. "Inmates" have included a former drug dealer, a vicar and a magistrate. Young shouts, uses raw language and doesn't pull any punches, and by the time his talk is over, some of the hardest-looking, most defiant kids look visibly shaken. 10

Young has been delivering his "prison's not worth it" message on a shoestring budget since 1995. Now his efforts are starting to bear fruit. Last year, Young secured £30,000 of Home Office funding for his Laces (London Anti-Crime Education Scheme) project. A community interest company, Laces helps to educate young people at risk of offending about the realities of prison, the consequences of crime. 15

## RESPECT

Between 1995 and 2005, Laces project made 2,000 presentations to young people, and deterred 1,290 potential offenders, thereby saving the public an estimated £6.2m in criminal damage and the criminal justice system approximately £1.2m. But Young wants to do more. "I still feel so frustrated," he says. "There are people out there [in the criminal justice system] who have never been to prison and who talk to young offenders like they understand them, but they don't. You need to be patient and understanding, but a lot of people alienate these youngsters. You need to show respect to them, give respect to teach respect, and lots of these kids don't respect anyone or anything because they have never had any respect themselves. Kids need to be coached and helped to develop, and that's what I try to do for the kids I work with. I'm a bit of a surrogate parent, giving them the care and support I never had." 20 25 30

Perhaps Young's biggest success story is a 19-year-old man, Jason, a former drug dealer who was recently referred to Laces by a crown court judge in Woolwich, south-east London. Jason has been crime-free ever since, has held a job down for a year, is in a steady relationship and has a baby named Lacey as a tribute to the project that turned his life around. 35

Young is incredibly proud of Jason and admits that when the judge agreed to revoke the youth offending team order and entrust Young to mentor Jason and keep him out of trouble, his eyes filled with tears. "I knew Laces was going to be a success and that one day this would happen, but it was still a big moment." 40

## CHANNELING AGGRESSION

"Without parental guidance or a teacher to spot a talent and egg them on, what hope have they got? They need to be shown how to channel their aggression into something worthwhile. Instead, we've got kids who will kill over a postcode, a girl, a look, all because they want to be noticed. 'Look at me,' they are saying. 45

"We have to teach our young people to self-motivate, to believe in themselves, with parents and teachers working together. Instead, we've got parents and teachers blaming each other.

Young says much more could be done to improve the job prospects for ex-prisoners. "Halving sentences just means career criminals can commit heavier crimes knowing he or she will get a more lenient sentence. It's no deterrent." "Prisoners need to be made to go to work full time like we do, but there have to be employment opportunities when they come out. Someone has to give them a chance." 50 55

He would like criminal justice agencies such as youth offending teams, police, probation and the youth justice board, as well as social services, to work with chambers of commerce to persuade community-minded businesspeople to give ex-offenders a chance.

**Source B: A letter written by Charles Dickens to the Daily News (1846)**

**TO THE EDITORS OF "THE DAILY NEWS"**

Before I describe a visit of my own to a RAGGED SCHOOL, and urge the readers of this letter for GOD'S sake to visit one themselves, let me say, that I know the prisons of London well, and that the Children in them are enough to break the heart and hope of any man. I have never taken a foreigner or a stranger to one of these establishments, but I have seen him so moved at the sight of the Child-Offenders, and so affected by the thought of their utter renouncement<sup>1</sup> and desolation<sup>2</sup> outside the prison walls, that he has been unable to disguise his emotion, as if some great grief had suddenly burst upon him. 5

Mr. CHESTERTON and Lieutenant TRACEY (two intelligent and human prison governors) know, perfectly well, that these children pass and repass through the prisons all their lives; that they are never taught; that the first distinctions between right and wrong are, from their cradles, absent from their minds; that they come of untaught parents, and will give birth to another untaught generation; that in exact proportion to their natural abilities, is the extent and scope of their depravity<sup>3</sup>; and that there is no escape or chance for them in life. 10

Happily, there are schools in these prisons now. If any readers doubt how ignorant<sup>4</sup> the children are, let them visit those schools and see them at their tasks, and hear how much they knew when they were sent there. If anyone wants to know the produce of this seed, let them see a class of men and boys together, at their books and mark how painfully the full-grown felons<sup>5</sup> toil at reading and writing: their ignorance being so confirmed and solid. The contrast of this labour in the men, with the quickness of the boys, the shame and sense of degradation struggling through their dull attempts at infant lessons, and their eagerness to learn, impress me more painfully than I can tell. 15 20

For the instruction, and as a first step in the reformation, of such unhappy beings, the RAGGED SCHOOLS were founded. I was first made conscious of their existence, about two years ago by seeing an advertisement in the papers stating "That a room had been opened and supported in that wretched where religious instruction had been imparted to the poor." I wrote to the masters of this particular school to make some further inquiries, and went myself soon afterwards. 25

The people in the neighbourhood were not very sober or honest company. Being unacquainted with the exact locality of the school, I was reluctant to make some inquiries about it – but I did. My enquiries were received with humour in general; but everybody knew where the school was. The prevailing idea among the loungers (the greater part of them the very sweepings of the streets and station-houses) seemed to be, that the teachers were quixotic<sup>6</sup>, and the school upon the whole "a lark."<sup>7</sup> But there was certainly a kind of rough respect for the intention. 30

The ragged school consisted of two or three miserable rooms in a miserable house. In the best of these rooms the pupils in the female school were being taught to read and write; and though there were many wretched creatures steeped in degradation, they were tolerably quiet, and listened with eagerness and patience to their instructors. The appearance of this room was sad and melancholy, of course how could be it be otherwise! But, on the whole, encouraging. 35 40

The small, low, chamber at the back, in which the boys were crowded, had such a foul and stifling stench as to be, at first, almost intolerable. But its moral aspect was so far worse than its physical, that this was soon forgotten. Huddled together on a bench about the room, and shown out by some flaring candles stuck against the walls, were a crowd of boys, varying from mere infants to young men; sellers of fruit, herbs, lucifer-matches, flints; sleepers under the dry arches of bridges; young thieves and beggars - with nothing honest, innocent, or pleasant in their faces; low-browed, vicious, cunning, wicked; abandoned of all help except this school; speeding downward to destruction; and UN-UTTERABLY IGNORANT. 45

CHARLES DICKENS

1. renouncement = abandonment, rejection	2. Desolation = despair, misery	
3. depravity = corruption	4. ignorant = without knowledge	5. felons = criminals
6. Quixotic = unrealistically optimistic	7. A lark = fun and games	

**Q1 [AO1].** Read again **source A**, from **lines 1 to 7**.

Choose **four** statements below which are TRUE.

- Shade the boxes of the ones that you think are true
  - Choose a maximum of **four** statements.
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- a) Young's biggest prison sentence was 17 years. [ F ]
  - b) He spent six months in a single cell. [ T ]
  - c) He has committed over 40 burglaries. [ F ]
  - d) Young has not been in prison since he was 40. [ T ]
  - e) He decided he wanted to help young offenders after he watched a TV programme about a man who did something similar. [ T ]
  - f) Young's life in prison was completely wasted [ F ]
  - g) Many young people see criminal life as exciting. [ T ]
- [4 marks]**

**Q2 [AO1].** You need to refer to **source A** and **source B** for this question:

Use details from **both** sources. Write a summary of the **causes of criminality** in the two different texts. **[8 marks]**

**Q3 [AO2].** You now need to refer **only** to **source B**.

How does the writer use language to explain the **conditions in the ragged school**? **[12 marks]**

**Q4 [AO3].** For this question, you need to refer to the whole of **source A** together with the whole of **source B**.

**Compare** how each source conveys the writer's **ideas about education as a means steering young people away from crime**.

In your answer, you should:

- compare the different ideas
- compare the methods used to convey the ideas
- support your ideas with quotations from both texts.

**[16 marks]**