

CHOICE MOVES

Kelly Oyebola (below) has set up a mentoring scheme to try and prevent the young from entering a life of crime and relying on the 'nanny state'

Oyebola set up Potential Mentoring (PM) before his brother was tragically killed in Fulham as a result of asking some youths to stop smoking. After this, his work took on a greater urgency and meaning.

PM is a service that provides effective adult advice and interaction with young people. During his work in the probation service, he realised that the main problem for the young recidivists was a massive inconsistency in the service they were receiving. "They would often say, 'Where is the person I saw last week?' Or, 'Why didn't this person do the thing they promised to do?'"

Oyebola saw young people who felt let down by the adults who surrounded them – there were no constant role models in lives that had rarely seen stability. Kelly decided to focus on working with young people before they crossed the line in to crime or problem behaviour – by taking PM into schools.

PM wants to hear from head teachers who have disruptive pupils – the organisation then comes in and acts as a mentor, listening to the problems faced by the youth, and acting on their behalf, often liaising between the

young people and their family if there is a dispute.

PM is offering a professional service for which Oyebola charges a very reasonable sum per hour – less than most middle-class people pay for an hour

with a therapist – but he is finding out that schools are loathed to pay him for this service, which has to come out of already stretched budgets.

Oyebola is quick to identify the government's 'nannying' of the previous generation as reason for the dire crisis faced by today's youth. "As soon as it became acceptable to live on the social, as soon as it became acceptable to get pregnant in order to get a flat – things went in to decline," he says.

Kelly places great importance on the respect of elders, basic and very traditional family values, and flags up our collective responsibility to rectify the problem. "We've all gone wrong – the young people are wrong, the parenting is wrong, the government doesn't do enough, nor do the schools or councils – because really, it's our most urgent problem, these young people are going to be looking after us when we are elderly.

"Do we feel good about that at the moment?"

For more information, go to www.potentialmentoring.org.uk

