

**Beyond**  
YOUTH CUSTODY

**PROVING  
'EFFECTIVENESS'  
IN RESETTLEMENT**



LOTTERY FUNDED

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## Glossary

- **INPUTS** – The resources invested, staff, time, buildings etc
- **OUTPUTS** – Products, activities etc, as a result of the inputs
- **OUTCOMES** – Changes that occur during a person's engagement in a programme or receipt of an intervention
  - **PROXIMAL** and **DISTAL** outcomes – These terms have emerged from the medical community with 'proximal' referring to short-term consequences and 'distal' to long-term consequences
  - **INTERIM** or **INTERMEDIATE** outcomes – those achieved on the journey to full resettlement e.g. improved family relationships, reduced use of substances, engagement in activities/ETE, maintaining stable accommodation.
- **IMPACTS** – Longer-term changes which are a result of the intervention
- **INDICATOR** – A measurable outcome i.e. how long a tenancy has been maintained
- **STAKEHOLDER** - Any group or individual who can affect or is affected by the intentions or achievement of the organization's objectives' (Freeman 1984).

**NOTE: The terms 'impact' and 'outcome' are often used interchangeably. Both refer to the consequences or after-effects of the inputs, however outcomes are normally seen to be the more immediate consequences whilst impact has a longer-term dimension.**

## Abbreviations

- **BYC** Beyond Youth Custody
- **CQC** Care Quality Commission
- **CRC** Community Rehabilitation Company
- **EBP** Evidence-based practice
- **FTE** First time entrants
- **HMIP** Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Prisons
- **IOMI** Intermediate Offender Measurement Instrument
- **MoJ** Ministry of Justice
- **NAYJ** National Association of Youth Justice
- **NOMS** National Offender Management Service
- **OBPM** Outcomes-based performance management
- **PYD** Positive youth development
- **RTC** Randomised Control Trial
- **ToC** Theory of Change

## Introduction

Beyond Youth Custody (BYC) has published a number of research reports and practitioner's guides that draw upon the best evidence available to describe, support and encourage good practice in resettlement services for young people in England and Wales. A number of consistent messages derived from this work over the last three years led to the following description of what constitutes 'effective' resettlement for young people:

**Effective resettlement is a process that enables a shift in a young person's identity, moving them away from crime towards a positive future. (p.8)**

In order to achieve this, three underpinning and widely accepted principles were identified as essential in BYC's 'Effective resettlement of young people' report (Goodfellow et al, 2015):

1. The coordination of services
2. Engaging the young person for positive change
3. Continuous service focussed on resettlement

As BYC enters its final phase it is important to capture how organisations provide 'effective' resettlement services and, more importantly, describe their success. It is hoped that by exploring these issues a clearer picture will emerge which will support, extend and share good practice, generate practice-based evidence of impact, and help the development of commissioning frameworks; all of which, it is hoped, will support the young person's shift in their identity and away from crime.

This report aims to explore the different ways 'effectiveness' is measured among stakeholders involved in the resettlement of young people. Specifically, how these 'indicators' or 'outcomes' shape the priorities for resettlement services and provide evidence of the value and impact of the work that they undertake for commissioners and policy makers, as well as society more generally.

It is drawn from the combined knowledge of the BYC team, who have spent many years researching and writing about issues associated with effective outcomes generated by interventions with offenders. Additionally, to augment our understanding and focus more specifically upon the issues of measuring effectiveness, a number of fact-finding activities were undertaken in the autumn of 2015.

These activities were:

1. A brief literature review that considers the various ways in which social impact is being measured across social policy more widely and, in particular, the youth justice sector's response to evidencing their success in service delivery.
2. A workshop with practitioners at the National Association of Youth Justice (NAYJ) conference (October 2015), co-facilitated with two young men from Safe Hands, Liverpool which considered a) the difficulties in measuring success, b) what success looks like/what factors lead to successful resettlement.
3. An enquiry via Youth in Focus (YiF)\* projects to explore the different ways successful resettlement is described and reported.

\*Youth in Focus (YiF) is a Big Lottery Funded programme, which aims to support vulnerable young people through changes in their lives. Alongside BYC, YiF funded 15 service delivery projects across the country to work with young people leaving custody.

## What counts as evidence of effectiveness?

The government's emphasis on 'best evidence' of 'what works' has become embedded across various professions in recent years, and the criminal justice system is no exception. The 'evidence-based' movement gathered significant momentum in the healthcare profession in the early 1990s; as a discipline of medicine, evidence-based practice (EBP) was coined as a term by a group at McMaster University in Canada in 1992 and quickly acquired international recognition, becoming the new medical orthodoxy (McIntosh 2010). However, the origins of the 'what works' paradigm in social policy is more generally traced back to the work of Donald Campbell in the 1960s and 1970s and in particular his seminal paper, *The Social Scientist as Methodological Servant of The Experimenting Society* (1973).

The predominant view within the 'what works' paradigm is that the best quality evidence of effectiveness is generated by undertaking randomised controlled trials (RCTs), which are regarded as being the 'gold standard' not only for medical research, but for social research as well. Indeed, the so-called Maryland Scale, usually used in meta-analyses and systematic research reviews, ranks evaluation research studies by the extent to which they approximate a full RCT. However, while RCTs do have the advantage of being able to demonstrate that particular changes are not simply due to chance, they have also been criticised for not giving sufficient attention to complex contextual factors, and there is a continuing debate about whether a prioritisation of RCTs really can advance understanding of complicated social and individual change (McIntosh 2010).

Cartwright (2007: 4), for example, concludes:

**"... to draw causal inferences about a target population, which method is best depends case-by-case on what background knowledge we have or come to obtain. There is no gold standard."**

Although gaining momentum, the use of RCTs in social research is highly problematic; particularly as debates about what constitutes good quality evidence about impacts and effectiveness are on-going. The attraction of randomisation is that it appears to be a simple method of deducing replicable conclusions but, for Goldstein (2002), it leads to erroneous conclusions that do not take the underlying complexity of modelling into account.

In the youth justice system as a whole, there is clear direction on what counts as success and how this evidence can be captured. Section 37 of *The Crime and Disorder Act (1998)* made clear that the statutory aim of the youth justice system is to prevent offending (and reoffending) by children and young people. Additionally, the system is judged upon the priorities of (i) reducing first time entrants (FTEs) into the system, established in 2008 and (ii) reducing the number of children in custody, introduced in 2010. Both (i) and (ii) have achieved a considerable level of success but, while offending has reduced, reoffending rates remain disappointing.

While the ever-reducing number of both first time entrants and children and young people in custody is warmly welcomed across the sector, a reduction in reoffending rates remains a tougher nut to crack. Ministry of Justice (MoJ) statistics confirm that, in the year ending 2013, 37.4% of children who received a substantive disposal reoffended within 12 months, an increase from 33.4% in 2002.<sup>1</sup>

Most significantly, more than two-thirds of children reoffend within 12 months of release from secure institutions. Reoffending rates are also substantially higher amongst young adults in the criminal justice system than older adult offenders (Bateman and Hazel, 2013). This view is supported by the latest figures below (Bateman 2015).

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<sup>1</sup> Ministry of Justice (2015) National Analysis of Reoffending Data, for those aged 10-17 Youth Justice Board

**Table 1:**  
**Proven rates of reoffending by type of disposal - 12 months ending September 2008 and 2013**

Disposal	Percentage reoffending within 12 months	
	Year to Sept 2008	Year to Sept 2013
Pre-court disposal	24.8%	28.3%
First tier sentence	45.5%	44%
Community sentence/YRO	65.9%	64.5%
Custody	72.8%	66.5%
All	32.9%	37.4%

The two targets – reducing FTEs and falling rates of recidivism – are accordingly in tension. The more successful an individual Youth Offending Team (YOT) is in reducing FTEs, the more difficult it will be for that service to demonstrate falling rates of recidivism, and vice versa. According to Bateman (2015), it is almost certainly this tension that accounts for the slight rise in the overall rate of youth reoffending.

Recidivism is an easy and cost-effective measure which resonates with those members of the public and policy makers concerned with crime rates. Although such approaches frequently reflect a deficit-based model, the value of including measures of reoffending as an outcome remains pertinent when trying to understand more about the effectiveness of interventions made. It may also offer an insight into whether those who leave custody go on to lead crime free lives, but it does not investigate whether these lives are indeed productive or demonstrate pro-social behaviours (Peters and Myrick, 2011; McNiell et al, 2012).

Data on recidivism is only collected over a one-year period. This is problematic in itself, as BYC shows that relationships of trust, and lengthy and consistent engagement, are often required to produce and prove successful outcomes, particularly with young people that have multiple needs. However, short-term interventions can be extremely effective and should not be excluded. This data also cannot account for the many young people transitioning into adulthood, moving on with their lives and thereby not remaining in regular contact with projects. Fortunately, recognition of the value of a longer-term perspective when considering the effectiveness of resettlement services appears to be emerging - for example, see NOMS Commissioning Intentions from 2014.<sup>2</sup>

Professionals in the youth justice system consider the binary focus on short-term reoffending rates to be an unhelpful indicator. Indeed, to view reoffending measures as just one aspect of far more complex lives which need to be supported is deemed more helpful. For specific examples of this complexity, see BYC's report 'Resettlement work with young people: Using individual case studies to assess costs and benefits'. Additionally, the report by Clinks (2013) 'What does good rehabilitation look like?' cited the following example, extracted from the MoJ's Offender Management Community Cohort Study (OMCCS) to illustrate the 'highly complex and daunting set of disadvantages' and 'direct and indirect discrimination':

**'Sixty-five to seventy percent of young people in youth custody have experienced a traumatic brain injury; 51% have come from unsuitable accommodation; 43-57% have dyslexia; 44% of young women and 30% of young men have been in care at some point; 34% are from a Black, Asian or minority ethnic (BAME) group; 23-32% have a learning disability.'**

(Frazer et al, 2013: 4)

<sup>2</sup> [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/280922/commissioning-intentions-2014.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/280922/commissioning-intentions-2014.pdf)

For many working within the system, there is increasing pressure to focus energy on meeting the targets mentioned on page 3; the compelling evidence of the negative consequences of a young person's contact with the criminal justice system means that for many practitioners there will be an inclination to prioritise the FTE measure over recidivism.

Consequently, reoffending cannot accordingly be considered a reliable indicator of YOT performance. Indeed, it has been suggested that due to the more entrenched patterns of offending amongst those in custody now compared to their counterparts prior to 2008, a rise in reoffending rates is an inevitable outcome (Bateman 2015).

Also, such a focus on reoffending does not allow for the 'zig-zag' process of desistance. Increasingly desistance theorists talk of a 'primary' and 'secondary' desistance. 'Primary' being where there is a gap in reoffending and 'secondary' being more akin to a shift in identity and fuller integration back into society. For secondary desistance to be achieved, a highly individualised response is required and a number of factors need to be present, which include:

- An acknowledgement of the individual's maturation as opposed to chronological age
- Positive supportive relationships
- Development of a pro-social identity
- Maintenance of hope and motivation
- Strength-based approaches – both personal and social capital
- Celebration and recognition of positive change

(McNiell et al, 2012)

The Youth Justice Board's (YJB) Reducing Reoffending Programme<sup>3</sup> is now in its third year. It was established to:

1. Help drive and support YOT efforts to reduce local reoffending rates
2. Develop a better understanding of the nature of reoffending and the drivers behind it

Seventy-five YOT partnerships now use the YJB toolkit. Preliminary findings suggest that the drivers behind progress in reoffending performance hinge on the following characteristics:

- Highly motivated and engaged staff groups who are aware of local reoffending performance data and accept that the prevention of offending and reoffending is the key business of the YOT
- The deployment of high quality assessment, planning and intervention processes. In particular, the quality of the relationship between practitioner and young person is deemed crucial, as well as the programmes of intervention being individualised and culturally and demographically sensitive
- The existence of wider partnership support and the availability of resources which enable access to a range of services, rather than maintaining YOT standalone projects e.g. parenting support. Further integration with children's services also allows for the opportunity to offer 'step-down' support to those who had come to the end of their formal YOT supervision but remained likely to reoffend
- Sufficient resources to meet minimum standards, as caseloads had reduced substantially at a faster rate than the reduction in funding. This meant that practitioners had the opportunity to address an individual's complex need. This was coupled with sophisticated information systems in the higher performing YOTs which enabled an identification of trends and the timely deployment of resources to address need

MOJ/YJB (2015)

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3 [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/479708/Reoffending\\_Furthering\\_Our\\_Understanding.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/479708/Reoffending_Furthering_Our_Understanding.pdf)

These characteristics are reflective of the underpinning principles for effective resettlement, identified by BYC at the start of this report. As BYC have discovered, in order to ensure resettlement is 'successful', a number of conditions need to be in place which characterise and facilitate the smooth transition from custody to the community. At an operational level these include:

1. Joint sentence planning that involves both custodial staff as well as supervisory staff in the community. This should start at the point of sentencing
2. The establishment, while in custody, of consistent and trusting relationships between the young person and the professionals tasked to support him/her, both in custody and upon release
3. The appropriate involvement of the young person's family/support network in the sentence plan
4. A 'seamless' transition from custody involving appropriate information sharing between services, through the gate support and access to services upon immediate release, in order to avoid some of the more stressful aspects of the transition process

There are other strategic obstacles which conspire against these operational conditions being in place – for example, the placing of young people at significant distance from the community to which they will return, and RoTL not being used sufficiently to assist in the preparation for the young person's release, amongst others.

These challenges are also reflected in the 'Joint thematic inspection of resettlement services to children by Youth Offending Teams and partner agencies', conducted by HMIP (Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Prisons), CQC (Care Quality Commission) and Ofsted, (March 2015) which offers a gloomy picture of the current state of resettlement for young people. It does, however, provide useful insights, particularly on the operational and strategic barriers faced by resettlement providers. The report identifies the need for greater focus on the specific needs and outcomes of children leaving custody and more scrutiny of data and impact evaluation. It concludes with the following statement:

**"It is disappointing that after a decade of initiatives, resettlement work shows little improvement in outcomes for many children despite the contributory factors being well known."**

(2015:36)

## Measuring service effectiveness

How do resettlement services measure their effectiveness? Is it possible to measure a 'shift in identity' and, if so, how do services describe their success? For many, it appears that there is a disconnect between the outcomes which are important to a range of stakeholders and what is actually measured. While most resettlement organisations agree that they contribute to a reduction in reoffending, it is often not the primary measure of success and stakeholders will have differing priorities.

**"There are so many different indicators of success and different ways of measuring success."**

Participant at NAYJ workshop 2015

The difficulty for youth justice serving agencies has been defining and measuring such success in ways that speak to the young person as well as commissioners, policy makers and the wider public, and that are also cognisant of both nationally imposed targets and their possible tensions with more locally determined or competing priorities.

For many commissioners, service effectiveness is often seen as success across a number of hard or measurable indicators, for example in securing employment or maintaining a tenancy. Further exploration into why someone now has the skills and motivation to sustain the tenancy – as a result of the reduction in negative factors which have previously created chaotic lifestyles (for example, drug use) – is rarely recorded.

For families, 'success' is often measured by young person staying out of trouble and not returning to custody. Young people themselves will of course have their own ideas, although getting them heard can sometimes prove challenging. This was a view echoed by the practitioners at the NAYJ workshop:

**"People sometimes forget there's a young person in the middle – no one's interested in our young people."**

**"What do young people say/want/need – are they involved in defining their success?"**

(July 2015)

When asked how they would describe successful resettlement, practitioners responded:

**"Building self-esteem and inner belief/ self-reflection."**

**"Achieve goals (whatever they may be, different for each individual)."**

**"Engagement is success – sometimes a young person just 'showing up' can be seen as success."**

**"Securing suitable accommodation, better mental health, ETE."**

All of the above are legitimate and reflect the YJB pathways (YJB October 2014) although they also indicate the lack of consensus in terms of prioritising interventions in order to achieve 'effectiveness'. The key question this raises is, does this lack of consensus matter moving forward?

## Why prove effectiveness?

There are multiple reasons why identifying effectiveness in resettlement practice makes sense. In the current economic climate, reductions in the reliance on the public purse are gathering pace, and interventions which can reduce the harmful impacts of crime, both socially and economically, need to be prioritised. Where effectiveness has been proven locally there can also be extremely positive impacts on sentencing decisions which can only further benefit those young people within the system.

In a survey by the National Audit Office in 2010, three-quarters of YOT managers said that, when identifying what works in reducing reoffending rates amongst young people, evidence is thin on the ground. Additionally, according to New Philanthropy Capital (2011), charities often rely on anecdotal evidence when making claims about their success rather than more robust measures of impact. After mapping expenditure across children's services in more than 20 local authorities across the UK in 2013, the Dartington Social Research Unit estimates that typically less than 1% of a total budget – including education – is spent on services that are underpinned by robust evidence of impact.

Increasingly, social impact measures are being required by commissioners in order to evidence value for their money. Practitioners are also keen to evaluate their interventions in order to further understand the changes they want to make, and to improve the initiative by re-examining methods and activities used. There are a number of reasons why this is helpful:

1. Such evidence will add to the body of knowledge in the particular field, promote good practice and strengthen the evidence base
2. Projects are more likely to succeed if they use existing evidence of creating change and are clear about the outcomes they are trying to achieve
3. Demonstrating impact to commissioners is likely to increase both the chances of investment and their understanding of both proximal and distal outcomes

Organisations that are unable to provide evidence of their impact are increasingly vulnerable in the current climate where payment by results is becoming embedded. For smaller organisations, resourcing more rigorous ways to capture evidence of impact rather than gathering case studies remains challenging.

Within The Code of Good Impact Practice<sup>4</sup> produced by the Inspiring Impact consortium in 2014, a learning cycle of 'impact practice' is identified which involves the following five steps:

1. Identify expected outcomes, develop a Theory of Change and select priority outcomes
2. Design the intervention based upon evidence of what works
3. Target measurement to focus on priority outcomes
4. Choose an evaluation methodology which is practical, proportionate and meets an achievable standard of evidence
5. Select tools and data which support the measurement of this data

Borrowed language from across different fields has been imported and is now associated with the identification of effectiveness in social intervention. For example, within philanthropy, the concepts of social return on investment (SROI), modelling, and Theory of Change have been applied to the sector without theoretical or practical knowledge to assist in their application (Proscio, 2000). Accompanying the drive for evidence-based policy and practice within criminal justice has been an increase in Payment by Results (PBR), social impact bonds and evidence- or outcomes-based funding/commissioning.

## Assessing effectiveness – key approaches

The government's contribution to the generation of evidence-based policy in public services has been via the establishment of seven independent What Works Centres. Together these centres cover policy areas which receive public spending of more than £200 billion. What Works Centres enable policy makers, commissioners and practitioners to make evidence-based decisions and to provide cost-efficient, useful services. The different centres provide a range of resources, briefings and toolkits for use in particular sectors. The What Works Centre for crime reduction is run by the College of Policing and can be found at <http://whatworks.college.police.uk>.

### Evaluation

Traditionally, evaluation in applied fields is most effective where the process is interactive, with professionals and other stakeholders responding to the emerging findings as the intervention unfolds. Indeed, it has been argued that this form of evaluation holds the key to the development of effective practice. This approach, described by Pawson & Tilley (1994) as Realistic Evaluation, is rooted in Participatory Action Research, pioneered by Kurt Lewin in the 1940s and 1950s, which he describes as 'a system of progressive problem-solving'. In his seminal paper *Action Research and Minority Problems* (1946) Lewin described the process as:

**“...research on the conditions and effects of various forms of social action that uses a spiral of steps, each of which is composed of a circle of planning, action, and fact-finding about the results of the action.”**

Utilising Lewin's circle of planning, action, and fact-finding enables those responsible for the intervention to identify the key mechanisms that sustain the problems being addressed. As Pawson and Tilley (1997) suggest, by identifying and analysing these mechanisms, and the contextual variables which shape their impact, it is possible to devise alternative mechanisms designed to disable or circumvent the circumstances responsible for the original problem(s).

According to 'Effective Intervention in Gang Affected Neighbourhoods' (Pitts et al, 2015), this model of research has several advantages over more conventional forms:

1. It promotes systematic organisational feedback, essential to effective project development
2. It promotes dialogue within and between organisations and with the intended beneficiaries of an initiative or operation

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<sup>4</sup> <http://inspiringimpact.org/listing/the-code-of-good-impact-practice/>

3. It acts as a spur to reflexivity within and between organisations
4. It helps to build capacity within and between organisations and their stakeholders
5. It assists in developing the skills and knowledge of the workforce and other stakeholders
6. It enables a comparison of the effects of similar interventions in different contexts, establishing what works, for whom, in what circumstances and why?

The main objective of this process is to enable the evaluators, in collaboration with the other stakeholders, to build, refine and operationalise a Theory of Change because, as Lewin observed, “There is nothing as practical as a good theory”. Realistic Evaluation is a process of theory testing and theory (re-) building. It proceeds from the assumption that every social initiative is a theory waiting to be tested. It endeavours to make the implicit theories informing programme development explicit, by developing clear hypotheses about how, and for whom, programs might ‘work’. The implementation of the program, and the evaluation of it, then tests those hypotheses. In order to do this it interrogates the three key components of a social programme Context (C), Mechanism (M) and Outcome (O).

### **Theory of Change**

Theory of Change (ToC) or ‘logic model’ is an aspect of programme theory – a long-standing area of evaluation thought – developed from 1960s onwards. It is now regularly mandated as a requirement of funding applications for funders like the Big Lottery and the Cabinet Office. Programme theory approaches offer a more explicit focus on the theoretical underpinnings of programmes, clearer articulation of how programme planners view the linkages between inputs and outcomes, and how programmes are intended to work, to improve evaluations and programme performance (Funnell and Rogers 2011).

**‘People are seeing theory of change as new, but it is just about good programme design, good adaptive management and understanding where you fit into the grander scheme of things.’**

Lydia Gaskell, WWF-UK

A ToC defines all building blocks required to bring about a given long-term goal. This set of connected building blocks – interchangeably referred to as outcomes, results, accomplishments, or preconditions is depicted on a map known as a pathway of change/change framework, which is a graphic representation of the change process. Each outcome in the pathway of change is tied to an intervention, revealing the often complex web of activity that is required to bring about change. Like any good planning and evaluation method for social change, it requires participants to be clear on long-term goals, identify measurable indicators of success, and formulate actions to achieve goals (Stuart et al 2009).

A more nuanced learning-based definition is offered by Comic Relief:

Theory of Change is an ongoing process of reflection to explore change and how it happens - and what that means for the part we play in a particular context, sector and/or group of people.

- It locates a programme or project within a wider analysis of how change comes about
- It draws on external learning about development
- It articulates our understanding of change - but also challenges us to explore it further
- It acknowledges the complexity of change: the wider systems and actors that influence it
- It is often presented in diagrammatic form with an accompanying narrative summary.

(James 2011:2)

Developing a ToC allows for the articulation of how an intervention will deliver impact. ToC requires practitioners to map what they want to achieve, and what they have got currently. Each service or intervention is mapped into the gap in between to create the theory that underpins the changes that

they seek to make. ToC is being used widely as an explanation of the causal links that tie programme inputs to programme outputs.

**“It helps circumnavigate the philosophical debates on methodology, especially in evaluation research, by recognising that the most important judges of validity are the stakeholders who are going to use the results.”**

(Nichols & Crow 2004).

A ToC would not be complete without an articulation of the assumptions that stakeholders use to explain the change process represented by the change framework. Assumptions explain both the connections between early proximal and long-term distal outcomes and the expectations about how and why proposed interventions will bring them about. Often, assumptions are supported by research, strengthening the case to be made about the plausibility of theory and the likelihood that stated goals will be accomplished. Rick Davies defines a ToC simply as, ‘the description of a sequence of events that is expected to lead to a particular desired outcome’.<sup>5</sup>

Practitioners approach ToC thinking from different starting points and for different purposes throughout the project cycle; some from a technical perspective as a tool and methodology to map out the logical sequence of an initiative, from activities through to the changes it seeks to make. Others see it as a deeper reflective process – a mapping and a dialogue-based analysis of values, worldviews and philosophies of change that make more explicit the underlying assumptions of how and why change might happen as an outcome of a particular intervention.<sup>6</sup>

Inevitably there is an emerging critique of the growing interest in and demand for ToC. The first criticism is that it is often poorly defined, meaning that it is hard to ascertain its quality. In addition, the term ‘theory’ is contentious. Other terms like ‘change pathway’ or ‘practice map’ may resonate better. One strength of the tool is its ability to capture complexity, but this may also be a weakness, as large elaborate examples can be discouraging for newcomers to ToC, and can look like rigid plans, which are overwhelmingly complex (see Weiss,1997).

Additionally, and importantly for staff who are already under significant pressure in their day-to day work environment, mandating a ToC may also turn it from a participatory practice tool with immense potential into an unwelcome bureaucratic imposition (Mayne, 2008, Hughes & Traynor, 2000). Many may be working from their own ‘implicit’ ToC based upon years of experience and an understanding of the difference their intervention will achieve. Such practitioners also have the ability to identify the empirical basis upon which their intervention is designed, and subsequently articulate it in funding applications (Reusga 2011). In his article ‘Philanthropy’s Albatross: Debunking Theories of Change’, Reusga asserts the following:

**“Requiring grantees to produce explicit theories of change – beyond what they usually include in their grant proposals – does little to improve the art or science of grant-making. Highly elaborated theories of change are generally urged upon grantees by well-meaning people who have a limited understanding of how they function in the social sciences. Because theories of change are generally shrouded in the impenetrable verbiage of philanthropy, it’s also not surprising that most of us have little inkling of their theoretical and practical limits.”**

(2011: 3)

As a result, practitioners need to consider both the strengths and limitations of their own ToCs – and the processes used to generate them. Work undertaken by providers to articulate ToCs can be of great value to organisations and staff teams and, as noted above, they are also often required by key funders. However, they should probably not be regarded as end products which should somehow be left alone once established. Causal processes can be enormously complicated, and there are therefore good reasons for regarding ToCs themselves as organic and subject to change or revision.

<sup>5</sup> Rick Davies, April 2012: Blog post on the criteria for assessing the evaluability of a theory of change <http://mandanews.blogspot.co.uk/2012/04/criteria-for-assessing-evaluability-of.html>

<sup>6</sup> A range of tools are available to help professionals develop a theory of change at <https://www.youthimpact.uk/resources-hub/impact-journey/developing-theory-change>

## Outcomes Frameworks

Outcomes-based performance management (OBPM) has come to dominate thinking across social policy in the last decade (Perrin 2006), the most recent incarnation being payment by results (PBR). It presupposes that any intervention can be measured for its impact in a recipient's life by using a range of outcomes against which to make such an assessment. Unsurprisingly, for many commissioners, the dominance of using reoffending rates and other deficit-orientated indicators or outcomes is that they are easier to measure and there is greater consensus about what young people should not do rather than what they should. As mentioned earlier, theories of change allow for an articulation of expected outcomes which takes place by engaging with staff, beneficiaries of the service, and other stakeholders to identify a range of expected outcomes over a longer timeframe.

A preferred lens through which to consider what impact services have is by embracing positive youth outcomes which refer to indicators of protective factors, skills or strengths. It is based upon the positive youth development (PYD) philosophy and is underpinned by the belief that even those young people with the most complex needs can achieve such development if a coordinated approach, which places the young person at the centre, is apparent.

PYD is a comprehensive approach to thinking about young people's needs as they make their transition to adulthood (Butts et al 2010). This approach is not new – some of it can be traced back to the work of 19th century juvenile court advocates in the US, such as Jane Addams. However, it is more frequently associated with the work of Kenneth Polk who developed a set of 'rules' for creating programmes for young people (Polk & Kobrin, 1972). Butts et al (2010) adopted this approach in their creation of a Positive Youth Justice framework in the US. Elements of these rules are apparent across a range of settings with young people – it is by no means limited to criminal justice environments. This approach has been further refined within youth justice in the UK through the 'Positive Youth Justice; children first, offenders second' framework developed by Haines & Case (2015).

Adopting a PYD approach could begin the useful conversation about the expectations we have of young people and what support needs to be in place from families, schools and communities to achieve them (Schulman & Davies, 2007). With such an outcomes framework in place, organisations can begin to reclaim their practice and increase consistency, internally and, more importantly, externally between organisations. Having a coordinated set of outcomes and language would allow for a more nuanced approach from commissioners and a clearer idea of who does what, why and what evidence is used to prove success.

This will be of particular interest to smaller organisations that need to ensure a proportionate approach to 'impact practice'. This would require the selection of tools and data that support the measurement of the outcomes agreed rather than looking for opportunities to monitor all the things that it is feasible to measure. The result should be a more efficient way to capture effectiveness and a more powerful story of impact.

Inevitably, different projects address different elements in the pathway towards desistance and will therefore deliver different intermediate or proximal outcomes. Proximal outcomes are varied. There are soft outcomes such as improving self-esteem, while hard outcomes, for example gaining employment, will be more tangible. According to a report commissioned by the Big Lottery (2013) to review the effectiveness of funded projects in reducing recidivism in Scotland, even when projects are successful in achieving intermediate outcomes, the relationship between the intermediate outcomes and desistance is not always clear and not always measurable. However, in order to ensure a robust approach to outcome evaluation, a number of principles need to be addressed:

1. The process must take account of all stakeholders including the commissioners
2. It is a process determined at project outset and resourced appropriately.
3. It starts when the project starts and is not just left until the end of the process
4. Uses a credible evaluation team who are skilled in collecting data in multiple formats

5. Employs a credible design
6. Provides a thorough account by using a team to ensure appropriate objectivity and provide 'believability' (Scriven 1991, 1994)
7. Uses reporting as a strategy and tool for on-going learning rather than an end product

There are a number of outcomes frameworks already in use with young people<sup>7</sup>, and also some tools which attempt to capture a more quantitative measure of progress – for example, Goodman et al's Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire for adolescents and NPC's Wellbeing Measure (2011). A first assessment is used to provide a baseline measure which is repeated at timely intervals during the intervention.

The danger for some is that standardised outcome measures can often focus on deficits and can subsequently pathologise difficulties experienced rather than focussing on the more positive outcomes identified earlier (Smith 1994). They have also been accused of not being accessible to young people that may have literacy or learning difficulties, and often employ normative measures. The term 'normative assessment' refers to the process of comparing one test-taker to his or her peers.

A better known tool is the Outcomes Star which captures the more subjective indicators of progress and is based upon a 'cycle of change' approach. It identifies five key stages which move from 'being stuck', 'accepting help', 'believing', 'learning to reach potential' and finally, 'self-reliance'. It has been reinvented by a range of providers and more than 20 versions now exist.<sup>8</sup> The tool has a wide range of enthusiastic supporters in the field because, for some young people, it can provide a useful framework for prioritising and problem-solving around key areas of concern. One difficulty in using Outcome Star data to assess impact is that the scores generated by the tool are arrived at within a trust relationship which evolves over time, and changes in scores can therefore mean either that real change has taken place in relation to key areas of need, or that a project participant has reached a point where they are ready to disclose particular issues to a practitioner. It is this feature of the Outcome Star which makes it more difficult to understand changes in scores over time, than it is for standard psychometric measures, for example.

Another tool which is used increasingly in the field for capturing individual change over time in relation to key dimensions of personal/emotional wellbeing is IOMI (the Intermediate Outcomes Measurement Instrument). It has the advantage of being accessible and quick to administer, but also of being designed to generate data which can be used for research purposes and for assessing progress in a standardised manner. IOMI is used for measuring 'distance travelled' in relation to key dimensions including resilience, wellbeing, agency/self-efficacy, impulsivity/problem-solving, motivation to change, hope, and interpersonal trust. Design of the tool was carefully anchored in feedback from a national consultation with several hundred service providers, and has been tested for reliability and validity (although further testing is also planned or underway).<sup>9</sup>

### The cost-benefit approach

For many, it will also be of particular importance to try and establish the costs and benefits associated with resettlement work, given the substantial costs involved in responding to offending. The following national figures provide a shocking picture of the costs associated with the youth justice system.

- **£3,620:** estimated average cost of a first time entrant (under 18) to the criminal justice system in the first year following the offence
- **£22,995:** estimated average cost of a first time entrant (under 18) to the criminal justice system, nine years following the offence

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/outcomes-frameworks-a-guide-for-providers-and-commissioners-of-youth-services>

<sup>8</sup> [www.outcomesstar.org.uk](http://www.outcomesstar.org.uk)

<sup>9</sup> Liddle, M., with Disley, E., Maguire, M., Meek, R. and Renshaw, J (forthcoming, 2016) Intermediate Outcomes Measurement Instrument (IOMI) toolkit – Guidance Notes. Ministry of Justice Analytical Series. London: National Offender Management Service.

- **£113,000,000:** estimated savings if one in 10 young offenders were diverted toward effective support
- **£100,000:** the average cost of a place in youth custody. In 2012/13 YOIs cost around £65,000 a place per annum, STCs cost £178,000 a place per annum and SCHs £212,000 a place per annum

There is an obvious economic imperative that makes a strong case for getting resettlement right and proving success. The cost benefit argument can be used to ensure appropriate levels of resource are available to safeguard good quality resettlement services. Indeed the corollary, getting resettlement wrong, can prove to be extremely expensive to society at large. Projects can use financial information to create 'cost-avoidance' calculations to demonstrate cost effectiveness. A cost avoidance tool for youth diversion developed by the Centre for Justice Innovations provides a useful framework.<sup>10</sup> There are a number of toolkits and software packages available to the criminal justice system that allow for services to demonstrate how their work is saving the public purse money. (See Liddle, 2016): 'Using individual case studies to highlight the costs and benefits of effective resettlement'.

### Complimentary methods

Of course, the above examples are not the only methods of data capture or proof of effectiveness, and the use of a mixed approach can be complimentary. Other sources of evidence of effectiveness could include the following:

- **Offending history**  
As already referenced earlier, the MoJ publishes figures on rates of reoffending by conviction offence and disposal. These figures can help providers understand the likelihood of reoffending and enable a comparison to be drawn between expected and actual reoffending rates.
- **Case studies**  
Case studies are an essential adjunct to robust quantitative data and provide very powerful evidence especially where the young person's voice is central to the telling of the story. However, as qualitative data, they remain subjective and individualistic in tone and normally only capture success stories for public relations purposes. When projects are able to share those cases which did not work out as intended they provide an extremely valuable insight across the sector. Where case studies are drawn from a sample in order to be representative, they can be extremely effective. BYC's recent publication on assessing the costs and benefits of resettlement work considers a range of ways in which evidence from individual case studies can be used to estimate such costs and benefits over time.
- **Risk profile**  
Collecting data on risk factors can help providers target their interventions more towards those young people with complex needs. This can avoid the accusation of 'cherry picking' those young people that are easier to engage, a claim often made by critics of the payment by results approach (NPC 2011).

Put simply, for methods to be useful, they need to provide the information required, be seen as reliable and read through the lens of what can be done and known on that occasion.

## The challenges in measuring effectiveness

There are significant challenges in measuring the impact of interventions that contribute to a reduction in reoffending or indeed facilitate a shift in a young person's identity. The vast majority of funded projects operate at a relatively small scale. It is difficult to carry out robust quantitative evaluation of small projects to show their impact on reoffending as such approaches, (for example, RCTs), require large numbers of service users and non-users. Additionally, and as discussed earlier, the relevance and replicability of such methodologies within social research is contested.

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.justiceinnovation.org/youth-diversion/valuing-youth-diversion-toolkit>

The application of outcomes frameworks like those mentioned above are not, however, unproblematic. There are a number of issues that those making claims need to manage, these include:

1. How to define indicators from measuring outcomes that are meaningful but do not distort practice
2. Ensuring an accurate attribution of responsibility where outcomes are shared across providers
3. The distorting effects of performance management and how to account for unintended consequences which may not always be considered positive (Lowe 2013)

The actual impact of any intervention is determined by the context within which it is received and understood in terms of the complexity of the life it intends to change. This makes it extremely difficult to understand and measure that impact (Widdershiven & Sohl 1999). Such an understanding would require the use of both intensive quantitative and qualitative longitudinal research methods (Shalock & Bonham 2003). Instead, many use what Smith et al (1997) call 'tracer conditions' or proxy measures which are simpler and cheaper to collect. Whilst such an approach gathers data which can be used for comparative purposes over time, care needs to be taken to ensure that they do not remove any understanding within context.

Secondly, it raised the question of how we can attribute an impact to a particular intervention. For any information on outcomes to be robust, it must be able to evidence that the intervention caused the outcome (Shalock & Bonham 2003). No service could possibly claim to have complete control over whether or not such an outcome was achieved. The response to such criticism has been to develop new methodologies, hence ToC or 'logic models' which visually map causal chains of impact. Outcomes are not the result of a linear process; to suggest so is to over-simplify an individual's journey.

Additionally, for many, success is now judged upon the attainment of outcomes. As a result, if managers accept that there is a lot about outcomes that they cannot control, they become adept at manipulating data by managing things they can control. These issues are frequently described as technical challenges in methods of data collection that can be overcome (Perrin 1998). For example, particularly in the PBR world, there are accusations of 'cherry picking' those who are easier to help. Consequently, according to Lowe (2013), managers will adapt their behaviour to meet the newly constructed targets. Additionally, the impact of OBPM on frontline staff has frequently been cited as the reason for less time being spent developing relationships with young people, and more time collecting data in order to prove effectiveness (Keevers et al 2012). Consequently, OBPM often distorts the priorities and practices of professionals.

Data collection can also prove challenging as different organisations use or have access to different data sets, particularly statutory sources. Access to such information for third sector organisations remains variable. As a result, statistics often lack coordination, making any kind of comparison problematic. As mentioned earlier the need to track young people for a year post intervention in order to determine success in reoffending is therefore frequently unobtainable (NPC 2010).

## What has been learnt from these fact-finding activities?

1. There are, of course, variations in the way that key stakeholders define 'success' in resettlement work – it is highly subjective. However, there are a number of factors which can aid successful resettlement processes. According to practitioners at the NAYJ Conference in October 2015, the key elements in ensuring an effective resettlement process were identified as follows:
  - Planning and involving young people from the beginning
  - Considering resettlement as part of the start of a sentence – not just as part of the exit

- Securing access into the secure estate is key so that relationships can be formed with workers before release
  - More use of mentors/advocates within custody
  - Building relationships and keeping consistency
  - Professionals working together and sharing information – led by one professional who co-ordinates the process
  - Proactive participation by all responsible for sentence planning
  - Bespoke packages for each individual
  - Keeping young people closer to home
  - Use of mobility/ROTL and placements to aid transition
  - Proper resourcing and funding
  - Continuation of support post licence/order
2. The debates over whether there is a need for some kind of universal mechanism or framework to demonstrate effectiveness in resettlement work will continue. In order to maintain the diversity across the landscape of service providers, any kind of measure would need to retain a flexibility that can reflect the range of interventions on offer.
  3. Any measurement of impact in resettlement needs to remember that there are no 'human universals' that can be applied uncritically to all and therefore standardised indicators that match up to some notion of what success looks like for an individual do not always consider the complexities of the lives of those they are hoping to support. Social impact measurement also needs to consider issues of power, agency, choice and freedom and how these human needs play out amongst the users of services (Hudson 2015). In short, it is about demonstrating and measuring the right thing, not necessarily everything (Clinks 2010).
  4. Resettlement providers can use a positive youth development (PYD) outcomes framework to measure a 'shift in identity' although the opportunities for aggregation/scaling will be limited. How to measure what made a difference – questions of attribution – are tricky as it is not usually one thing, but a combination of factors. The timescales for measuring success are extremely variable, and there is recognition that longitudinal studies, though rare and costly, could help us to understand some of these complexities over the longer term
  5. Impact measurement should not be extracted from user feedback as these form the basis of 'client-centred' approaches to resettlement that retain elements of good practice highlighted previously – individualised, joined up etc. Such feedback is crucial evidence in furthering our understanding of impact and effectiveness; it helps us to understand and illuminate the causal chains we seek. However, these two aspects of programme evaluation may remain in tension and those responsible for service evaluation need to find appropriate ways to provide an evidential tapestry when reporting on impact.
  6. Commissioners have also begun to recognise that being able to demonstrate clear, attributable outcomes is not straightforward. While they may desire statistical evidence, qualitative information, case studies and stories all help to build up a picture of impact and, if the evidence is presented through the use of creative methods, can convey a powerful message. Proximal outcomes, such as sustaining a tenancy and maintaining engagement in employment or education, may be easier to demonstrate and can be strongly indicative that the distal outcome – a shift in identity – is being achieved. Of course resettlement services need to be able to evidence their impact, but without it diverting significant resources from frontline service delivery.
  7. There is an increasing interest in measuring impacts which are shared across a number of providers. Shared measurement aims to make it easier for organisations to learn from each other, save them the costs of developing their own tools, and build an evidence base of what works. It can therefore allow more consistency and comparability in impact measurement. In 2013, Inspiring Impact's Blueprint for shared measurement<sup>11</sup> identified key stages and success

11. [http://inspiringimpact.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/03/blueprint-for-shared-measurement2.pdf?Downloadchecked=true&utm\\_source=New%20Philanthropy%20Capital&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_campaign=6540192\\_shared%20measurement%20launch%202016&dm\\_i=UL9,3W6G0,L1W0F9,E1BPL,1](http://inspiringimpact.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/03/blueprint-for-shared-measurement2.pdf?Downloadchecked=true&utm_source=New%20Philanthropy%20Capital&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=6540192_shared%20measurement%20launch%202016&dm_i=UL9,3W6G0,L1W0F9,E1BPL,1)

factors in developing a shared measurement approach. The work they have undertaken explores the conditions necessary for shared measurement, as well as the key factors in developing, designing, scaling and sustaining approaches.

8. Commissioners are also looking for ways to co-commission services in order to increase their impact across issues or larger localities, thereby achieving even greater value for money. Opportunities for services to bid jointly with others, for example Police and Crime Commissioners, is deemed very attractive and adds greater value to an application especially if services can demonstrate that they will add value or secure match funding from other commissioners. After all, key priorities for local authorities, CRCs and police and crime commissioners include the prevention of offending as well reducing reoffending (Clinks 2010).
9. What if both commissioners and providers looked for the things that worked, and tried to replicate them, rather than a focus upon creating something different and new? This is the approach taken by Realising Ambition<sup>12</sup>, a £25 million Big Lottery Fund programme supporting the replication of evidence-based and promising services designed to improve outcomes for children and young people. For Raising Ambition, good replication allows for innovative practice as it is a sequential development of earlier work and gives providers opportunities to test initiatives that have worked elsewhere in new contexts. Skilful providers are able to identify what needs to stay the same, core services, and what needs to change to make it relevant within the new context. The five key ingredients of successful replication are:

**“A tightly defined service; effectively and faithfully delivered to those who can benefit from it; that provides confidence that outcomes have improved; that is cost-beneficial and scaleable; and that is delivered by an organisation that uses evidence to learn and adapt, as required.”**

Realising Ambition 2015

## Conclusion

So, does measuring effectiveness in resettlement work with young people matter? Yes, it does. There is a huge amount of energy and money being spent in assisting organisations to measure their impact through the generation of relevant evidence. However, we must remember that evidence is never an absolute truth, it is often contingent for a number of reasons and therefore the application of notions of evidence-based practice or evidence-based commissioning will never demonstrate the same outcomes without the necessary caveat of ‘context’. As a result, it would be appropriate to consider a more nuanced approach which encompasses the best of what we know and looks to develop our understanding of the interventions we make through ‘practice-based evidence’ rather than being wedded to other’s expectations of ‘evidence-based practice’.

Professionals across the youth justice sector want to demonstrate the difference their interventions make to the lives of the young people they work with. However, the response to the “What works?” question is not the only evidence we need to use. There are a number of other questions we need to address, as different stakeholders will have different interests in the answers, for example:

1. Is the need for the service established?
2. Is the project reaching those it was intended to support?
3. Are the young people fully engaged with the service and do they contribute to service development?
4. Is it being delivered to an appropriate quality or standard?
5. Is there existing evidence to support the view that by doing X, Y is likely to occur?
6. How much does it cost and is it offering value for money?

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<sup>12</sup> <http://www.catch-22.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/Realising-Ambition-Programme-Insight-The-Secret-Life-of-Innovation.pdf>

For Tim Hobbs (2015), evidence gives us 'confidence', and its starting point has to be ensuring that our data collection methods are fit for purpose. While it is recognised that the more robust such methods can be, the greater the potential for demonstrating impact regardless of method, its analysis should increase our confidence in what we are doing and why.

Measurement, whether in outcomes or other indicators, is never neutral; we have much to learn from service user feedback. The sector needs to address who is setting the standard and reclaim the agenda to ensure that the appropriate evidence is being taken into account, and that this is predicated on the young person being central to the debate. Such a discussion will inevitably consider what 'effective resettlement' looks like, and how that understanding can become embedded across policy reforms, contract specifications, supply chains, collaborative working relationships, evidence gathering, and, in individually tailored and holistic resettlement plans.

The ongoing Taylor Review of Youth Justice published an interim report on its preliminary findings on 9th February 2016.<sup>13</sup> It begins to signpost the future direction of what we currently recognise as the youth justice sector and the challenges in separating responsibilities for the sector between central and local government. In particular, it identifies a clear intention to further devolve processes and budgets to local areas in order to avoid some of the difficulties associated with the transition for young people from custody. In this way, the intention would be for local partners to design and commission services for vulnerable groups of young people, for example, mental health services, while also supporting a smoother transition from custody and aid the integration back into the community.

The direction of travel identified in the interim report suggests that the need to demonstrate the effectiveness of resettlement work will only gain momentum as new commissioning opportunities become available locally. This will require sufficient political will, resources, and operational protocols in place between relevant partners who are prepared to work together in new models of delivery. This should initiate a new, honest and critical debate about what professionals should be measuring and how they can evidence their impact in resettlement work with young people, which may also include the development of a range of tools that are fit for this purpose.

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13 [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/498736/youth-justice-review.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/498736/youth-justice-review.pdf)

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