

Beyond Youth Custody (BYC) is a national Big Lottery funded programme which exists to challenge, advance, and promote better thinking in policy and practice for the effective resettlement of young people. BYC brings together Nacro, the crime reduction charity, with three research and evaluation partners, ARCS (UK), and Salford and Bedfordshire universities.

Role of family in effective resettlement of young people

Effective and sustained resettlement requires that a young person shifts the way they think about themselves and behave. Beyond Youth Custody's research on [Effective Resettlement of Young People](#)¹ has shown that in order to help a young person address multiple barriers and move forward, resettlement support needs to guide this shift in identity (personal support) and enable it by preparing the home environment (structural support). Where appropriate, the family can be an important resource for both aspects of this support, which can continue beyond the withdrawal of formal support services.²

"Whilst I was in secure they [my family] were very supportive. They turned up to every one of my meeting and always came to visit me. They still made me feel like I was still a part of the family, which helped me get through the week till their next visit."

Despite recognition across the sector of the importance of familial contact and support, many barriers are cited both in families' ability to achieve this and agencies' ability to facilitate this work. On 24 May 2016, BYC held a policy roundtable bringing together key stakeholders, policy makers and practitioners to consider the findings of BYC's research into the role of families in effective resettlement of young people. The meeting – hosted and chaired by Tim Loughton MP – heard from the lead author of the research, Professor Neal Hazel, and leading contributions from Nacro's Sally Benton, Lord McNally and Lord Harris. The meeting also heard from a young man who had served a custodial sentence, who reflected on his experience of how family support, facilitated by the secure unit, helped him turn his life around. This briefing outlines key themes from discussions.

Despite children and families being one of the nine key pathways in reducing reoffending, it remains a neglected area of social policy and funding. Both the inward facing culture of prisons and the fact that offenders often serve their sentence far from home, means that local authorities have little incentive to invest in prison-based interventions when the population largely lives 'out of area'. Although there are some localised examples of good practice in supporting family relationships, initiatives remain patchy, sporadic, and insecurely funded.

Action to address this will need to include:

1. A coherent, integrated strategic approach

- Such complex issues require a cross-governmental response. Consideration should be given to a designated government department charged with overall responsibility for co-ordinating policy and provision for offender families.
- Offender management, family support, education, training and employment (ETE) and accommodation are all inter-related and need to be addressed in an integrated approach to resettlement across custody and the community.
- Custodial institutions and commissioners of resettlement services need to be persuaded of the need to prioritise family engagement in resettlement, but this is likely to require determined strategic effort and national guidance.

2. Investing upstream

- Sometimes the dysfunctional nature of a family can be a contributing factor to a young person's offending. Most young people who end up in custody are already known to services; they often have multiple and complex needs that have not been met throughout their lives.
- More work needs to be done with families in the community to ensure they receive support targeted at helping with parenting/bereavement/violence/domestic abuse and mental health. To be effective, this will require a co-ordinated approach and integration with the Troubled Families agenda.
- Early family intervention has the potential to substantially reduce public costs over the long-term, whilst beneficial intermediate outcomes are likely to include: improved family contact and relationships; reduced family isolation/stigma; improved parenting capacity and improved confidence and self-esteem for children. The need to monitor both intermediate and long-term resettlement outcomes requires multi-agency recording and sharing of information about offender families – but the scale of this work should not be allowed to delay action.
- A disproportionately high number of young people in custody have spent time in local authority care, many being moved through lots of placements. The state needs to take its role as a corporate parent seriously, taking on board recommendations from Lord Laming's Review to stop looked after children (LAC) being pulled into the criminal justice system.

3. Co-ordination and accountability of services

- During their lives, many young people in custody are likely to have been passed from agency to agency and have multiple professionals involved in their care. These agencies can have different and sometimes competing priorities and blurred lines of responsibility. A lack of communication between departments, prison and YOI establishments, or between individuals within an establishment, mean that information is falling through gaps, lives are being put at risk as a result¹ and plans for effective resettlement hampered.
- Effective resettlement requires sharing skills and resources across custodial institutions, local authorities, statutory, voluntary and third sector organisations. These partnerships are likely to result in the development of new local procedures and practices, which need to include a systematic assessment of family as a resource for a young person's resettlement needs, as well as what support family members would need in order to act as a useful resource.
- Good communication and the sharing of information relating to a young person can help secure staff and those working in resettlement help meet the needs of young people. Information sharing between Children's Services, Youth Offending Teams and different secure establishments should be routinely facilitated. 'Data protection' should not be used as a protection for agencies withholding and not sharing information.

¹ The Harris Review (2015) *Changing Prisons, Saving Lives Report of the Independent Review into Self-inflicted Deaths in Custody of 18-24 year olds*, United Kingdom: Her Majesty's Stationery Office
https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/439859/moj-harris-review-web-accessible.pdf

- Austerity budgeting poses substantial challenges for developing new ways of working which means that partners need to identify how mutually beneficial gains can be achieved by working together and pooling existing resources.

4. Culture change to focus on planning for resettlement

- If a young person receives a custodial sentence, planning for resettlement needs to begin at the point of sentence and families should be involved in this planning in a meaningful way. This requires a cultural shift from custodial institutions to ensure that all activities have consideration for a young person's resettlement and release. For example, Detention Training Order (DTO) planning meetings should focus on resettlement needs and planning, as much as behavioural management in custody. Temporary Release should be used as much as possible to help young people prepare for release, including education, training, family therapy etc.
- Custodial establishments and community based services need to take a 'whole family' approach, with the need to give families an integral role in resettlement made explicit in the commissioning framework.

5. An individual with responsibility for a young person's journey

- Building trusted and consistent relationships is crucial to enhance a young person's motivation to change, increasing their resilience and engagement in services. In order to facilitate this, there are calls for one individual to take personal ownership and have responsibility for a young person's journey through the system. This individual should be accountable and personally know the young person and their needs, such as a Custody Rehabilitation Officer², and could utilise the expertise and knowledge of other prison staff such as Family Engagement Workers.
- This individual can provide a link between the young person and their family, and also feed information from the family back into the prison. The role would go further than simply communicating and updating families (doing *to* families) but instead involving families in meaningful ways in resettlement planning (doing *with* families) thus allowing problems and solutions to be identified and addressed.

6. Families in need of support

- Because of the high numbers of LAC in custody, agencies can sometimes over-rely on the families of young people who have family support available to them, as they are focussing on meeting the additional needs of LAC. While the family can provide extremely valuable support, many families with a member in custody are often under-resourced and have complex needs of their own. This can affect their ability to support a young person in custody. We must acknowledge and repair the damage that imprisonment inflicts upon them and build up their resources and capacity to help their loved ones. In addition, family members living in the community may also be experiencing backlash or stigma and emotional or financial implications as a result of the young person's crime, making it harder for them to help and engage.

"Whilst I was doing so well in custody, there were still challenges for my family... they still lived in the community that I committed my offences, my dad's business took a big impact because of my crime."

- It is therefore crucial that support needs of wider families are identified and, where appropriate, interventions take a 'whole family' approach by 'supporting the supporter'. This

² Ibid

approach can equip and enable families with the guidance and skills they need to support their family member while in custody and after release (acknowledging the need for continued support). While the value of family as an effective agency in a young person's resettlement is significant, they should not be over relied upon, or expected to pick up the pieces and fill in for gaps in the system.

- When considering family interventions, it is important that 'strength assessments' are conducted in addition and alongside risk assessments. Sometimes the nature of being risk adverse can act as a barrier for involving families.

7. Enabling young people through innovation

- In addition to work with families, more needs to be done alongside young people to help them identify how to make new circles of friends and develop supportive networks.
- Encouraging young people to take up positive new hobbies and activities can be very important in them forging a new self-identity. Being more creative and looking at hobbies and leisure activities (anything from sports to arts) that give young people things to do in their spare time can be hugely beneficial. There are funding and resources available in these industries and more should be done to encourage partnership.

8. Prison regime

- Issues associated with the regime in the secure estate can act as a barrier to family engagement. For example, behavioural incentive schemes result in visits being taken away and reduced contact with family members. The daily regime in YOIs can restrict this further, for example when young people are locked in their cells for most of the day with no access to a phone.
- Changes under the Transforming Youth Custody regime, including protected hours for education, can mean that there is very little time for family interventions. For example only leaving Sunday morning available, which can be a very difficult time for families to travel to the institution.
- The impact of regimes and restrictions on criteria for approved/accredited interventions and how they are classified needs to be reviewed in relation to unintentional negative effect on resettlement.

9. Offences and victimisation within the family

- When seeking to engage families in plans for release, it is important that workers are aware of, and understand potential risk dynamics within the family. For example, where there has been abuse within the family, or domestic abuse between family members. This could include direct risks such as child sexual abuse, violence and indirect risk such as abusive relationships and patterns of controlling behaviour between family members.
- Practitioners need to be able to identify such dynamics and carry out risk assessments and safeguarding measures to ensure that it is safe and appropriate to involve certain family members and supporters.

10. Future landscape – challenges and opportunities

- There have recently been many positive statements made in relation to prison reform, prison education and the interim findings from the departmental review of youth justice.
- What remains unclear, however, is how such reforms and aspirations will be achieved within the context of realities and problems facing the secure estate and youth offending teams/probation services in the community. Reforms should be based on evidence about what works. It will also be important that progress, expertise and best practice are not lost and are, in fact, built upon (i.e. continuing the roll out of AssetPlus training for YOT staff).

- It is likely that justice budgets will, in some form, be devolved in the future. This will make localities accountable for how many young people are taken into custody, encouraging them to scrutinise data at a local level. It will also give them financial incentives to prevent young people going to custody. However, to avoid declines in quality of services, it is important that with devolved responsibilities comes with the same level of devolved funding, ensuring that commissioners and providers do not have 100% of responsibility but only 80% of funding.

For further information, please see: Hazel. N, Goodfellow. P, Wright. S, Lockwood. K, McAteer. L, Francis. V, with Wilkinson. S (2016) The role of the family in resettlement: A practitioner's guide. London: Beyond Youth Custody/Nacro [available here](#).

Beyond Youth Custody is continuously undertaking research into the effective resettlement of young people leaving custody, sharing best practice in this area and contributing to debates in policy. All research reports and resources are available on our website, www.beyondyouthcustody.net.

Contact us

First Floor, 46 Loman Street, London SE1 0EH

Tel: 020 7902 5441 0300 123 1889

Email: beyondyouthcustody@nacro.org.uk

Twitter: @BYCustody

Website and sign up to newsletter www.beyondyouthcustody.net