

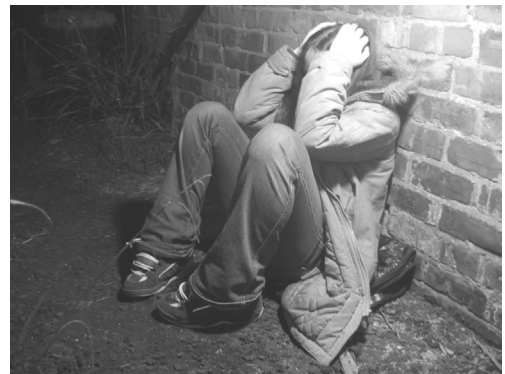
# Sitting on a TIME-BOMB

## THE NEETS THREAT TO OUR SOCIETY AND ECONOMY

---

### I. A National Problem

The United Kingdom is currently facing a huge social and economic problem, which we ignore at our peril. **Vast numbers of young people throughout the land are now not in education, not in employment and not in training.**



Many of them are socially excluded, marginalised and lacking any purpose in life.

Some feel they have no future and suffer from depression. Others are being drawn into anti-social behaviour, starting a criminal career and creating a sub-culture. Increasing numbers feel they are failures or misfits and become drop-outs.

These young people constitute a substantial sector of our society. They are highly vulnerable and will have a major influence on the life of our nation in coming years. The social consequences of the present situation being allowed to continue are incalculable.

### 2. The Facts of What is Happening

**There are now 1.25 million young people between the ages of 16 and 24 who are without education, without employment and without training (Office of National Statistics 2006).**

These young people, who are now referred to as NEETs, constitute about **one fifth of all young people** in the United Kingdom. **Their numbers have grown by 15% over the past nine years – males by 27% and females by 6% (ONS 2006).**

Figures deposited in the House of Commons library recently reveal that **more than 2.2 million British children now live in households totally dependent on state benefits.** Research reveals that such children are far more likely to become benefit-dependent adults, sparking fears that a generation of unemployable youngsters is now being created.

### 3. The Cause of What is Happening

The roots of this are many and complex. They directly impact on community cohesion and wellbeing.

Many of the young people concerned have clearly not benefited sufficiently from the educational system, having basic numeracy and literacy deficiencies. Many are the products of broken marriages and dysfunctional families. Our society has grievously neglected the defence and promotion of the family, especially the marriage-based family.

Warning signs about the emerging dangers of the NEETs situation can be seen in the fact that **54,000 pupils play truant every day** (*Department of Children, Schools and Families – Autumn 2006*), and also in the fact that in the year 2005/06 there were **9,170 permanent and 343,840 fixed-term expulsions** from schools in England – over 10% of the school population (*DFES June 07*). Children invariably suffer through disturbance and instability at home. **Eight hundred thousand children never see their natural father.** Fifty-three percent of divorces involve a child under 16 (*ONS/Divorce on-line 2007*).

Nearly **1.3 million children** now have parents with serious addiction problems (*“Bottling it up Campaign”, Turning Point 2007*). **One in three children** now lives in poverty, compared with one in ten in 1979 (*Welfare isn’t Working, Child Poverty, Reform 2007*).

In the recent United Nations survey of children’s material, emotional, family and educational well-being in 21 rich nations, **the United Kingdom was ranked bottom for the overall well-being of children and young people** (*‘An overview of child well-being in rich countries’, Unicef 2007*).

**Over 60,000 needy children live in care in England** (*Dept of Health/Publications and Statistics January 07*), but in 2004 30% of care leavers at age 19 were not in education, employment or training (*Social Exclusion website – Facts and Figures*).

**Seventy-five percent of those leaving care have no educational qualification** and 39% of all male prisoners under 21 years of age have been in care (*Project Caleb 2004*).

Seventy percent of all prostitutes have been in care, and those in care are far more likely to be imprisoned, homeless or have a child, which will be institutionalised.

**Nearly two-thirds of young offenders are unemployed at the time of arrest** (*Social Exclusion Unit Website – Facts and Figures*).



## 4. The Consequences of What is Happening

When large numbers of young people are drifting and insecure because of family breakdown, and/or educational under-achievement, the consequences are becoming increasingly obvious in our national life.

We are seeing a huge problem of under-age drinking, binge-drinking and drunkenness. We are seeing large numbers of young people being hospitalised because of this and also suffering from liver disease.

We are seeing a huge problem of drug abuse, with addiction and dependence making very deep inroads into the quality of life in many communities, and also leading to hospitalisation. We are now seeing the emergence of an urban gang culture.



We are seeing a substantial increase in serious social disorder, vandalism and violence on our streets.

In addition to all this, we are seeing widespread promiscuity among the young, with a huge proliferation of sexually transmitted diseases. We are seeing children having children, and children having abortions.

**We are seeing the adoption of a lifestyle of despair, irresponsibility and hopelessness.**

## 5. The Cost of What is Happening

The cost to the nation of educational under-achievement has been assessed as **£18 BILLION EVERY YEAR.\***

Youth unemployment costs UK taxpayers **£20MILLION EVERY WEEK** in Job Seekers' Allowance.\*

It is assessed that the loss of productivity to the economy attributable to NEETs is **£70 MILLION EVERY WEEK.\***

The estimated cost of youth crime in Great Britain is now in excess of **£1 BILLION EVERY YEAR.\***

Each year an estimated **70,000 school-age offenders** enter the Youth Justice System at enormous cost (*HM Government, Reducing re-offending through skills and employment December 2005*) and **18 to 20-year-old males now constitute 40% of all first-time offenders.** \*

Three-quarters of male offenders aged between 18 and 21 re-offend within two years, adding further burdens.\*

\**"The Cost of Social Exclusion"- Prince's Trust 2007*

## 6. Facing up to the Situation

There is an immediate need to get to the roots of the problem of NEETs. We need a very thorough and honest investigation of the formative, family, social and educational influences upon young people over recent years. **Why have we got this problem? What have been the major contributing factors? Why has the emergence of a welfare culture changed the climate for young people? Where have we gone wrong?**

The state has acknowledged what is happening. Excellent work is being carried out by some charities, but much more must be done. There is an immediate need to mobilise the whole of society and local communities to achieve a collaborative and radical solution to this ingrained problem. We cannot go on as we are doing. Although many of those classified as NEETs are highly responsible and motivated young people the basic problem is both a cause and a product of serious social disorder. We cannot stand by and allow countless lives, as well as families and communities, to disintegrate before our eyes.

**The threat to social cohesion and 'national wellbeing' is real, immediate and desperately serious.** We are in danger of creating a lost generation. Not nearly enough is being done. It is unlikely that statutory bodies alone will be able to resolve the problem. The need is for the establishment of teams of people drawn from the voluntary and statutory sectors to work together.

## 7. What Can We Do?

The problem is now beyond the capacity of the state alone. We need to marshal the vast resources of voluntary groups and perhaps commerce in a collaborative effort with government, both local and national. This must happen without further delay.



There are signs of hope. During the past three years one project, on minimal resources has rehabilitated young people, trained them and equipped them for useful life. They have been saved from a cycle of re-offending and have been led into employment, apprenticeships and training. At the same time there has been visible urban regeneration. It has effectively marshalled voluntary helpers with public support. It is a highly successful model now ready to be applied nationwide. **In spite of this, public-sector support for this inspiring project has been cut off.**

The NEETS problem is **not** intractable. It **can** be dealt with, but only if we have real nationwide commitment, which is at present lacking. Those in authority must take responsibility for what is happening. If this problem is not resolved it will have a devastating effect on future generations.

**WE ARE SITTING ON A TIME-BOMB. ARE WE AWARE? DO WE CARE?**

---

**maranatha**

April 2008

© The Maranatha Community, 102 Irlam Road, Flixton, Manchester M41 6JT Tel: 0161 748 4858 Fax: 0161 747 7379  
e-mail: [info@maranathacommunity.org.uk](mailto:info@maranathacommunity.org.uk) [www.maranathacommunity.org.uk](http://www.maranathacommunity.org.uk)

*Maranatha is a movement of thousands of Christians in all the churches, committed to healing, renewal and unity.*