

ENGAGING YOUNG PEOPLE IN RESETTLEMENT

A PRACTITIONER'S GUIDE

Introduction

This practice guide is one of an ongoing series produced as part of the Beyond Youth Custody (BYC) programme, funded under the Big Lottery Fund's Youth in Focus initiative. BYC has been designed to challenge, advance, and promote better thinking in policy and practice for the effective resettlement of young people.

One of the prerequisites of effective resettlement intervention with young people leaving custody is that they are fully engaged with the services provided to them. This practitioner's guide reports on research undertaken by Beyond Youth Custody on the issue of engaging young people in resettlement services and considers the implications for work with young people leaving custody. Beyond Youth Custody also introduces a three step model to guide practitioners through the phases of engagement in a young person's resettlement journey.

This briefing reports on research undertaken by Beyond Youth Custody on the issue of engaging young people in resettlement services and considers the implications for work with young people leaving custody.

The full research report by Dr Tim Bateman and Professor Neal Hazel, upon which this briefing is based, is available at www.beyondyouthcustody.net.

Contents

Introduction	1
Meaning of engagement	2
Initial engagement	3
Organisational issues	3
Interventions and activities	4
Relationship dynamics and the qualities of effective staff	4-5
The three-step process of engagement	6-7
Summary	8

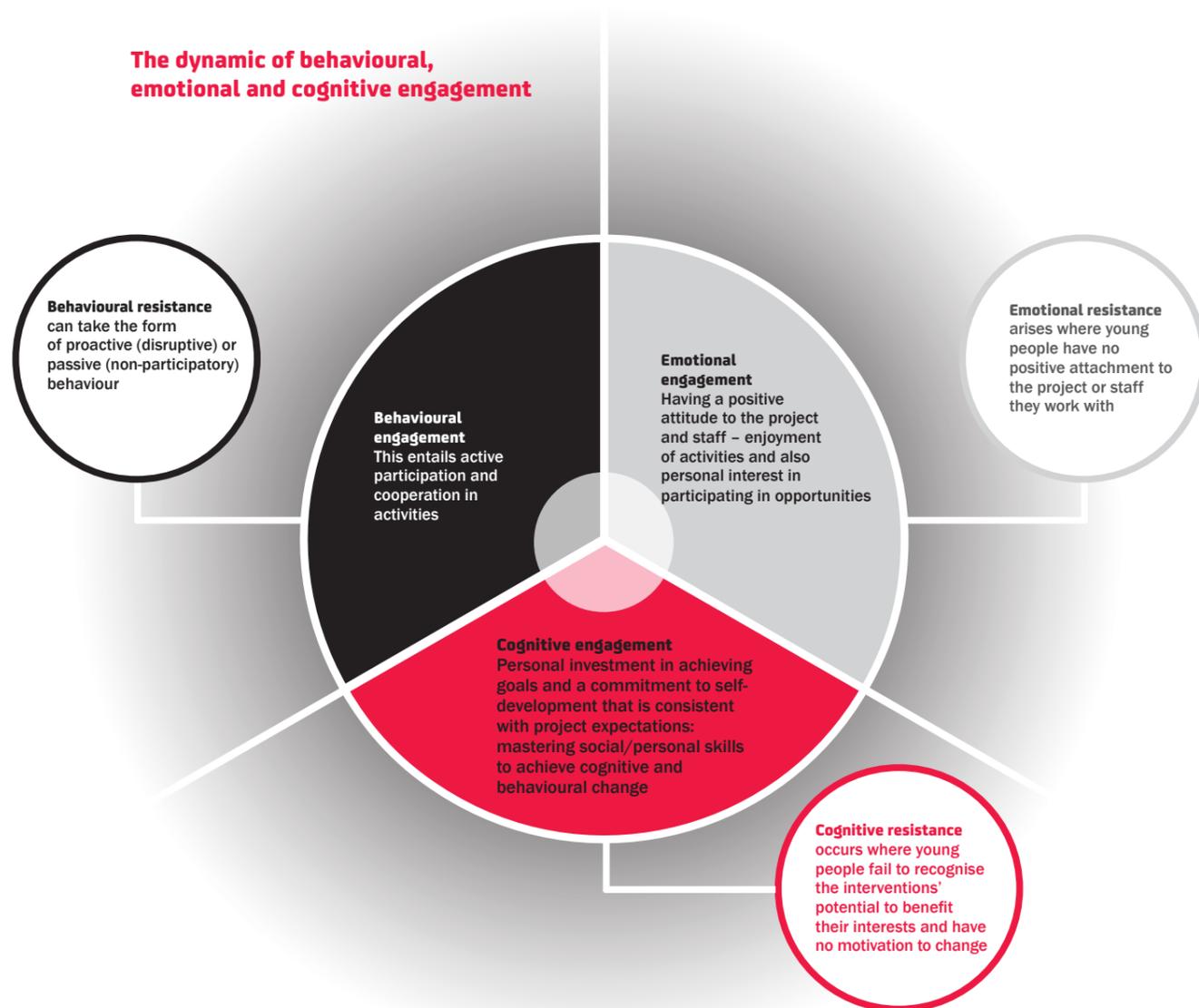


Meaning of engagement

Young people leaving custody have a range of complex needs and are amongst the most vulnerable in society. Unsurprisingly, engaging them in resettlement services is a challenge. But it is also important to be clear what engagement means. Engaging a young person clearly requires that he or she is involved in some way with the intervention, but simple attendance is not sufficient to guarantee full engagement. It is helpful to conceive of engagement as having three interlocking elements as follows. Behavioural engagement refers to the young person's participation and cooperation signalled by, for example, attending appointments and participating in activities. Emotional engagement refers to the young person's attitudinal relationship with the project and those who work in it, and might be manifested in the young person being motivated to attend, being enthusiastic about (at least some) activities and getting on well with staff. Cognitive engagement focuses on a personal investment on the part of the young person to achieve the goals of intervention and a commitment to working towards the necessary cognitive and behavioural changes.

Complete engagement will involve each of the above spheres, but young people may be engaged in different ways and to different degrees at different times. Engagement might therefore be best understood as a collection of processes that, where successfully negotiated, can facilitate the young person moving towards adopting a changed identity or reflecting on the person that he or she would like to be.

The dynamic of behavioural, emotional and cognitive engagement



Initial engagement

Developing a relationship with young people while they are still in custody is important. The transition to the community is frequently traumatic and an intensive focus at that point can help to avoid 'drift' and maximise the prospects of early engagement with the service.

The background and social circumstances of young people who come into contact with the criminal justice system are chaotic, making it more difficult to spark an initial interest in resettlement activities and undermining the likelihood of consistent attendance. In many cases disruptive backgrounds mean that there is a lack of familial support to encourage engagement.

Given the extent of these barriers, traditional methods of 'recruitment' such as sending letters, the provision of leaflets and other written materials are unlikely to be effective. Word of mouth approaches, either through agencies with whom the young person has already engaged, trusted adults or peers offer greater chances of success. The importance of meeting the young person on his or her own territory is a recurrent theme in the literature, suggesting that some form of detached or proactive outreach work may frequently be required for initial engagement.

Considerations for practice

Does your project:

- Visit a young person whilst they are in custody to start building a relationship before release?
- Offer intensive contact around the point of the transition to the community?
- Use a range of non-traditional approaches to engaging young people?
- Offer incentives to young people to attend and take part in activities?
- Meet young people on their own territory, making use of outreach work, drop-in facilities and taster sessions?

Organisational issues

If outreach work is frequently a precursor to initial engagement, maintaining engagement over the longer term requires premises that are accessible and attractive to young people. Sufficient resources are required to allow a flexible approach and to enable the dedication of considerable amounts of time to each individual young person. In particular, the key to engaging marginalised young people is persistence, patience and perseverance, recognising that progress may be slow and manifested in small steps.

The ethos of the project should signal a commitment to inclusive working, which can be as important as the nature of activities undertaken and the services offered. Inclusivity involves an individualised approach and requires recognition of the diversity of young people who are in need of resettlement services. Failure to attend appointments should be regarded as an indicator that a proactive approach is required rather than that the young person cannot be engaged.

Considerations for practice

Does your project:

- Have premises that are young person friendly?
- Ask young people what they think of the physical space and involve them in making the environment more appealing?
- Provide adequate time for staff to ensure that they can respond flexibly to the individual needs of young people?
- Have an inclusive ethos that seeks to recognise, and respond to, diversity?
- Consider how to adopt a more proactive approach to engage young people who do not attend appointments?

Interventions and activities

Formal sessions, such as paper-based offending behaviour sessions, are unpopular with young people and can inhibit engagement. There is considerable literature on the benefits of using activities that are enjoyable, rewarding, practical, exciting or challenging. These typically include outward bound and adventure programmes, sports, music, arts or other forms of structured leisure activities that might be attractive to young people. It is important to recognise that different activities appeal to different young people and that interests vary with age.

In the first instance, enjoyable activities can function as a hook, encouraging young people's interest in order to enhance motivation and over the longer term enable work on other issues. However, it is also important to recognise that they can also function as 'enrichment activities' in their own right which improve self-confidence and self-esteem, which are themselves requirements of the process whereby the young person is enabled to make a shift in identity. Services that young people see as relevant to their future are more likely to sustain engagement than interventions planned around issues defined as problematic by professional workers. Over the longer term, young people's interest should be reinforced by having clear goals and progressive pathways that facilitate achievement and by offering practical and emotional support to increase the likelihood of achieving successful outcomes.

Key to engaging marginalised young people is the delivery of services that reflect young people's own perception of their needs or interests. A participatory approach that encourages and values young people's input into project planning and their involvement in the design of their own intervention is more likely to engage service users. In a resettlement context, whether or not compliance with an intervention is a statutory requirement will impact on the extent to which a fully participatory approach can be adopted. Nonetheless, it is important that there is some element of empowerment and that the young person's voice is taken into account when decisions are made.

Considerations for practice

Does your project:

- Use structured, enjoyable leisure activities as a way of stimulating young people's interest in the service to enable work on other issues in the longer term?
- Respond to young people's interests as they perceive them?
- Provide practical, emotional and developmental support?
- Have mechanisms that acknowledge young people's progress and achievements in concrete terms?
- Allow young people to determine their own intervention plans so far as is consistent with agency expectations?

Relationship dynamics and the qualities of effective staff

There is a growing consensus that relationships are central to engaging marginalised young people in interventions, although there is less clarity about the nature of effective relationships. One view, for instance, is that effective work with young people in conflict with the law involves staff being firm but fair; conversely, there is evidence that rigidity, as opposed to clarity about expectations, can undermine flexibility and be off-putting to young people. The concept of fairness is also open to a variety of interpretations and it would appear that more effective engagement is achieved where the starting point for professionals is recognition of young people's vulnerability and an explicit acknowledgement of the likelihood that they will have experienced considerable disadvantage. For such reasons, approaches that emphasise compulsion or are based on punishment are often ineffective. It is important that authority is exercised in a manner that is perceived as legitimate by the young person.

Young people make a clear distinction between workers who 'care' about them and those who do not, and they are more likely to form effective relationships with the former. The literature suggests that certain qualities of staff are associated with approaches that will be perceived by service users as caring. These include: demonstrating empathy; a non-judgemental attitude; conveying warmth; focusing on issues identified as problematic by the young person rather than those defined by the service; a commitment to a young person's self-determination; and a preparedness to 'go the extra mile'.

Considerations for practice

Does your project:

- Emphasise the importance of developing good relationships between staff and young people?
- Provide a flexible response to young people's behaviour that allows the development of such relationships?
- Demonstrate an understanding that most young people leaving custody will have experienced significant disadvantage?
- Ensure that authority is exercised in a way that young people perceive as legitimate?
- Promote a caring ethos and an empathetic environment?
- Employ staff with a strong commitment to young people's welfare and self-determination?



Julia Pennington, Operations Manager from the Salford Foundation, describes how staff on the ADAPT project develop effective relationships with participants.

What is the project?

ADAPT is an intensive mentoring, support and advocacy project supporting young men and women leaving custody to resettle back into their communities. It is delivered by Salford Foundation and funded by the Big Lottery.

Why does it work?

The ADAPT project uses a mentoring approach which draws on the life experiences of our staff to help young people. Many of our staff have grown up in areas of high crime. Some are ex-offenders and others have been through their own personal struggles. They have come through this time successfully, and have gone on to train to a professional level and gain experience of working with hard-to-reach young people. The model itself is designed to prove to young people that they can change if they make the right choices.

We approach young people on their level, showing them that we can relate to them, using their language to communicate with them and making sure they know we genuinely care about their success while maintaining a professional role and ensuring there are firm boundaries. Young people know that we care and that we have been where they are. This generates a level of mutual respect – something many young people have never experienced before. We let young people know that the only difference between them and us is the choices we have made. We challenge negative perceptions and work with the young person to identify their gifts and talents, supporting them in both recognising and enhancing the positive aspects of their personality. This in turn creates a self-awareness, they are then more skilled at being able to realise their own triggers and patterns of behaviour which empowers them as they begin to feel in control of themselves and their lives.

'The staff are great. If you need someone to talk to, they are there. ADAPT helps you...because they listen to you and they will try to get your life moving forward. When people listen it's like they care more.'

The three-step process of engagement

Beyond Youth Custody has developed a model of engagement that identifies three interrelated stages. Using this model, resettlement services can facilitate the process by which the young person negotiates each stage of the journey, helping them to achieve a shift in identity which is conducive to social inclusion.

The process of engagement can be considered to have three chronological steps, each of which involves the young person developing relationships in a different form:



Step 1 The service engaging with the young person

This is concerned with the service establishing a meaningful relationship with the young person, interesting them in the service and enhancing their motivation so that they begin to become involved in project activities.



Step 2 The young person engaging with the service

This is concerned with establishing a sustained and developing relationship with the service. It involves the young person identifying with the service and the objectives of intervention, and engaging with activities that both contribute to, and require, a shift in identity.



Step 3 The young person engaging with wider society

This is concerned with the young person transferring the relationship that has developed with the service to mainstream society. The shift in identity achieved through engagement with resettlement provision is no longer dependent on the relationship with a particular service, but is established to an extent that allows the young person to engage in a constructive manner with other agencies and wider society.

Considerations for practice

Ensuring engagement from the perspective of a resettlement provider involves finding ways of facilitating the young person's journey through each of the steps (see left).

Step one can be facilitated by:

- Meeting the young person early in custody to talk about needs and interests.
- Approaching young people through agencies they are already involved with.
- Activities that are fun or relevant to the young person's future.
- Outreach work.

Step two can be facilitated by:

- Individualised and flexible programmes of activities.
- Resources allowing staff contact time to develop relationships.
- Using fun activities to deepen bonds and improve motivation.
- Involving young people in activity planning and goal setting.
- Managing young people's expectations of services.

Step three can be facilitated by:

- Celebrating and rewarding young people's successes as an explicit acknowledgment of their newly emerging identity.
- Enabling young people to develop the confidence, knowledge and independent living skills necessary to avoid ongoing dependency on the resettlement service.
- Supporting the young person to develop the motivation, self-esteem, skills and other necessary means to disengage from resettlement work.
- Working with the community to develop increased acceptance and generate opportunities for young people to pursue in wider society.



**POSITIVE PRACTICE
SAFE HANDS, EVERTON**

Sue Gregory, Safe Hands Manager, describes how the project structure enables participants to develop through the journey of engagement.

What is the project?

The Safe Hands project helps young custody leavers integrate back into society using the power of sport as well as education, training and wider social support. It is delivered by Everton in the Community and funded by the Big Lottery.

Why does it work?

Each young person on the Safe Hands project embarks on a distinctive project journey, passing through three significant stages: pre-season, mid-season and the end of season run-in (see box below). This provides our participants with a clear pathway along which to strive towards short, medium and long-term goals.

The project structure also allows the Safe Hands team to address the complex and multiple challenges a young person faces at different stages of their development, allowing us to implement very specific and bespoke interventions during custody, throughout the licence period and beyond.

'I'd never done a marathon before... to complete it was an amazing feeling. I'd only been out two days and Safe Hands helped me to do it.'

Safe Hands: the three-stage pathway

PRE-SEASON (2-12 months prior to release) Intervention stage

- Strong relationships developed between the young people and Safe Hands staff.
- Emotional and behavioural issues addressed and coping strategies explored with an option of accessing psychological support.
- One-to-one support and group workshops delivered across a range of themes.
- Opportunity to address their hopes and fears.
- Raise their self-esteem, confidence and aspirations with therapeutic support.
- Preparation for release and transitional support needs identified.

MID-SEASON (6-12 months after release) Transitional stage

- Bespoke programmes of targeted activity and accreditations to build on pre-season progress.
- Individual action plans continued to address specific learning and support needs.
- Support in helping them to fulfil licence conditions and to stay out of trouble.
- Extensive volunteering opportunities provided through Everton in the Community.
- Ongoing youth action group activities to keep the young people involved in decisions.
- Exit strategies explored in the form of further education, training or employment.

END OF SEASON RUN-IN (Beyond the programme) Exit strategy stage

- Young people supported to select the most appropriate progression pathways.
- Tracking mechanisms implemented as part of aftercare and ongoing contact and support.
- Peer mentoring programme to offer paid employment.
- Opportunities to explore enterprise, self-employment, apprenticeships and training.
- Ongoing pastoral support provided in relation to their key relationships away from the project.
- Ongoing social and emotional support from Everton in the Community and project partners.



Summary

Young people's engagement with resettlement is concerned with more than a requirement to attend a service or complete a programme. While such requirements may persuade them to turn up, they do little to foster the emotional or cognitive changes that are necessary for young people to fully benefit from the services provided to them. Projects need to consider how their organisational ethos, staff-young person relationships and delivery methods can be adapted to help ensure all these types of engagement. Beyond Youth Custody introduces a three-step model to guide practitioners through the phases of engagement in a young person's resettlement journey. The three steps are:

- 1) the service engaging the young person;
- 2) developing the young person to engage with the service; and
- 3) supporting the young person to engage with wider society.

These three steps should support a positive shift in a young person's identity to allow effective resettlement and longer term outcomes.

The full research report and summary briefing upon which this practice guide is based are available at www.beyondyouthcustody.net

This review has been produced by the Beyond Youth Custody partnership, consisting of Nacro, ARCS (UK) Ltd, the Centre for Social Research at the University of Salford, and the Vauxhall Centre for the Study of Crime at the University of Bedfordshire.

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