
Young offenders' trauma on release from custody

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YOUTH CUSTODY

A 5-year England-wide programme which examines and promotes best practice in the resettlement of young people and young adults leaving custody.

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Paper takes data from research over 15 years:

- Evaluation of Medway Secure Training Centre (1998-2000)
- Assessment of the Detention and Training Order (2000-2002)
- Young offenders' experiences of Criminal Justice (2000-2002)
- Evaluation of RESET resettlement programme (2005-2007)
- Resettlement needs of girls in custody (2011-2013)



- Data from qualitative depth interviews with young people (and parents)
- Young people aged 12 to 17

Mixed experiences of release

- Release process is easy for some:

I reckon it was easy. I just come out and everything is the same, not the same but over the two days everything felt the same. It was like I had never gone to prison

John, 17

- But 'two days' to feel the same gives hints at the transition process and initial issues >



Dream of getting out, no anticipation of disorientation

- Key words repeated in interviews:

mad, buzzing, strange, weird

Big thing innit, just getting let out. And then I felt weird for a bit.... I couldn't speak. It was weird...I knew I'd be happy and everything, but I didn't know it was going to feel like that.

Ella, 17

Weird, It done my head in

Tony, 14

I knew it was gonna be a bit weird but I didn't think...I dunno. I think it just hit me to be honest, I dunno.

Sasha, 17

Trauma effects felt by young people

- Physical stress symptoms

When my mum came and picked me up from the prison, when I came out and I was sitting in the car, I felt sick. I was shaking cos I didn't know what to do and that.

Ella, 17



Trauma effects felt by young people

- Overwhelmed psychological anxiety

I couldn't handle it, like the first day I couldn't handle being out of prison. I just couldn't stop crying and felt depressed all the time.

Sasha, 17

I was really scared when I am out. I was all scared cos I thought everyone was looking at me. I felt scared. I walked around town, and I thought everyone was just staring at me, but they weren't it was just me.

Peter, 17

Trauma effects felt by young people

- Quiet and withdrawn

I came out and it was weird. I could hardly talk for about a week

Ben, 17

He was very withdrawn when he first came out. He didn't want to go anywhere or anything. He was very withdrawn. He is back [to himself] now.

Yes, he is speaking now and he does go out with his friends.

Grandparent



Trauma effects felt by young people

- Agoraphobic symptoms

Just indoors with all my family and friends, I didn't go out

Sasha, 17

I just weren't ready to go out. I felt weird

Ella, 17 (did not leave the house for 10 days)

Trauma effects felt by young people

- Agoraphobic symptoms – neighbourhood felt alien and unfamiliar

I didn't really want to go out. I wasn't used to being there. I had to start again getting used to the area.

Ben, 17

- Exacerbated by fear of being returned to custody:

I was scared of getting in trouble and getting taken back...As long as I was in the house, I wouldn't mind.

Ella, 17

- Contrasted with others who react with binge on life or binge on antisocial behaviour

Trauma effects felt by young people

- Physical tiredness [stress or physical readjustment?]

I just used to get right tired, cos inside you used to like walk around there not doing much really

Gary, 14

And walking as well, that was mad, walking. My legs felt like spaghetti.

Martin, 16

What was stressful about the experience?

- Disorientated and scared

Lost, I think I was. I didn't know where I was going to go or what. I just came out of there. It was like my life had just stopped and swung back round and kicked me.

Martin, 16

I walked into the shop, and I didn't know what I wanted

Peter, 17

I came out and I was scared. I didn't know what to do, I didn't know where to go. I kept sitting down. I was like seeing cars going past and I was like, "Can't believe I'm out"

Jenny, 16

What was stressful about the experience?

- Pace of life literally and perception

I came home and everything was faster, cos everything's slow down there [in custody]. You don't really do owt do you? So you come out and everyone's just rushing about as normal and ... so it takes you a while to keep up and carry back on.

Gary, 14

Everyone rushing about. Everyone is mad. You are used to sitting down all day.

Martin, 16



What was stressful about the experience?

- The normal was suddenly unfamiliar – destabilised

I dunno, I was shocked really....happy to get out, yeah...[but] yeah, it felt weird. Like seeing a bus and everything, it felt weird

Sasha, 17

I was walking into shops and I was thinking, “Oh my gosh”, cos I didn’t see a shop [inside]. I didn’t actually like, all I saw was pure girls. I didn’t see like cars or food shops and that.

Jenny, 16

What was stressful about the experience?

- Adapting to a world that's moved on

There's new owners in the shops and all that. It was a bit strange, but I've got used to it now

Steve, 17

- Eg thinking been 'robbed' when new coin in change (Barry, 14)

What was stressful about the experience?

- Learning to interact again – especially with family and friends

I didn't know what to say to mum and dad when I came out. And I didn't know what to say to my friends. I like never talked to hardly anyone. I just kept myself to myself.

Peter, 17

I was in the bedroom with my cousin celebrating that I'd just come out. And usually, like me and my cousin chat away and everything but in the bedroom I was just looking and smiling and embarrassed, going all red and everything. Going all red. I didn't want to talk to them. She started talking to me and I was, "Yeah yeah". I just didn't know what to say. It is a weird experience, a really weird experience.

Ben, 17

What was stressful about the experience?

- Suggestion of difficulty with the opposite sex after single sex institution?

It was strange seeing boys walking past me. It was strange seeing boys walking past me. People was coming up to me: "How are you? And I weren't really relating to them.

Jenny, 16



What was stressful about the experience?

- Lack of regulation like eating and sleeping patterns

Just my sleeping pattern. [In custody], I wake up in the morning and make the bed and then eat my breakfast for a certain time. But it's just getting back into a sleeping pattern, waking up at 2.30 in the afternoon again.

Sean, 16

- Unable to cope with taking initiative or act independently



Negative support

- Pressure of being focus of attention when interactions are stressful

Cos everything was going too fast. Like people, all my family were coming over, get all this birthday stuff and....I dunno, like every time I see someone, it was like “Oh how was prison?” “How was this, how was that?” and yeah, it was just the same thing over and over.

Sasha, 17

Conclusions

- Release from prison is traumatic for young people, not so recognised by literature
- Disorienting and scary experience
- Physical and psychological symptoms of stress
- Trauma not anticipated, nor prepared for
- Even young people with high levels of support
- Supporters can make matters worse

Recommendations

- Service providers should acknowledge and prepare for traumatic nature of release
- All young people should be met at the gate by someone they have good relationship with
- Structured timetable for initial period, discussed in advance
- Greater use of Release on Temporary Licence
- Additional shorter ROTL

If just for an hour, just like walking around (Barry, 14)

- Advice to young people and family for graduated exposure and acclimatisation
- More alone time with family in different environments before release
- Consider physical preparation for release as well

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Bateman T, Hazel N and Wright S (2013) *Resettlement of young people leaving custody: Lessons from the literature* London: Beyond Youth Custody/Nacro

(<http://www.beyondyouthcustody.net/resources/publications/lessons-from-the-literature/>)