

## ASBO Mania

### Are ASBOs working or are young people being failed by the system?

*If you don't know what ASBO stands for, then you've probably been living on another planet for the last year. For those of you who have just arrived back on earth, ASBO is the government's new buzz acronym, standing for 'Anti-Social Behaviour Order'.*

*ASBOs have caused as much controversy as they have confusion and here Charlotte Lytton, from Children's Express, explores whether ASBOs are working or whether young people are being failed by the system.*

The subject of ASBOs has become one of great controversy. Over 4,483 of them have been given out in the past five and a half years. But are they really having any impact on the youth of today who are committing crimes, or are they doing more harm to them than good?

ASBOs were introduced in April 1999, aimed at tackling relentless low level street crime. However, 42% of ASBOs issued were breached in their first two and half years. Statistics like this have become an increasing cause for concern for many people who feel they're not worth the paper they're written on. Criminal Defence solicitor and ASBO concern national co-ordinator Matt Foot says the government are dreaming if they think ASBOs are working.

But what about the ordinary person on the street? What do they think? 15-year-old Ginisha from London says: "They're not really working, so what's the point?" And it's not just young people who think this. But do ordinary people on the streets of London agree? I went to find out. Roland, 42, says "they're not a good idea. It's just a silly little knee jerk reaction to something that desperately needs a wider response".

But it's not just members of the public who have a problem with ASBOs. It's not uncommon to see sketches about them on TV shows like the immensely popular 'Little Britain' where character Vicky Pollard boasts about the number of times she's been in trouble with the police.

So are some young people really proud of their ASBOs? 25-year-old Ed Huck says, "It's true. Young people will collect ASBOs as a badge of honour" although 15 year old Mueen Pasha disagrees: "No, they're not collected as a badge of honour, definitely not".

Perhaps ASBOs aren't being taken seriously because of the haphazard way they were organised in the first place. There seems to have been a serious lack of information on ASBOs given to the public which has been very detrimental. There have been reports of some people who've received ASBOs and barely knew what they were, and other reports about teenagers who had never heard of them - despite the fact that, when ASBOs were launched. David Blunkett (then Home Secretary) described them as something "that is required to protect communities".

One of the main concerns with ASBOs for many children's charities is the high number handed out to under 18's. It's been reported that 50% of all ASBOs have been given to children and teenagers. Another issue children's charities are worried about is the recent trend of 'naming and shaming' young people. They argue that this can destroy a child's future, making it impossible for them to turn their lives around. They also claim that ASBOs are demonising young people and stereotyping those who hang out on the streets in hooded tops or baseball caps as troublemakers. Even though they may not be committing any crimes, they are still blamed for causing problems. The Children's Society policy editor Kathy Evans justifies their behaviour: "For many young people, hanging around on the streets with their friends is their best choice option."

Many people have also raised concerns about the fact there aren't any ways in which to redeem yourself from an ASBO in order to shorten the time you have it. One small mistake by a police officer who thinks he has seen someone commit an ASBO worthy crime can cost a person a minimum of two years with a cruel and unfair label. Suggestions have been made as a way around this. 26-year-old Jennifer says, "They should definitely be able to work ASBOs off with community service, or something like that".

But the question remains: if ASBO's aren't working, how else do we control anti-social behaviour? "They should either be imprisoned or fined," says 42-year-old Roland. But should young people be spending their adolescent lives locked behind bars, especially with the running costs of a year's imprisonment at £36,000?

Instead, this money could be used to tackle anti-social behaviour before it happens and 14-year-old Paula thinks this is exactly what needs to happen. She is furious at the lack of support given to young people facing difficulties. "The government should be helping them; we all have to help each other".

The politicians are supposed to have our best interests at heart. But do they? Are they really interested in offering help to people who need it? I think that what's needed is a new system of counselling and support for ASBO teens - and there's no time like the present. But until this happens and while there are constant disagreements over the poor state of ASBOs, we can only imagine that the situation will continue. And with the nation split over how to deal with anti-social behaviour I wonder if it will ever be reduced and how many more young people will be harmed before it is.

### About the team

This story was produced by Charlotte Lytton, 14. It was published by [Reach for the Sky](#) website.

### 1 comment

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i'm not sure about wether ASBO's are a good idea or not. some young offenders think its a trophy to boast about, but others talk about it in shame. I'll never do such a horrible thing to get an ASBO, but thats not how everyones mind works! :|

Dan (age 13) from North East of England, 30 December 1899 00:00

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