

**“NOW ALL I CARE ABOUT
IS MY FUTURE”**

SUPPORTING THE SHIFT

Framework for the effective resettlement of
young people leaving custody: a summary



“I used to run around the streets, acting like an idiot. **Now all I care about is my future.** Next I’m going to my Level 3 then university to do gas and oil management and accounting. My life is only just beginning. I’m moving through every page of every chapter of my book. Without [my project], I’d be doing nothing. Or I wouldn’t be alive.”

Introduction

This document has been 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 and sustainable resettlement of young people after custody. The programme has published research reports, policy briefings and practitioner guidance on a number of key issues in resettlement including diversity, young people with background trauma, girls and young women, and engaging young people; all resources are available for download at www.beyondyouthcustody.net.

The new framework presented here – which draws on findings from across the programme – proposes, for the first time internationally, a ‘theory of change’ for the sustainable re-entry of young people. This reconceptualisation of resettlement enables a better understanding of why practices previously shown by research to improve recidivism rates are effective. Consequently, the framework provides a new focus for resettlement services’ aims and objectives, and may be particularly useful as a common language for the inter-agency working that we know is essential when supporting young people.

The framework has been designed as a resource for policy makers, decision makers, academics studying youth justice and anyone working with young people leaving custody. A visual representation of the framework outlined in this document can be found on the centre pages. A full version of this report, which includes references and suggestions for further reading, can be found at: www.beyondyouthcustody.net/publications.

The resettlement challenge

Reoffending rates among young people leaving custody remain stubbornly high. In its 2015 inspection of services for youth resettlement after custody, HM Inspectorate of Probation (HMIP) described outcomes for young people leaving custody as “shocking”. Noting BYC’s review of the recognised principles of effective practice in resettlement support, Inspectors asked the question:

“So, even when we know the solution, and we know providing the solution is for the most part possible within current budgets, why on earth is it not being done?”¹

At the end of BYC’s six-year programme of learning and awareness work with service providers, we consider that this failure is primarily because the existing “solution” has been comprised of a disparate set of good practice principles without a unifying framework. Previously, it has been challenging to understand how these principles work together to effect desistance – the process of abstaining from crime among those who previously had engaged in a sustained pattern of offending – nor how an individual’s own work or that of different agencies fits with the process as a whole. Essentially, there has been no unifying aim for resettlement beyond effecting the outcome of preventing reoffending. It has been difficult for service providers to understand their aim because there has been no theory of change in resettlement.

1. HM Inspectorate of Probation. (2015). *Joint thematic inspection of resettlement services to children by Youth Offending Teams and partner agencies*. London: HM Inspectorate of Probation.

The theory of change in resettlement

In this document, we set out a theory of change for understanding how effective resettlement works, which can guide future policy and practice development. This theory of change recognises that effective and sustainable resettlement facilitates a shift in the way that a young person sees themselves, from an identity that promotes offending to one that promotes positive contribution to society.

The subsequent framework highlights how service providers should support the young person to develop a positive identity – a new narrative for how they relate to others. This involves guiding and enabling the young person – through personal and structural support respectively – to create new roles in their life story that foster and reinforce this positive identity which promotes wellbeing and desistance. Within this framework, we can identify five key characteristics that research has shown are important for all resettlement support.

THE AIM: SHIFT IN IDENTITY



Shift in identity

Effective and sustained resettlement involves the young person shifting their identity away from one that is conducive to offending to one that promotes a crime-free life and social inclusion. Such a change in the way that young people view themselves and their future life chances is central to the rehabilitative process. As such, effective and sustained resettlement can be reframed as:

“A journey for the young people in terms of how they perceive themselves from a socially marginalised offender to a socially included one... a process of transformation conducive to their fuller integration into mainstream society.”²

The young person’s criminogenic background

Young people entering custody often have multiple and complex needs that are also criminogenic (i.e. needs which cause criminal behaviour) and should be addressed in resettlement. They are often vulnerable, with a history of victimisation and disempowerment that can act as barriers to making positive choices. They are more likely to have experienced previous traumatic events, often have entrenched patterns of offending and have accepted this behaviour as normal to them. Research has consistently shown that, in addition, the adversities of imprisonment exacerbate vulnerabilities, making rehabilitation more difficult. The experiences of girls and young women and members of Black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) groups can make these vulnerabilities worse.

The young person’s pro-offending identity

Elements of a young person’s criminogenic background can mean that they make sense of themselves within their life story (their ‘narrative’) in ways that promote criminal activity. The offending part of their identity is often tied to how they gain status or identity, which may not be as ‘a criminal’ directly, but may contain characteristics that are conducive to criminality, such as ‘tough’, ‘street-wise’, ‘a fighter’ or ‘a gangster’.

Interactions with justice professionals may underline the young person’s pro-offending identity by labelling them as criminal. Being placed in custody reinforces this pro-offending identity, making positive change in behaviour more difficult. Again, it is important to recognise diverse experiences; BAME young people have disproportionately negative experiences of imprisonment, with stereotyping and discrimination further damaging a negative identity.

The process of change for each young person

This framework for resettlement identifies the young person as the central agent in their own rehabilitation, while recognising the complex needs that may act as a barrier to success. In effective resettlement, the young person

manages to shift their identity during and beyond the end of their custodial sentence. They build a more positive identity in a more positive life story, and behave more positively as a result. This positive identity is fostered and reinforced through involvement in activities, adopting roles in everyday life and interacting with supportive others.

The journey for a young person is not usually linear or without problems. Changing the way a person thinks about themselves and behaves is challenging, and a criminal identity may be deepened further by the experience and label of being a prisoner or ‘con’. The additional prejudice and discrimination faced by young people from diverse groups can make it even harder to maintain belief in their positive identity. The journey may well involve relapses towards a negative narrative and a return to offending behaviour. Young people need substantial support in order to stimulate and reinforce change, which requires resilience and drive, not only on the part of the young person, but also from those working to support them.

Ultimately, the decision about whether or not to desist from crime is down to the young person – they must want to change and be motivated to do so for themselves.

“It’s my decision isn’t it? I just want different things now. Don’t wanna waste my time any more.”

Towards a pro-social identity

Resettlement services have an important role in supporting a young person’s shift to a more positive, or pro-social, identity – an identity where a young person is empowered to make better choices in their behaviour and with wider life decisions, including relationships. The young person recognises that they can gain status and security from these positive choices. They are more future-oriented in their motivations and choices.

Previous research has found that when a young person at risk of offending finds a new pro-social identity, it can replace the need to maintain status and peer respect through negative behaviour.

Sustainable positive outcomes

The standard binary measure in England and Wales of reconviction a year after release captures a relatively short-term symptom rather than an early indicator of desistance or a longer-term sustainable goal. For the expected positive outcomes for resettlement to be sustainable, they should be the antithesis of a criminogenic background. They would include social inclusion, constructive engagement with others, desistance from offending and a lifestyle that promotes wellbeing.

THE ROLE OF ALL SERVICES: SUPPORTING THE SHIFT IN IDENTITY



The aim of resettlement planning, provision and service providers should be to facilitate the young person’s identity shift. Seeing resettlement as a shift within a young person, rather than something that is done to them, means that they are central to their rehabilitative process. Young people have got to be motivated and ready to change for themselves. It is therefore crucial that resettlement services involve young people as the primary agents in their own resettlement, rather than defining problems or solutions on their behalf.

As has been noted, this shift is neither easy nor instant, but involves a journey for the young person. Consequently, resettlement is not simply about providing a temporary solution at the moment of release but supporting a longer-term process.

Facilitating the shift in identity involves service providers both directly guiding the young person on their journey (personal support) but also working on the structural barriers that will indirectly enable them to make the shift (structural support).

2. Bateman, T. and Hazel, N. (2013). *Engaging young people in resettlement: research report*. London: Nacro/Beyond Youth Custody.

Personal support: guiding the shift

The primary task of resettlement services is to guide the young person on their journey to shift their identity – the way they see themselves, their relationship with others and their life story. Personal support promotes self-belief and identifies pathways that stimulate and reinforce positive change. Personal support is crucial to the effective resettlement of young people, and structural support relies on its success. Only providing structural help like accommodation or a college placement is unlikely to be effective without this primary function of helping the young person see the way forward and how those opportunities fit into that.

Into custody

Explore pro-social strengths and goals

The starting point for helping a young person to build a positive identity and wider narrative is to focus on their existing strengths and future goals, even if those have been previously used in a negative way (e.g. physical strength used in violence or people skills used in drug dealing).

Establish support relationships

Relationships lie at the heart of successful engagement and effective resettlement. Supportive interactions are crucial for practical and emotional support and for defining and reinforcing positive roles. This includes interpersonal relations between staff and young people, relationships with family, peers and wider society. Work on relationships needs to start early, preferably before or at the start of the custodial sentence.

Focus on pathways (roles and activities)

The pathways needed for the young person to develop their personal identity should build on recognised strengths and prioritise interventions that help the young person to make achievable steps towards their goals. This is achieved by identifying and facilitating activities and (associated) roles for the young person that will foster and reinforce their specific positive identity and wider narrative.

Prepare for release disorientation

Release from custody can cause disorientation and stress because of the sudden change in regime. Young people can be prepared through a compulsory pre-release course, day of release plans confirmed at least two weeks before leaving custody, release on temporary licence and intensive but flexible support for the days after release.

Into the community

Facilitate engagement

The young person's engagement, both in relation to individual activities and their overall plan, is important to the resettlement process. With full engagement, each new interaction and activity becomes an opportunity to develop and shape their identity. For example, full engagement with a catering course may allow a young person to establish their role as 'a student' and a 'future chef', identifying with the skills and values of the profession and providing a professional character with which to interact with employers and others.

Develop empowering relationships

Helping the young person to manage relationships, with doubters and supporters, is key to guiding the shift. Particularly noted for girls, positive and supportive future relationships that emphasise empowerment (including in formal supervision) help to promote positive identities for future desistance. Family can provide a sense of identity and belonging, nurturing the young person's strengths and reinforcing the importance of their role in the family.

Into the future

Help relapse recovery

Moving on from crime is not always a straightforward journey and may involve relapses. At these points, a young person may not have built sufficient resilience to make positive choices. These are critical times because relapses may shake personal belief that desistance is possible and reinforce a pro-criminal identity. It is important that supporters encourage young people to see any setbacks as temporary rather than evidence of an intractable pro-offending narrative.

Structural support: enabling the shift

The secondary task of resettlement services, after guiding the narrative shift, is to facilitate the structural changes needed for the young person to follow their identified pathway. Structural support addresses barriers to change, prepares the home environment and provides access to services that address multiple problems. For resettlement to be effective and sustained, a comprehensive structural after-care provision is necessary post-release to address the barriers confronting the young person. Areas usually requiring structural support are accommodation, education training and employment and constructive leisure activities.

Into custody

Coordinate planning from start

Case managers should assess the network of possible supporters, including informal supporters. Dedicated resettlement workers should develop a catalogue of local service providers, from multiple sectors, which are available for resettlement support. Such coordination does not happen naturally and must be regarded as a priority by those responsible for resettlement. Family members can be encouraged to act as champions for the young people, helping to ensure that all parties commit to support needed to both guide and enable change.

Focus custody services on release

The primary aim of custodial institutions should be preparation for resettlement. Training plans should take a long-term view rather than focusing on behaviour management within the institution. Temporary release can help to ensure that arrangements are in place for the young person's return to the community, allowing for a graduated return to family life and limiting the worst effects of disorientation and trauma.

Confirm community services before release

Research has shown that, even once identified, engaging the service providers necessary to support effective resettlement can take time. Agencies need to confirm the availability of timely structural support well in advance of release.

Arrange contingency planning

Lack of contingency planning has been an increasingly prominent theme in recent research and inspection reports. If plans fall through, the consequence is invariably firefighting rather than purposeful support. Sentence plans should include contingency planning for at least accommodation, education and health.

Into the community

Ensure flexible and prompt support on release

The period immediately following release has been identified as a window of opportunity during which young people may be particularly motivated to change but are also emotionally vulnerable. Service providers should ensure that support is available immediately on release. Support should be flexible, as imposing rigid requirements on young people at the point of transition can undermine engagement.

Early exit planning

Disengagement is an integral part of the resettlement process and requires management by service providers. There is a crucial need to plan for the support needs of the young person after the end of any contracted support period with any one agency. The withdrawal of informal support should also be considered and planned for.

Into the future

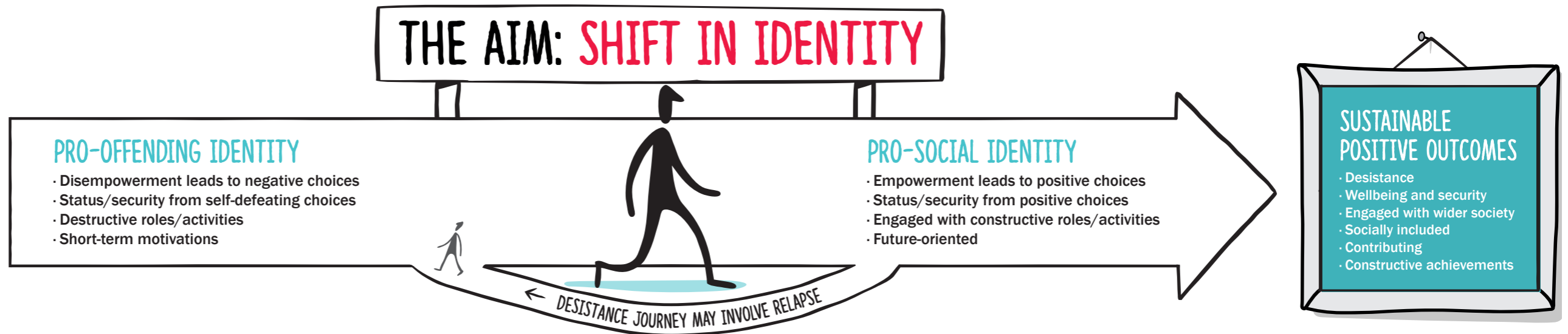
Continue support post-sentence

The most obvious exit transition is the withdrawal of formal supervision by the responsible criminal justice agency, usually at the end of a statutory period. As such, resettlement provision should make arrangements for continued support in required areas of the young person's life once statutory involvement ends.

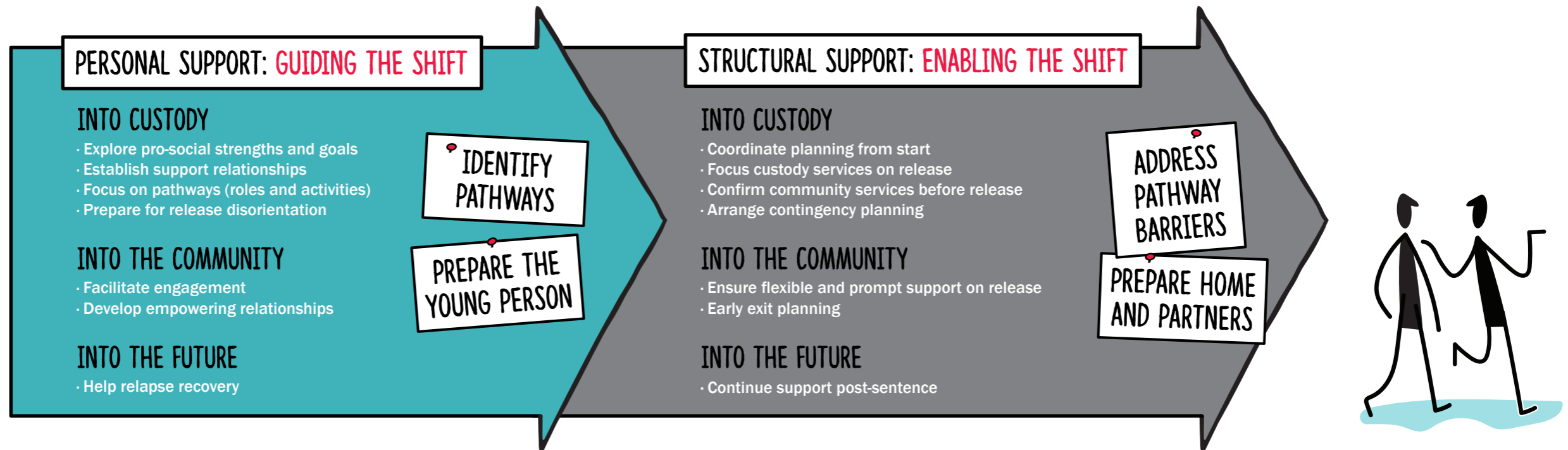
A FRAMEWORK FOR RESETTLEMENT SERVICES

CRIMINOGENIC BACKGROUND

- Vulnerabilities and trauma
- Barriers to social justice
- Disengaged
- Socially excluded
- Offending
- Criminal labelling



THE ROLE OF ALL SERVICES: SUPPORTING THE SHIFT IN IDENTITY



THE HOW: 5 KEY CHARACTERISTICS FOR SUPPORT

1 CONSTRUCTIVE

Centred on identity shift, future-oriented, motivating, strengths-based, empowering

2 CO-CREATED

Inclusive of the young person and their supporters

3 CUSTOMISED

Individual and diverse wraparound support

4 CONSISTENT

Resettlement focus from the start, seamless, enhanced at transitions, stable relationships

5 COORDINATED

Managed widespread partnership across sectors

THE HOW: 5 KEY CHARACTERISTICS FOR SUPPORT

There are characteristics of all resettlement support (covering both personal and structural processes) which research has consistently shown are key to effectiveness and sustainability. The effectiveness of resettlement support is not just dependent on what steps providers take at different stages of the sentence, but how they take them. If interventions demonstrate the following key characteristics, they are more likely to be able to promote a young person's shift in identity and their wider narrative. As such, the likely effectiveness of each package of support overall, and its constituent parts, can be judged in terms of whether it demonstrates all of these five key characteristics.

1 CONSTRUCTIVE

Centred on identity shift, future-oriented, motivating, strengths-based, empowering

Centred on exploring, building and reinforcing a positive identity

The central task of resettlement services should be providing personal and structural support to guide and enable a young person's shift in identity. Therefore, the first and foremost characteristic for any package of support is that all intervention activities are designed to illuminate and facilitate pathways for the desistance journey. This journey for the young person should always be the focus for any planning and thinking around the support.

Interventions should select activities, roles and structural support specifically to build and reinforce the identified positive identity and pathways to it. Service providers should reflect on whether this is the case for each element of their existing resettlement support. Elements of support (like education and training), while perhaps intrinsically beneficial, should never "become ends in themselves";³ they are only likely to lead to sustained engagement and desistance if actively related to the young person's pathway for identity shift.

Future-focused and strengths-based

It is particularly important that interventions avoid any underlining of the previous pro-criminal identity that could lead to recidivism. Although custody itself reinforces that negative labelling, resettlement interventions need to reinforce the alternative positive identity and wider narrative for the future.

"[In the resettlement project] I would make my goals and feel happy with myself. It led me to where I am now."

Interventions should focus less on addressing what the young person has done previously and more on the person themselves, their present difficulties and overcoming them for the future. This means building on the strengths of the young person for them to take into their future. It also means avoiding interventions, including the custodial element, that are concentrated on containing or managing current behaviour.

Empowering and motivating

Interventions should ensure that they help build self-esteem in the young person. This helps to combat the vulnerabilities and disempowerment that often characterise young people in custody, and helps to sustain their motivation to change. Empowerment, which is interrelated with a developing positive identity, will help the young person make constructive choices in relation to their behaviour, recognise their strengths and the worth of their roles.

However, practitioners should be aware that failure to fulfil promises of support can derail the shift in identity by undermining the young person's confidence in a new narrative. Failure to provide support – particularly structural support for identified pathways – can introduce demotivation and disillusionment in the change process for a young person and lead to relapses and reoffending.

3. HM Inspectorate of Probation. (2015). *Joint thematic inspection of resettlement services to children by Youth Offending Teams and partner agencies*. London: HM Inspectorate of Probation.

2

CO-CREATED

Inclusive of the young person and their supporters

Young person as central

The shift in identity is a journey taken by the young person themselves and is dependent on their agency and motivation to change. Their engagement is crucial. As such, the resettlement work should be responsive to opportunities, difficulties and barriers identified by the young person themselves. Active participation can also be part of the process of empowerment – making positive choices, developing trusted relationships with service providers and helping to build self-esteem and a positive identity.

Developing plans with the young person concerned means that they have a stake in their own future and are more likely to comply with their licence after release. A young person's active involvement in their resettlement leads to better outcomes for them, greater job satisfaction for staff and more effective services.

"They spoke to me on my level and provided help by understanding my needs and not overpowering me with demands. They had an empathetic approach and put me first which motivated me to succeed."

Involving informal supporters

Research shows that, when appropriate, families and friends are an important source of support for young people on their resettlement journey. As part of a coordinated package of personal support, the family can help to reinforce each stage of the resettlement process. Providing that the family has been involved in planning and understands the goals and identity that the young person is working towards, they can consistently reinforce the key aspects of these.

Cultural identity can be an important factor in a narrative, especially for young people from particular BAME and faith groups. Interventions need to actively support individuals to engage confidently with their cultures. Where applicable, representatives from each young person's local community should be involved in planning and implementing their resettlement package, with a specific responsibility for helping them to build good personal and community relationships that reflect and reinforce a positive identity. However, it is recognised that there are often barriers to the engagement of family and other informal supporters, which practitioners should address as a priority.

3

CUSTOMISED

Individual and diverse wraparound support

Recognising barriers and responding to diversity

Resettlement planning needs to acknowledge the huge range of diversity in young people's support needs, including the impacts of previous trauma, and the part it plays in their narrative about their place in the world. Tailored interventions should be responsive to each of these needs, which include ethnic, cultural and gender differences. Young people from particularly disadvantaged or discriminated against groups, including girls and those from BAME backgrounds, are likely to need a particular emphasis on empowerment.

In order to build trust and develop meaningful interventions, practitioners need to understand how the young person makes sense of their life and their place within it, including vulnerabilities and perceptions of social injustices which can act as a barrier to the shift in identity. They need to consider the ways in which individual,

cultural, procedural and structural factors mesh to impact upon engagement and outcomes. It is vital that practitioners are able to show their empathy, demonstrating to the young person that they recognise their starting point.

“I think understanding the lives these young people have led is key. Understanding they have rarely been given clear boundaries, they have often been neglected and may feel uncared for and that nobody listens to them. It is important to be persistent in our approach, give them ownership of the work and really show care and understanding. This will assist in making the young person feel worthwhile and will encourage them to engage.”

Individual wraparound support

Each young person’s resettlement journey is different and entails a unique mix of circumstances and vulnerabilities. They will also have different strengths and goals to inform their shift in identity. This means that service providers are required to create an individualised wraparound package of support that facilitates their particular process of narrative shift and addresses underlying issues such as the impact of childhood trauma.

4 CONSISTENT

Resettlement focus from the start, seamless, enhanced at transitions, stable relationships

Support runs throughout the resettlement journey

It is important that resettlement is recognised as a long-term journey for the young person rather than just the act of release from custody. Therefore, any shift in identity requires support at all stages of a sentence and beyond. Resettlement work should not be restricted to the time of release or immediately prior to it.

It is necessary to begin the resettlement process at the beginning of the sentence, if not before, in order to provide time to identify and facilitate pathways prior to release. The support must also continue after the end of sentence in order to sustain and reinforce progress.

All service providers focus on resettlement

It is crucial that all service providers prioritise the personal and structural support required to facilitate the shift in identity. Custody, and custodial services, need to focus on preparation for what will happen in the community.

By the same token, community-based services need to engage with the young person during the custodial stage and help them to prepare for release. Community services need to be arranged well before release in order to prepare the young person and help them engage with a practical pathway for change.

Seamless programme

The resettlement process should be a seamless one that bridges the divide between custody and community, working cohesively towards the same shift in identity. This requires supporters from different agencies working together and exchanging information including between custodial institutions, youth offending teams and other service providers.

Matched aims, targets and training can encourage such joint working. The concept of resettlement as guiding and enabling a shift in identity provides a shared framework on which to focus and a common language.

“I had someone... and they left! They keep leaving... why am I going to make the effort with a new person when they keep going?”

Consistent formal support relationships

Stable support relationships are important for trust and engagement, requiring early formation and consistency where possible. Where those support relationships are with institution staff, trust and engagement can be protected by not moving young people between custodial institutions.

5

COORDINATED

Managed widespread partnership across sectors

Requiring partners across sectors

The complex and multiple nature of young people’s needs means that they are likely to require support from multiple agencies. The wraparound package of support needed to both guide and enable a shift in identity requires partnership and coordination of support from across sectors including statutory and voluntary agencies and employers in the private sector. Some elements of support are dependent on others, such as an education placement being dependent on where the young person will be living. The importance of coordination and information sharing is key.

Arranging partnership working and healthy relationships with community representatives can help young people to cultivate a sense of belonging and develop effective strategies for dealing with potential future discrimination.

“There needs to be a better degree of communication and connection between the different groups involved in the varying phases of the release process.”

Brokering partnerships

Such a widespread partnership requires coordination at a management as well as case level in order to map and maintain a menu of support available locally. Successful resettlement programmes require dedicated resettlement staff to broker the engagement of partners across sectors, involving high-level buy-in, joint planning and information sharing. This can result in a more streamlined and focused resettlement practice, and an understanding across partners of roles and responsibilities for delivery. Having a resettlement broker means that someone has a wider view of the young person’s life and needs and reduces the number of times a young person has to tell the same story to different members of staff. Those individuals who work directly with young people can help to join up the dots for individual clients, by liaising regularly as required with workers from other agencies.

“Over the past five years, Nacro and its partners have established an extraordinary foundation of evidence and learning for the effectiveness of resettlement practice in youth justice – a resource that will, no doubt, be invaluable in efforts to improve outcomes for young people leaving custody.”

Dr Phillip Lee MP, the Minister with responsibility for youth justice, speaking at a BYC event

A full version of this report, which includes references and suggestions for further reading, can be found at www.beyondyouthcustody.net/publications



BYC publications

RESEARCH REPORTS

- Custody to community: how young people cope with release
- Engaging young people in resettlement
- Gang-involved young people: custody and beyond
- Lessons from Youth in Focus
- Resettlement of girls and young women
- Resettlement of young people leaving custody
- Trauma and young offenders
- Supporting the shift: framework for the effective resettlement of young people leaving custody

PRACTITIONER GUIDES

- Custody to community: supporting young people to cope with release
- Developing trauma-informed resettlement for young custody leavers
- Engaging young people in resettlement
- Ethnicity, faith and culture in resettlement
- Gang-involved young people: custody and beyond
- Participatory approaches for young people in resettlement
- Recognising diversity in resettlement
- Resettlement of girls and young women
- The role of family support in resettlement
- Young offenders and trauma: experience and impact



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