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Juvenile delinquency and how to beat it [1]

Written by **Sam Bowman** [2] | Saturday 20 November 2010

One of the big problems with urban life is juvenile delinquency. Straightforward crime is bad, but fortunately relatively rare, but the day-to-day hassling that people get from gangs of teenagers affects a lot of people. Usually these kids don?t plan on getting violent, but they know that their victims don?t either, so they feel free to bully and intimidate for the fun of it. It?s also a relatively modern phenomenon.

Teenagers become delinquent because they?re bored, they feel powerless and they have too much energy. Being annoying or violent to other people is an entertaining use of energy which makes them feel important. So, what can we do to change this?

The typical answer is to build ?youth centres?. Unfortunately, because they don?t tackle the real causes of juvenile delinquency, ?youth centres? are a bit of a white elephant ? you can build them, but they probably won?t come. As usual, you can?t throw money at a social problem and expect that it?ll go away.

The underlying cause of juvenile delinquency is that teenagers are forced to go to school even if school isn?t right for them. Many people have non-academic talents and abilities and, by forcing everybody to stay in school until they?re sixteen, the government is trying to force square pegs into round holes. They disrupt classes at school, making it harder for students who do want to learn to do so ? a big problem that hurts smart kids from poor backgrounds ? and then have long evenings with excess energy to vent their frustrations on the rest of us.

The solution to this is surely obvious. If the school-leaving age was lowered to thirteen or fourteen, it would enable youths for whom school isn?t right to get jobs and spend their energy at something worthwhile. They?d be earning money (which would be good for them) and gaining a sense of responsibility and self-worth, and wouldn?t have so much excess energy that they need to vent on the world in the evenings.

Forcing all teenagers to go to school holds back those who really do want to go and frustrates the ones who don't ? and the rest of us have to put up with their frustration. There's no point in deluding ourselves that they're benefiting from it when they could be acquiring real world skills in the workplace. The solution isn?t sticking-plasters like ASBOs or youth centres, it?s allowing them to get jobs and grow up.

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