

THE ROLE OF FAMILY SUPPORT 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.

Effective and sustained resettlement requires that the young person shifts the way they think about themselves and behave. However, incarceration itself often reinforces individual vulnerabilities and negative mindsets and fails to fully address the complex problems and behaviours that led to offending in the first place. Reoffending rates of young people leaving custody remain stubbornly high.

Changing the way a young person behaves and thinks about themselves is challenging. It is likely they will need substantial support in order to stimulate and reinforce change. It will require consistency, resilience and drive, not only on the part of the young person, but also from those working to support them.

Beyond Youth Custody's research has shown that in order to help a young person move forward and shift the way they think about themselves, resettlement support needs to guide this shift (personal support) and enable the shift by preparing the home environment to address multiple barriers (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.

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How do we interpret 'family'?

Each family is unique and constantly changing – as children develop, adults become parents, carers age and family members' health changes. Many families have complex and sometimes fragile relationships: people join or leave the family, parents have different partners, step and/or foster children come and go, and extended family carers and Social Services can also be involved.

Family models include kin networks, co-parents, LGBT and adoptive or foster parents, friends and ex-partners. Therefore, 'family support' needs to include building trusted family relationships as well as support networks in the absence of links with biological families.

It may not always be appropriate to involve particular or all members of the young person's family where, for instance, those relationships are negative or abusive. Where that is the case, unless those relationships can be improved, involvement may be counterproductive to the young person's resettlement and wellbeing.

” I think support from a trusted person to the young person really helps, I was lucky I had family but a lot of young people don't. If someone from their life is there for them every step of the way it would help greatly for the person and give them a reason to stay out. Because if the young person went back to prison they would feel like they are letting this person down who believes in them and is able to show it.

The family's ideal position as a support partner

Research has highlighted the positive outcomes that involving the family in resettlement can bring. It has suggested that maintaining familial relationships throughout a custodial sentence can reduce reoffending significantly among people leaving custody. More specifically, trusted family members are in a unique position to fulfil key characteristics that research has shown are associated with effective resettlement support:

- Continuous – families may be present from the start of the sentence, and still involved after formal support has stopped
- Consistent – trusted family relationships can offer a solid base when other providers change through the sentence
- Customised – family members know the young person as an individual and can offer key insights to their support needs and motivations
- Coordinated – a widespread partnership across sectors, including the family. Harnessing the family as a key member will help ensure that the above characteristics are met, offering both the personal and structural support necessary to enable them to move away from crime towards a positive future
- Connecting – family members are in an ideal position to support the young person's engagement. They can encourage participation, champion their inclusion in planning processes, and reinforce the young person's commitment to their more constructive journey

The family's role in personal support

Support services need to guide the young person's shift by providing support at a personal level that promotes self-belief, stimulating and reinforcing positive change in the way they see themselves. As part of the coordinated package of personal support, the family can help reinforce each stage of the resettlement process.

Identifying strengths and goals

- From the very start of involvement, family members can help with the development of an alternative personal identity. They will have particular insight into the young person's positive social skills and strengths (e.g. good with people, sharp ideas). They may also help the young person to recognise these, reminding them of examples of where they have displayed the qualities. This in itself can be a process of helping raise the young person's self-esteem.
- Families can feed into the process of identifying constructive goals for the young person (e.g. being an entrepreneur, being a local expert on something). Family buy-in to this planned development is important to the young person and can reassure them that their goals are achievable.

Providing a stable foundation

- Reception into custody can be particularly overwhelming; the distress of arriving in an alien environment may lead some young people to turn in on themselves and become isolated. Family separation can exacerbate the existing vulnerability of young people in custody. However, if they are involved in the process, families can provide an important source of ongoing support.
- Families are potentially ideally placed to provide important information to prison staff about the young person's wellbeing. Family support can therefore facilitate the young person's adjustment to life in custody, improving their wellbeing and behaviour, reducing conflict with staff and generating a calmer and easier to manage population. As a result, young people are also more likely to engage with rehabilitative and resettlement processes.

Family membership as part of personal identity

- Family can provide a sense of identity and belonging. Family membership can be a resource for service providers and the connection can be reinforced by family members, developing a sense of pride for the achievements of others in the family.
- Family membership also provides a sense of connectedness to the community. The family can help underline the young person's role as their representative and develop a stake and pride in the local community. This is an important factor for increasing their motivation to change – enabling them to focus on making plans for their return to the community.
- Young people in custody are often motivated by repairing familial relationships with their parents, grandparents and children. Family work can therefore be used to motivate a shift in identity and to get the young person to engage in their rehabilitation/resettlement.

Family responsibility as part of personal identity

- Being in a relationship or having a child can be a trigger for desistance from crime because these life events provide a constructive role for the young person. Any responsible 'family role', and the positive qualities it entails, can be underlined during the intervention and reinforced by other family members.
- Isolated from the outside world, custody removes young people's sense of responsibility, making resettlement planning extremely difficult. However, research with young male offenders shows that they tend to have strongly held beliefs about doing the right thing in relation to their male role in a family and the responsibilities that it brings. This sense of role responsibility can be harnessed, with the help of family members.

- Becoming a parent (or reforming relationships with children) can be a key transition in creating a new and positive identity to replace an offender reputation. Parenthood then becomes a key component of a 'redemption script': a constructed narrative that explains why offenders did what they did and why they have now put this behaviour behind them. Therefore, for young people with children, fostering strong parent-child bonds should be a priority.

Emotional support at release

- The period immediately before and after release can be an emotional and destabilising time for the young person. Before release there is often heightened excitement, anxiety and unpredictable behaviour; on release there can be a period of disorientation, with symptoms of psychological distress and increased likelihood of offending.
- Our research has shown that families can make this period better or worse. If well advised by service providers, they can provide an emotionally stable transition. For instance, before release they can prepare the young person for any changes in the neighbourhood, reassure them of support, and manage expectations of home. After release, they can help ensure that the young person is not overwhelmed by their freedom, show they understand the disorientation, and help guide their reactions to it.

Reinforcing personal identity

- A young person's identity is formed largely from interactions with others. Providing that the family has been involved in planning and understands the goals and identity the young person is working towards, they can consistently reinforce the key aspects of these. Even in everyday conversation, relatives can point out when the young person is showing a strength or positive characteristic. In doing so, the family can help build the young person's self-belief.
- The family can reinforce the benefits of family responsibility (as described above) after release by assigning particular jobs or duties to the young person that reinforce their identity. This might be as simple as asking them to put up a picture, if wanting to reinforce that they are the practical family member who's good with their hands. The key is not just asking them to pull their weight, but explicitly underlining the value of their expertise or role.
- A young person will have existing relationships with friends and others in their community with whom they are used to interacting according to their identity associated with offending. These relationships and interactions have the potential to reinforce their identity associated with crime and undermine their resettlement. The family may have a role to play in preparing the ground before any interactions, mediating the relationship and reinforcing their move away from crime. They also need to be aware of the negative influence of others on the process and, with the help of service providers, try to manage and counter it.

Helping with relapse recovery

- Moving on from crime is not always a straightforward journey and we must acknowledge that it may involve relapses as well as progress. At these points, a young person may not have built sufficient resilience to make positive choices. These are critical times because relapses may further shake personal belief that desistance is possible, and may actually reinforce a criminal identity. Those closest to the young person can influence how they process these episodes and their reactions should be guided by service providers. They can then emphasise that relapse is part of the 'old self', showing understanding, but making it clear that it doesn't fit with a positive future and how they think of them now, showing faith in what they are capable of.
- The family can remain a source of support long after the end of the sentence and service involvement. It is important that the family are primed to continue supporting the young person's progress and to deal with any later relapses. Support services should include the family in any exit strategy.

Considerations for practice

Does your organisation:

- Encourage families to inform the process of identifying new goals for the young person and development planning?
- Underline any responsible 'family role', including being a parent, and the positive qualities it entails?
- Work with families to manage and counter negative influences on the resettlement process?
- Guide the expectations and responses of family members to relapse?
- Include the family in any exit strategy?



SIMON'S STORY

My story begins at the age of seven with the loss of my mum. It affected me massively because I was a mummy's boy and my brother was a daddy's boy, so when we lost her it affected me the worst. I felt that my family was all processing it themselves so I couldn't go to them. I felt that my safety net had gone, and I had no one, I couldn't even go to the funeral. When that happened my behaviour went downhill, I became very, very angry and upset.

When I hit secondary school I started organising fights and participating in a fair few myself. I became very arrogant, rude and nasty, which led to me not being a very nice person to be around.

At secondary school I was convicted and sentenced for my offences. When the police turned up at my house at 3am to arrest me, all of my family were shocked and upset. When the police handcuffed me and took me away, I didn't see my family home again for three and a half years.

When I was sentenced I had a conversation with my family, and they told me that if I got into any more trouble that they were done with me. So while I was in custody they were very supportive - they turned up to every one of my meetings and always come to visit me. They made me feel like I was still a part of the family, which helped me get through the week till their next visit.

While I was doing so well in custody there were still challenges for my family, like the media and they still lived in the community that I committed my offences. My dad's business took a big impact because of my crime, but they still stood by me. Professionals even advised them to move from the area because of any friction or backlash from my crime.

The only thing that supported me through my whole experience was the support from the people around - they were all there when I needed to ask a question or even just to have a little moan about something. They are all very supportive and they are all good to me but hard work.

Just before I was going to leave custody I was asked to move to a placement away from my family, but I said no and dug my heels in, as I had ambitions for my life ahead and I'm very close to my family. This led to me not knowing where I was going to live two days before me leaving custody. This put me in a bad place because I didn't know where I was going or what was going to happen to me. I got a placement later that day and I had no choice but to take it but the placement left me very isolated and lonely. However, my family came to see me as much as they could. I still couldn't visit them and my licence restrictions didn't even let me breathe without them knowing where I was or what I was doing.

Although I am doing good I still get a lot of criticism... but after all this time I have realised I have got my family still behind me supporting me. Now that it has been two years since my release, I see a lot of my family who are still very supportive. I also play in a sports team and I work Monday to Friday every week. I have learned to drive and passed my test first time; also I have passed my NVQ Level 2 and started on my NVQ Level 3.



**POSITIVE PRACTICE
INVISIBLE WALLS WALES
HMP PARC**

Invisible Walls Wales (IWW) commenced in 2012 and has three main aims:

- To reduce prisoners' reoffending
- To reduce the likelihood that their children drift into criminogenic lifestyles (intergenerational offending)
- To increase social inclusion for the wider family

IWW seeks to achieve these aims by supporting healthy family contact and strengthening family ties. It works with 20 families per year – an intentionally low number that allows for intensive support to be provided for up to a year prior to release and for six months in the community. Each family is carefully selected on the basis of need; they are generally experiencing complex, fractured situations and need help to develop, repair and maintain healthy relationships. IWW supports all family members: each person has their needs assessed and every family member is treated equally. There is a specific focus on addressing children's negative outcomes e.g. absenteeism and truancy from school, poor educational attainment, physical and mental health problems, early pregnancy, early antisocial or offending behaviour.

Each family is assigned a Family Intervention Mentor who provides a single point of contact for the duration of their involvement with the project. A package of specialised support is put in place for the whole family. This can include: specialist parenting and relationship programmes for the whole family (eg, Child Advocacy Support, Family Group Conferencing and Youth Inclusion Support Programme), advice about family debt, benefits and housing issues, support around physical and mental health, help with substance misuse and support for training and employment. Dependent on individual need, the mentor is able to involve outside agencies, such as parenting support workers, social workers, child advocates or an intergenerational offending specialist.

One of the key components of IWW is HMP Parc's Family Intervention Unit (FIU): a 60 bed unit for prisoners where the entire focus of the environment is upon repairing, enhancing and taking responsibility for relationships and parenting. A range of group and individual interventions are delivered and the men are encouraged to maintain their family ties through visits, letter writing, 'emailprisoner.com' and regular telephone contact. They can also earn access to the Family Lounge (as a privilege for those achieving 'enhanced status' through the IEP scheme), where the family can share a more informal, relaxed visit and younger children can enjoy various family-orientated activities. Prisoners are taking an active, mentoring part in the development of the FIU and their family-themed artwork is displayed on the unit and throughout visits.

Independent evaluation is revealing overwhelmingly positive outcomes. Fathers are taking a much more active interest in their families and currently only three out of 65 prisoners who have worked with the programme have reoffended. There have also been extremely positive outcomes for the children, whose wellbeing, health and happiness have increased substantially and, in some cases, school attendance has jumped from around 40% to the high 90s.



**POSITIVE PRACTICE
NEPACS: FAMILY SUPPORT WORKERS
HM YOI DEERBOLT**

NEPACS is a charity supporting a positive future for prisoners and their families. It works in prisons across the North East of England, with more than 140,000 visitors (including 20,000 children) using its visitor centres each year. While assisting prisoner resettlement through maintaining family ties, NEPACS also aims to minimise the damage that offenders' imprisonment causes to their families through informal support and assistance with finance, childcare and health issues.

Since 2011, NEPACS has been developing an Integrated Family Support Programme. It currently has Family Support Workers (FSWs) in four prisons and two Integrated Family Support Advocates (IFSAs) working across 12 North East local authorities. Its work in HM YOI Deerbolt (in the Pennines) caters for young men from a huge catchment area. Their involvement with a NEPACS Family Support Worker has highlighted the extent to which their problematic behaviour, non-compliance and conflict with staff is often triggered by stress and frustration arising from family relationships. FSWs are able to initiate and maintain communication between the young men and their families with extremely positive effects. As prison visits are inevitably quite artificial and strange, NEPACS tries to normalise relationships and staff are constantly thinking of ways to respond to support needs in greater depth. They take a wide approach to supporting families, including:

- Making visiting centres warm and welcoming (with plenty of information and support)
- Enabling visits with extended family members and putting on special play days – e.g. a 'whole family' event that includes lunch and lots of creative activities, games, sport – with photographs taken to provide both the young person and their family with positive memories
- Parent-child visits, where the young person in custody has full parental responsibility for their child during the visit to help bonding through feeding a baby and changing nappies etc
- Extended phone calls with partners prior to them going into labour (and occasionally during it)
- New baby visits taking place with the family alone in the Ashley Done suite (a more intimate environment). Photographs are taken of the dad with their new baby to record the event and also provide a signifier of the importance of the father in the ongoing life of their child
- A Dads course for new fathers which includes what it means to be a parent, how to look after a child in the long-term, and how to sustain your parenting role. This boosts young people's sense of responsibility and helps them to develop a positive identity as a parent
- For the family in the community, FSWs are able to act as a neutral liaison, reassuring them about their loved ones' wellbeing

The project has Big Lottery funding until 2016.

The family's role in structural support

Support services play a critical role in facilitating a young person's shift in identity by providing support at a structural level that prepares the home environment, addresses barriers to change, and provides access to services that address multiple and complex problems. Accessing support and sticking with it can be a challenge for young people leaving custody. Family can help this by providing practical assistance and resources:

Help with early planning

- Young people in custody often have multiple and complex problems. They will need to access support from various different services which, in itself, can present problems for young people. It is important that family members are engaged by services as soon as possible in order to act as partners to identify problems, work to find practical solutions and, indeed, be a means of practical support themselves.
- Research and inspections have suggested that resettlement services may be more comprehensive or active where all providers are held to account by other partners. Family members should be encouraged to act as champions for the young people, both in and out of planning meetings, helping to ensure that all parties commit to support needed to help them move on from crime. They can then advocate for the young person to help ensure that all services are delivered promptly, as promised.

Exploring local support opportunities

- Young people who maintain familial contact are also more likely to have employment and accommodation in place for their release, which supports a successful reintegration into the community.
- Family members may well be aware of local opportunities for structural support. Their knowledge and intelligence may reveal potential providers not obvious to case managers.
- Research has shown that family members are often able to make the most of their own contacts in order to offer support opportunities (e.g. for employment). With new goals and pathways identified, it may be that different possibilities not tried previously are now more appropriate. With a clear way forward and the young person more engaged, it is possible that family members will have more confidence in calling on potential contacts.
- Research has indicated that engaging the service providers necessary to support effective resettlement can take time, even once identified, and should be started early. Family members may be able to help in that engagement process, negotiating with potential sources of support identified by case managers. That is especially the case in their neighbourhood where shared local identity may offer reassurance.
- Where potential partners may lack confidence in taking the step to support someone who has offended, family members may be able to help reassure them. They may be able to act as 'guarantors' for the young person, showing the young person that they believe in them and demonstrating to potential partners that the young person will be supported.
- Family members may have tried offering structural support opportunities (such as working in a family business) in the past, but the placement broke down because of the young person's attitude or behaviour. All parties need to engage with the idea that the same support may be approached differently and present itself as a fresh opportunity, supporting a new identity, and reinforcing their self-esteem and self-perceptions. As such, all possibilities of opportunities directly involving families and friends should be worked through.

Providing a stable home environment

- Perhaps the most obvious way that a family can help structurally is in providing accommodation to the young person on release. However, it is recognised that this can often break down during the

community period, and so should never be arranged without case managers having a contingency plan in place. As with all arrangements for the community period, this should be negotiated as early as possible and in place well before release.

- Young people will not always want to return to their parental home, even if it is available. Service providers should ensure that they listen to warnings from the young people about what will happen if they are released to a particular accommodation, and work through any anticipated problems or find alternative accommodation that may or may not be with other family members.
- In addition to the emotional support that families can provide to counter the disorientation on release, they can also ensure that their home provides some stability at this time of change. In particular, families should make the home environment as familiar as possible, without major changes (such as redecoration).
- A young person's family can also try to make the home environment as calm as possible. In a home that was previously chaotic, this move towards calmness may well need to be balanced with providing familiarity in routines. Families need to be warned that young people may not want a big fuss when they come out, such as a celebratory party or suddenly launching into all their favourite activities at once. The pace of life needs to be managed, and their lifestyle may need to be more structured than they are used to.
- The family can have a vital role in managing the disruptions from others. Young people coming out of custody can be a source of excitement to those close to them and a novelty to others. Service providers can encourage family members to act as a buffer and work with the young person to control the access and behaviour of others.
- Changes in the surrounding neighbourhood can cause additional stress for young people and destabilise their pathways to desistance. Young people released from custody should be mentored into their wider neighbourhood in a controlled and supported way, with appropriate briefing and debriefing. As professionals can't always be there, family members can have a vital role in this process.

Day-to-day practical help

- It is crucial that all young people are met at the institution at the time of release by someone that they are familiar with and trust. The preference would usually be a family member or close supporter, ideally driving them home in a vehicle they are familiar with. However, if the family does not have a vehicle available, case managers may be able to help with transport so that a family member can still be with them at release.
- Even the smallest practical help from family members, such as ensuring that the young person gets up in time for an appointment, can mean the difference to progress along an agreed resettlement pathway. Case managers should make it clear how important the family can be in providing this kind of basic support. It also demonstrates the worth that they place in the activities.
- It should be recognised that routine in custody is extremely structured, with even the smallest activity regulated, supervised and controlled. Family members should be helped to recognise that young people may need to transition from this level of control. As such, they may need more help and guidance in everyday tasks, from meals to bed times.
- Providing transport for the young person to make appointments and pursue constructive activities is a particularly useful job for family members to fulfil. However, it requires sustained commitment, and supporters need to understand that withdrawal or failure of this support can have a destabilising effect on the young person. As with all resettlement provision, service providers need to ensure that they monitor family support and ensure that contingency plans are in place.

Post-sentence support

- Family members can provide key roles in support after formal service providers withdraw. Close supporters can share more of a 'case management' role with the young people themselves. It may be

necessary for them to coordinate and arrange ongoing structural support beyond the end of the sentence. As noted previously, this underlines the importance of early engagement with the family, their buying-in to the shift in personal identity and associated pathways, as well as including them in exit planning.

Considerations for practice

Does your organisation:

- Support young people and their families both within custody and post-release?
- Involve key family members in young people's resettlement planning?
- Co-deliver parenting support to both young people in custody and their partners/co-parents?
- Seek to strengthen young people's personal relationships with their families – or with new support networks if family relationships are irreconcilable?
- Engage young parents coming out of custody in community-based parenting support?
- Build networks of community support for both young people and their families?

Challenges and possible solutions

Despite recognition of the importance of familial contact and support across the sector, many barriers are often cited in families' ability to achieve this. It is essential that support services adopt solutions to overcome some of these challenges, enabling families to support young people, and so unlocking this important resource.

Effectively engaging family

Engaging families in services can often require an innovative approach, as they may have complex historical relationships with services. This work needs to be reparative, not just between family members, but also between families and practitioners; families who have been involved with 'the system' for a long time may lack trust in agencies and their staff.

The service will work to map all of the possible supporters, which may include people outside of the immediate biological family. Once key supportive family members have been identified, the service can often be the link between the family and the young person.

Engagement can be facilitated by helping the family to address some of the 'day-to-day issues' they are dealing with, such as finances, mental health, domestic violence, accommodation and bereavement. Once trust is built by addressing some of these issues, the family can then often become more engaged with the service and their capacity to support the young person in custody is increased.

Breakdown in family relations

Breakdown in family relations and rejection of, or by, the family is often a substantial factor in the lives of young people in and leaving custody. In contrast to the benefits of family involvement identified above, this breakdown may result in the young person:

- Feeling abandoned and isolated, increasing vulnerabilities
- Displaying challenging behaviour, disrupting risk-dependent resettlement activities
- Declining to engage with or disengaging with resettlement activities
- Feeling demotivated to make changes to their life

” “All my support went. I had nothing and needed to rebuild it all.”

Work often needs to support reparation of familial relationships that have broken down prior to custody. Such work also needs to be undertaken with realistic expectations – recognising irreparably harmful relationships and providing help to develop positive endings and new support networks. So, not only do ongoing family relationships require support, but also the loss of key relationships may need addressing because that loss is likely to damage resettlement outcomes.

Renegotiating relationships and interactions with those closest to the young person needs to be aided by focusing more in family interactions while inside. This underlines the importance of institutions and case managers facilitating more 'alone time' between young people and their families before release in order to help start the negotiation process. In addition, temporary release can be useful to help refamiliarise the young person with their home environment, including their interactions within it.

Coping with family crises

Families with a member in custody tend to be among the most vulnerable in society. They are likely to be struggling with their finances, health problems, housing problems, domestic violence, substance misuse and stigma or social exclusion. Families can, therefore, often struggle to maintain contact and offer ongoing support to young people in custody both during and beyond their sentence. If resettlement support is to be holistic and address the barriers to a shift in identity, it will need to address family-wide vulnerabilities.

Where the state is the family

A disproportionately high number of young people in custody have spent time in local authority care and do not have family members to support them or long-term foster placements to return to on release. Maintaining contact with social workers, support workers or other individuals important to the young person while in custody is crucial. Trusted and consistent relationships with people the young person knows and trusts are important both in terms of emotional support and having someone who can advocate on their behalf.

Embedded negative perceptions of the young person

If the young person has a self-identity that is negative and associated with offending, it may be shared by the family, who could have given up on the young person. As such, it should be recognised by the service provider that involving the family in resettlement means that the process may also entail supporting a complementary shift in the family's view of the young person. If we want the family to be supportive of the young person's journey it is important that the family believe they are capable of change. This may involve a process of persuading family members (or a 'champion' in the family) that the young person has the capacity to change. The service provider may need to run exercises with the family in which the young person's strengths are highlighted and potential underlined.

Family members may also have a lack of confidence in their own ability to help. When the child is involved in offending, perhaps serious or persistent, the family may blame themselves or consider that they have failed. As such, service providers may need to highlight their own strengths and potential to help, including how they can reinforce positive identities.

Distance of placement from home

Many young people are held significant distances away from home; children with particularly high levels of vulnerability, and detained in specialist units, tend to be held even further distances from home. Such distance can prevent parents from being able to attend planning meetings and other visits, and create additional logistical difficulties in arranging transport, planning routes, arranging visiting orders and claiming back travel expenses.

” “A lot more individuals would get a lot more support if they were closer to home.”

Full involvement in planning means that service providers may need to assist families in reaching meetings. Institutions should explore using video conferencing (through Skype or similar), including for planning meetings. However, video conferencing should supplement rather than replace family visits where they can be accommodated.

Communication problems in custody

Communication is often a barrier to families' active participation in supporting young people. In particular, parents are sometimes not adequately informed about developments in custody, including transfer between institutions and impending release. This can increase anxiety for both the young person and family, interrupt emotional support, and hinder support and buy in at release. Another barrier to communication can be caused by behavioural incentive schemes that can limit the amount of telephone contact allowed. To aid communication, families need to be updated regularly and custodial institutions should not include family contact in behavioural incentive schemes. Access to means of communication with home should be maximized for all young people in custody. Where Case Managers find that young people have their access limited, the consequences for resettlement and recidivism should be raised with the institution at the highest level.

” “It's hard for loved ones when young people are far away from home.”

Stress of family visits

Family visits can be hugely demanding and often quite upsetting for all involved. Consequently, some young people decide not to ask for them, not wanting to place extra demands on their family and concerned about reactions. Service providers should manage the expectations of both the young people and family members regarding family visits, as well as supporting them afterwards. They should consider briefing and debriefing the parties involved, perhaps advising the family of how their visit can be used to help develop or support any work going on with the young person at that time.

” “For some young people it's easier not to see their family as it's too emotional and the lack of contact makes it easier to cope with.”

Both parties need to be advised of the different nature of their interactions in custody, including highlighting that unusual behaviour may be emotional coping mechanisms. There may need to be an early and open discussion about any demands on the family, with clear expectations negotiated.

Offences and victimisation within the family

” “My family were the reason why I got in trouble. Having family members who are involved in drugs and put pressure on you to get money.”

Some young people may not be allowed contact with their family, for example, if they have committed violent offences against a member of the family. Safeguarding must always be the top priority, yet even where young people need to be kept separate from their families, both parties still need support. Families of those convicted of a sexual offence are particularly isolated, face complex issues and require a range of practical and therapeutic support. In addition, early work will need to be done to help the young person come to terms with any shift in their family role that this brings and how this might affect possible future roles.

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 and 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.

” “Some people need to be returned closer to their family and their community, for others it is the worst thing possible and they need to be away from abusive relationships or people who might influence them in the wrong way. However, this needs to be assessed on a case by case basis.”

Lack of trust and confidence as parents

Owing to their previous lifestyles, young parents in prison may lack confidence in their ability to parent and can be managing extreme guilt and shame. Issues around parenting and contact can also be a primary concern for others. The current carer may not have confidence in their commitment to parenting, owing to previous behaviours, including substance misuse.

Families may need particular reassurance of a change in the young person's behaviour and motivation in relation to their child or children. Access to a trusted 'neutral' person who can offer impartial support and liaise between parties can address this. Supporting the young person with their communication skills and managing the relationships is significant. To build confidence, young parents need to be able to access:

- Parenting classes
- Family conferencing
- Relationship groups/learning
- Good quality contact
- Temporary release (with a focus on enhancing family relationships)

” “Mainly for me it was building a relationship with my son because he was born when I was in prison. Building a relationship with his mother, because we were on good terms to start with but when I went inside it went sour.”

Considerations for practice

Does your organisation:

- Focus on the emotional context of family relationships, addressing issues such as anger and shame?
- Address the loss of key relationships?
- Facilitate 'alone time' between young people and their families before release?
- Use 'temporary release' to help refamiliarise the young person with their home environment and their interactions within it?
- Help the family to address some 'day-to-day issues' such as debt, mental health and accommodation?
- Focus on building trusting relationships between families, but also between families and practitioners?



LEE'S STORY

Lee's mum is under pressure to stop visiting him. He's about to lose what family he has. Lee doesn't know that yet.

Lee is 19-years-old. He's in jail for a violent offence that he still feels was justified; he considers that he was merely protecting himself. He experienced trauma as a child and has mental health difficulties. Lee is severely isolated. Several professionals he's

met recently consider him to have a personality disorder because he finds it so hard to engage with other people.

Lee doesn't get to phone home very much – he hasn't got many phone credits because he finds it difficult to use the top-up system. He's being bullied by other prisoners because he stole a phone and they found out. Lee is on the vulnerable prisoners unit but currently can't go outside his cell. Even if he could make phone calls more readily he can't communicate with his family about what is actually going on for him. There's a lot of conflict between different family members and it's impossible to sort that out within the limits of a prison visit or a phone call – having an honest, emotionally charged conversation in those circumstances is extremely difficult.

While he was on remand, Lee's main source of support was his younger brother, a 17-year-old student. Their parents are elderly and in ill health. The family's financial pressures and the time it takes to travel to the prison make visiting extremely difficult; it's a long way to go for only a short visit. Lee's brother would like to visit Lee and take Lee's young daughter along, but Lee's girlfriend is hesitant to let his brother take the little girl to see her father because she is frightened of him. She's planning to leave him and just disappear while he's in jail. Lee's mum supports his girlfriend's decision. They all expect that Lee will be devastated when he finds out.

Lee's mum wants to keep visiting him in prison but his dad's very angry with Lee and doesn't want her to go. She feels ashamed, humiliated and degraded by being searched and given short shrift by prison officers. She remembers vividly that once when she visited, there was a lock-down, so she could only have 20 minutes with her son. She had travelled three hours to see him and had expected to be with him for an hour.

Supporting staff to deliver a family approach

The challenges of involving families in resettlement have implications for practitioners and staff delivering family support interventions. In order to overcome the barriers to allow for effective resettlement work with young people and their families, individuals and organisations should consider:

Tailoring of interventions to client need

Practitioners need both confidence in their abilities and organisational support (and capacity) to continuously adapt their practice to the needs of each family member that they work with.

Continual dialogue and reflective engagement with families

Support needs to be delivered in partnership with the families – constantly exploring their evolving needs and keeping them engaged in determining the most helpful course of action for all involved.

Experience of reparative approaches

Experience of delivering family group conferencing or similarly reparative approaches to family support would be beneficial, as would skills in developing informal community networks.

Research-mindedness

As part of the reflective approach to developing tailored practice, practitioners will need to be interested in constantly evolving their knowledge base regarding effective interventions and good practice in engaging families.

Ongoing support and training

Because the nature of family support work can be quite traumatic, even very experienced and highly skilled staff will need ongoing supervision and possibly additional wellbeing supervision or clinical support (perhaps through external providers, such as Social Services).

Considerations for practice

Does your organisation:

- Enable staff to tailor their approach to the needs of each family (and each family member) that they work with?
- Encourage reflective approaches to engaging families?
- Seek to build a pool of staff that has experience not only in family support work, but also in the development of informal community support networks?
- Provide ongoing support, training and supervision that is mindful of the potentially traumatic nature of family support work?
- Support and resource 'research-mindedness' among staff?

Conclusion

Effective resettlement is a process that enables a shift in a young person's identity, moving them away from crime towards a positive future. Resettlement support involves both guiding this shift (personal support) and enabling the shift by addressing multiple barriers in the home environment (structural support). The family is an important resource for both aspects of this support. They are in a unique position to reinforce all these developments through personal and structural support beyond the withdrawal of formal support.

Crucially, the family can offer a sense of connectedness with the outside world, increasing stability and countering the vulnerabilities that increase with incarceration. The young person's familial role and relationships can also be important aspects of their personal identity. Both of these factors need to be cultivated. The family can also be useful in identifying and underlining wider strengths and goals that will support personal development. In addition, families can offer important practical support to enable young people to achieve their aims.

Families can therefore be seen to be central to resettlement work, and it is crucial that families feel 'part of the process' rather than being alienated by it. Families should be integral to resettlement planning – attending sentence planning meetings so that they are involved in preparations for release, and have their capacity to provide support assessed (and enhanced if necessary). A joined-up, holistic approach that delivers consistent support to all family members – across both custodial and community settings – is crucial.

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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