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# Resettlement of young people leaving custody : lessons from the literature update October 2015

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**Beyond**  
YOUTH CUSTODY

**RESETTLEMENT  
OF YOUNG PEOPLE  
LEAVING CUSTODY  
LESSONS FROM THE LITERATURE**

**UPDATE: OCTOBER 2015**

**Dr Kelly Lockwood and  
Professor Neal Hazel**



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## Introduction

In April 2013, Beyond Youth Custody (BYC) published an extensive literature review on the resettlement (re-entry) of children and young adults leaving custody (Bateman et al, 2013). As new publications are constantly added to the literature, the shape of the evidence base continues to change. Therefore, BYC is committed to publishing and disseminating regular supplements that take account of the latest developments in resettlement policy and practice.

This review explores relevant publications that have been circulated since the most recent update was published in July 2015 (Lockwood and Hazel, 2015). It aims to ensure that practitioners and policy makers involved with the resettlement of young people have access to the latest available lessons from research, policy and practice.

This update will begin by considering the trends in imprisonment and challenges for resettlement of children and young people, before going on to explore recent research findings, with consistent themes of 'education', 'health' and 'safety' identified.

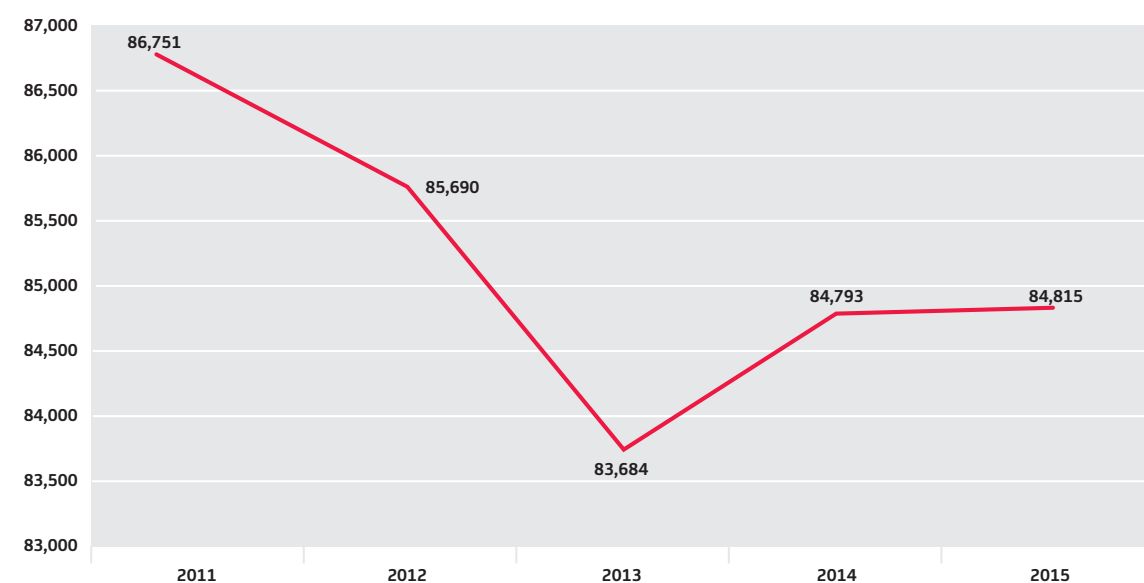
## Trends in imprisonment and challenges for resettlement

### Overall prison population

The overall prison population in England and Wales has risen dramatically over the last three decades. The number of prisoners in England and Wales reached its record high of 88,179 prisoners on 2 December 2011 (Berman, 2013).

However, the population has levelled off somewhat in the past few years. Looking at a snapshot of the prison population on the last Friday in each September (Figure 1) shows a drop from that high point for two consecutive years, totalling a decrease of 3.5%. However, the population once again increased by 1.3% between September 2013 and September 2014, followed by a very slight increase in the past two years. So, the figure of 84,815 for this end of September shows an increase on the past two years, but is still fewer prisoners than 2012. This appears to indicate a steadying population but with a slight upward trend moving forwards.

**Figure 1: Overall custodial population at end September 2011-2015**



Data compiled from: Ministry of Justice (2011; 2012; 2013; 2014b; 2015b)

If immigration removal centres are included, the total number of people held in National Offender Management Service establishments at the end of September 2015 is 85,892 – fewer than the 88,700 predicted by the Ministry of Justice in autumn last year (Ministry of Justice, 2014a). Those same government projections estimate that the prison population will continue to increase to 90,200 by June 2020, although the possible range provided is wide – anywhere between 81,400 and 98,900 (Ministry of Justice, 2014). Given that the average prison place now costs £36,237 per year, this would pose a substantial challenge for a government committed to austerity measures. That challenge could play out in a number of different scenarios (or a combination) over the next few years:

1. The custodial estate is immune to austerity and figures continue to rise
2. Prisons become more efficient (or thrifty) in their regimes
3. Practice is successfully 'transformed' in a way that ensures reduced recidivism
4. Criminal justice agencies divert a larger proportion of offenders (and those on remand) from prison

Each of these situations has different implications for resettlement service providers. The first would suggest that the burden on service providers will rise, meaning that the individualised service identified as necessary for effective resettlement becomes more difficult (Goodfellow et al 2015), raising recidivism and fuelling an even greater rise in the prison population. The second scenario may again mean even less resource for resettlement in and out of the custodial estate and the same viscous cycle. The third would, we would argue, need to involve improved resettlement along the lines of the model and principles proposed by BYC publications. The fourth scenario, which we have seen with the youth justice system, could see a dramatic fall in the custodial population, but would present challenges for resettlement as those left would be likely to display an entrenched pattern of offending and have a higher concentration of complex needs to tackle.

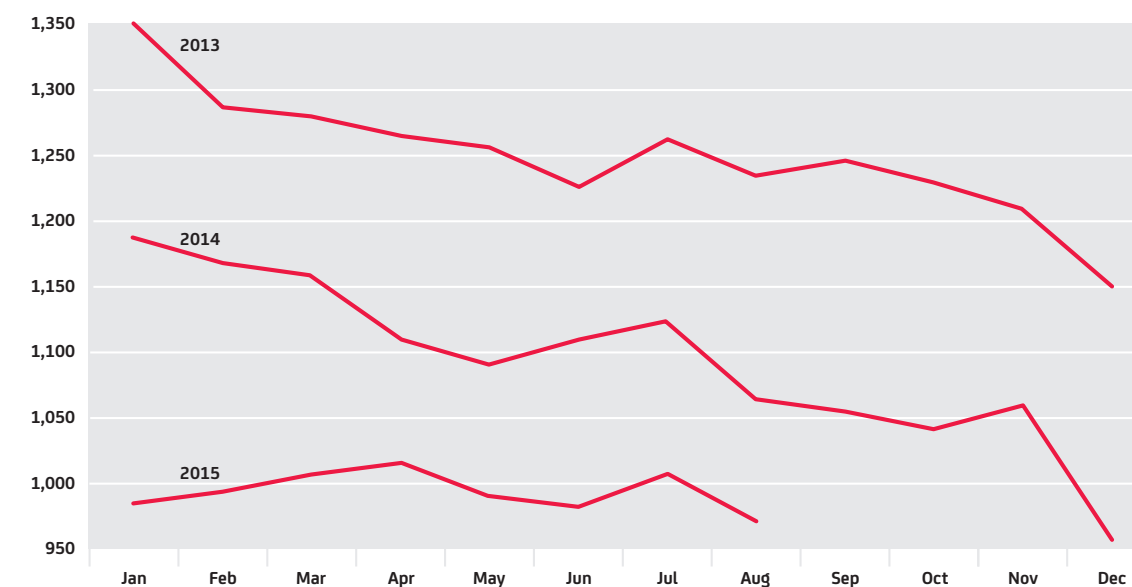
However, it is interesting to note that of the three possible sentencing projections presented by the Ministry of Justice (2014), the one closest to the current trend (its lowest figure or best case scenario) has September 2015 as the peak in its prison population. That would suggest that the current upward trend indicated by the last couple of years will reverse from this point forward, whereas the other sentencing scenarios predict a continued rise. We will continue to monitor the prison population against these government projections in future BYC literature review updates.

### Children in custody

Analysis of data in relation to children in custody in England and Wales reveals a different trend to adults. Initially mirroring the adult population, there was a rise of more than 85% in the number of children sentenced to custody between 1992 and 2002 (Pickford and Dugmore, 2012). However, from 2002 the number began to decline, and decreased more rapidly from 2008 onwards (Bateman, 2015). A further 20% reduction in the children's custodial population was witnessed in 2014, representing a 76% reduction since the end of the last century (Bateman, 2015).

Bateman (2015) notes that the largest reductions recently have been in short term sentences, but with some reductions also witnessed in longer-term sentences. The use of remand in youth custody also continues to drop, with a 5.4% decrease witnessed in the period between 2013/14 and 2014/15 (Puffett, 2015).

**Figure 2: Child custodial population: annual trends 2012-2015**



Compiled from data provided in Youth Justice Board (2015)

In August 2015, the child custody population was 971. This reflects a decrease of 32 children from the previous month and a decrease of 97 (or 9%) from the previous year (Youth Justice Board, 2015). Although still not as low as the 957 figure seen last December, this August does see the fewest children incarcerated in any month since then. In addition, as Figure 2 shows, the trend since April is back in line with the seasonal trajectories of the last few years, after an atypical rise at the start of the year, which we noted in our July update (Lockwood and Hazel, 2015). The next few months will show whether the custody figures continue to better last year and drop below last December's record low or have 'bottomed out'.

The recent fall in child custody numbers is generally attributed to increased diversionary schemes at different stages of the youth justice system. However, statistics published by the Department for Education (2015) highlight increasing associations between care histories and custody. Penelope Gibbs, chair of the Standing Committee for Youth Justice, argues that "children in care [are] more likely to be criminalised for quite minor offences [and] are more entrenched in serious offending" (Puffett, 2015a). More than half of girls and a quarter of boys in custody are looked after children (Prison Reform Trust, 2011). In total, 36.8% of children across YOIs have been looked-after (Department for Education, 2015); this represents the highest percentage in five years. This rise coincides with legislative changes that classifies young people in custody as 'looked after'; however, the impact this has on these numbers remains unclear (Puffett, 2015a). The Howard League for Penal Reform has recently called for a renewed focus on early intervention in government policy. They point to the proportion of looked after children in custody as a reminder that welfare problems are at the heart of much offending in childhood (Puffett, 2015a).

### Young adults in custody

The young adult (18-24 years) prison population for England and Wales has also fallen, although the reduction had been more modest in comparison to children (Bateman and Hazel, 2014), until 2010 when a more pronounced decline began (Bateman, 2015). From 2010 to 2014 there was a more significant decline of more than a third in the young adult population, and that trend has continued.

The custodial population of 18-24 year olds has fallen to fewer than 12,000 for the first time in recent years. The total of 11,939 young adults incarcerated at the end of June 2015 was 7% fewer than the previous June (see Table 1). Furthermore, the decline is gaining pace – the population for June 2014 had been just 5.1% fewer than the previous June.

**Table 1: Young adult custody by age – June 2013-June 2015 (30th of each month)**

	Jun 13	Sept 13	Dec 13	Mar 14	Jun 14	Sep 14	Dec 14	Mar 15	Jun 15
<b>18-20 years</b>									
<b>Males</b>	6,084	6,044	5,727	5,759	5,533	5,306	5,030	4,993	4,879
<b>Females</b>	188	189	188	180	168	167	172	177	171
<b>Total</b>	6,272	6,233	5,915	5,939	5,701	5,473	5,202	5,170	5,050
<b>21-24 years</b>									
<b>Males</b>	12,361	12,293	12,014	12,136	12,021	12,037	11,614	11,601	11,573
<b>Females</b>	461	467	420	459	452	435	406	406	366
<b>Total</b>	12,822	12,760	12,434	12,595	12,473	12,472	12,020	12,007	11,939
<b>Young Adults</b>									
<b>Total</b>	19,094	18,993	18,349	18,534	18,174	17,510	17,222	17,177	16,989

Compiled from Ministry of Justice (2014c) and Ministry of Justice (2015c:1.3)

Over the last year, the reduction for 18-20 year olds (12.9%) has been much greater than for those aged 21-24 (5.5%). Indeed, the numbers of 18-20 year olds in custody is now falling faster than for those under 18

years of age. As we noted in our previous update (Lockwood and Hazel, 2015), one theory is that we are seeing the trends for reductions in child custody, and diversion from criminal prosecution that has fuelled that, filtering through to young adults. However, as noted above, fewer people in custody will also mean a concentration of those with more complex problems to tackle for sustainable resettlement.

### Gender and ethnicity differences in custody population trends

Our previous update noted that the custodial population for girls under 18-years-old in the year to May 2015 had fallen to a greater extent than for boys, which is a longer-term trend (Lockwood and Hazel, 2015). That gender difference continued in the more recently published figures to August 2015. Whereas the number of boys in custody was down 9% on the previous year (down from 1,024 to 939), the number of girls in custody dropped by as much as 38% (from 44 to 32) (Youth Justice Board, 2015).

We can see from Table 1 (above) that a very similar gender difference exists for in the trends for 21-24 year olds. Whereas the number of young men in custody at this age was 4.5% fewer in June 2015 compared with the previous year, the figure for young women was 23% (from 452 to 366).

However, the middle age category – 18-20 year olds – does not show the same pattern of a faster decrease in custody numbers for females (Table 1). In fact, whereas there were 13% fewer young men aged 18-20 years old in custody in June 2015 than a year previous (4,879 compared with 5,533), there were actually three more young women (from 168 to 171).

In relation to ethnicity, figures for August 2015 saw a continuation of the long-term trend of the White child custody population falling more quickly than for Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) children (Youth Justice Board, 2015). Whereas the reduction for under 18s identified as White was 13% (from 639 to 568), it was just 8% (from 428 to 395) for those identified as Asian, Black, Mixed and Other.

## Developments in the custodial estate and implications for resettlement

### Safety

Drawing on findings from the HM Inspectorate of Prisons Annual Report 2014-15 and the independent Harris Review, the BYC literature review update published in July 2015 highlighted increased concerns for the safety of young people in custodial institutions. A further unannounced inspection of YOI Cookham Wood has continued to highlight concerns relating to increased violence and use of restraint in custody.

As the population has decreased, the rates of violence within custodial institutions have escalated, including assaults between young offenders and incidents of physical restraint by staff (Bateman, 2015). The unannounced inspection of Cookham Wood brought attention to each of these areas. The inspection highlighted that Cookham Wood "was managing an increasingly complex group of boys" with "significant levels of poor behaviour and violence in all areas" (HM Inspectorate of Prisons, 2015:28). Violent incidents were identified as 'too high', with an increase in the number of boys requiring outside hospital attention after attacks. Since the publication of the report a further serious assault against a prison officer, resulting in hospitalisation, has been reported in the media (Cox, 2015).

The inspection report also indicated that incidents of restraint were high and three children had required treatment in hospital following restraint by staff. The report raised concerns about the use of pain compliance techniques in three incidents, but noted that staff were being trained in the new restraint procedure Minimising and Managing Physical Restraint (MMPR) (as discussed in previous literature reviews) that emphasises de-escalation techniques. Chief inspector of prisons, Nick Hardwick, said that faced with a larger, more challenging population and significant staffing issues, Cookham Wood reflected systemic problems across YOIs (HM Inspectorate of Prisons, 2015).

To maintain order and safety within the estate – particularly in institutions with a high prevalence of violence – isolation and segregation are frequently used. In October 2015, the Children’s Commissioner published a report based on empirical research which aimed to “assess the nature, prevalence, causes and impact of isolation and solitary confinement in England” (Children’s Commissioner, 2015:2). The report indicated that around a third of children experience isolation and segregation, with some spending up to 22 hours a day in isolation. Children most likely to experience isolation are: Black and mixed heritage children, children with a recorded disability, looked after children and children assessed as a suicide risk. Kate Morris, the Director of Operations for the Youth Justice Board, maintains that “isolation should only be used in circumstances where a young person poses a risk to themselves, to staff or to other young people” (Youth Justice Board, 2015a). However, the report indicated that certain other factors influenced whether isolation was used, including:

- lower staff to child ratios
- the building structure
- size and density of population
- institutional culture

The report highlights the mental health implications of isolation and potential impact on resettlement. Citing BYC’s model for effective resettlement, it argues that isolating children in this way is effectively putting them in ‘deep freeze’ and inhibiting any rehabilitative processes, including education programmes. A “radical reform” to “the environment and the approach needed to improve the outcomes and life chances of children in custody and to reduce re-offending” was called for (Children’s Commissioner, 2015:2).

### **Contract award announced for Rainsbrook and Medway secure training centres (STCs)**

On 4 September 2015, it was announced that MTCnovo and G4S Care and Justice Services (UK) Limited have been awarded contracts to deliver the custodial service at Rainsbrook STC and Medway STC respectively for the next five years (Youth Justice Board, 2015c).

The decision to award the Medway STC contract to G4S Care was a controversial one (Guardian, 2015); the contract was won despite losing the contract to run Rainsbrook STC, a few months after the publication of a critical inspection report into that STC (Ofsted, 2015). Ofsted rated Rainsbrook as ‘inadequate’ and suggested that staff conduct resulted in young people being caused distress and humiliation (Ofsted, 2015). The report also noted poor decision-making by senior managers leading to delays in young people receiving essential medical treatment.

However, it should be noted that under G4S management, Medway STC was specifically praised for good practice in a recent thematic inspection report on resettlement in relation to the way it worked with YOT staff to build a tailored mobility (supervised release on temporary licence) plan that helped raise self-esteem and prepare a child for release (HM Inspectorate of Probation, 2015).

### **Review of the youth justice system announced**

On 11 September the Secretary of State for Justice, the Rt Hon Michael Gove, announced a review into the youth justice system. Gove acknowledged and welcomed the significant reduction in the number of young people entering the youth justice system but brought attention to the limited progress made in reducing reoffending (Ministry of Justice, 2015). The review is being conducted by Charlie Taylor, former Chief Executive of the National College of Teaching and Leadership. It intends to consider evidence and current practice in preventing youth crime and rehabilitating young offenders, and to explore whether the current arrangements are fit for purpose. Chair of the Youth Justice Board, Lord McNally, has welcomed the review, suggesting:

“A strategic review of the youth justice system is essential... to ensure that the impressive successes of the last 15 years are recognised, preserved and resourced, and that real opportunities to deliver meaningful reform are grasped” (Youth Justice Board, 2015d).

While the review is welcomed, Bateman (2015) suggests that it is unlikely to increase the much needed resources to support children in trouble. Further criticisms have related to the exclusion of key issues, such as the age of criminal responsibility. The current minimum age of criminal responsibility in England and Wales is the lowest of all European Union Members. Commentators have raised concerns that the current age does not take account of emotional, mental and intellectual maturity and fails to prioritise the best interests of the child (Children's Rights Alliance, 2014).

### **Education**

Appropriate education and provision of skills is imperative to facilitate the successful rehabilitation and resettlement of children and young people leaving custody (Little, 2015). Education in prison has recently become central to the policy agenda of government. As of 17 August 2015, YOIs are required to ensure that all under 18 year-olds in custody receive 30 hours of education. The Chief Executive of Prisoners’ Education Trust (PET), Rod Clark, welcomed the recognition of the importance of education in “helping young people gain the skills and attitudes to work towards more positive futures” (Prisoners' Education Trust, 2015). However, he cautioned against an increase in time spent in a formal classroom setting as this may not be the appropriate approach for all young people, particularly those with “complex needs and serious mental health issues”. Rod Clark goes on to advocate “tailored learning plans... to engage effectively with learners who may be harder to reach.”

Of the 30 hours of mandatory education, 60% is protected time as part of a new 'core day' with no avoidable absences from education permitted; the remaining 40% is 'unprotected', during which the below approved Permitted Absences could take place (Youth Justice Board, 2015):

- Sickness
- Healthcare
- Courts
- Looked After Child Reviews (LACR)
- Legal and official visits
- Police Production
- Searches
- Chapel Service
- Temporary Release
- Mandatory Drug Testing (or "MDT")
- Development of plan for reengagement of a Young Person
- External appointments
- IEP (Incentive and Earned Privilege) Reviews
- NOMS interventions
- Incident Response
- Discharge/Transfer
- Case Management
- Focus Groups
- ACCT review
- Family Days

It is expected that all public sector establishments will adhere to the 60/40 split in order to secure young people’s education. However, the split will not apply to young people during their induction period (the first 10 days in an establishment). To ensure daily access to legal advice, further exceptions include young people held on remand and complex cases where significant legal advice may be required. Enhanced Support Units



will also be expected to adhere to the 60/40 split, with recognition that the support needs of the young people will take precedence (YJB, 2015).

While the focus on education is welcomed by many commentators, anecdotal feedback from those working with young people in custody suggests that these reforms may impede resettlement work. Owing to a lack of permissible absences from allotted education time and the impact on prison resources, such as staffing levels and available rooms, it is becoming increasingly difficult to facilitate such visits during normal office hours. In order to make the early arrangements for support on release that we know are essential for effective resettlement, it may be necessary for community service providers and the custodial estate to explore arrangements for more visits in the evenings and at weekends.

A review has also been commissioned for the education services in prisons for those over 18 years old. The review has been commissioned by Michael Gove, Secretary of State for Justice, and will be chaired by Dame Sally Coates, Director of Academies South for United Learning. The review will examine the scope and quality of current provision in adult prisons and in young offender institutions for 18-20 year olds and is due to report by March 2016 (Ministry of Justice, 2015a). Given the disproportionate number of women in prison who have an education deficit and fewer qualifications (Bateman and Hazel, 2014b), it is imperative that a gender sensitive approach to the review is adopted that explores the specific educational needs of young women.

## Research Findings

The previous review of literature (Lockwood and Hazel, 2015) highlighted the particular vulnerabilities and safety of young people in custody. Recent published literature continues to highlight this as an ongoing area of concern.

### Pathways to suicide attempts among male offenders

Suicide is common among offenders and release from prison is considered to be a particularly vulnerable time, with many prisoners at increased risk of homelessness, unemployment and mental illness (Byng et al, 2015). Byng et al (2015:936) note that despite “the risk of suicide for male offenders leaving prison being eight times the national average”, the challenge of understanding and preventing suicide amongst this group has historically received limited academic attention.

Of the 35 participants, nine had made two or more suicide attempts. This particular group often described living with severe mental distress. Suicide was constructed as a means of ending chronic and enduring mental pain. The narrated accounts of suicide illustrated a feeling of restricted sense of self and were often inextricably linked to events in the past.

Those who had made one attempt at suicide primarily talked of responding to a particular adverse event such as the loss of a child. Unlike those who were grouped as making multiple attempts, this group constructed their suicide attempt as 'stupid and not to be repeated'. This group also discussed living with emotional distress; however, unlike those who made multiple attempts, this group were not overwhelmed and consumed by events in their past but expressed an ability to reflect on and learn from past experiences.

Although participants who had not attempted suicide also described equally problematic histories, they constructed themselves as self-reliant and emotionally well most of the time. Portraying a restricted sense of agency, Byng et al (2015) suggest that this sub group had similarities with those who had made multiple attempts on their life. Whilst suicide was 'out of bounds', iterative use of substances to manage the emotional distress was more readily reconciled.

Byng et al (2015) note a clear distinction between those participants who had made one attempt at suicide and those who made multiple attempts. The single attempters portrayed themselves as having more sense

of their own choices in their lives at the time of interview and were determined not to make any further attempts. The multiple attempters, however, expressed low level control which Byng et al (2015) identify as representing restricted agency often related to past traumas, negative identities and constraining social structures. Byng et al (2015) conclude that it is essential to understand individual patterns of agency (or sense of self) in terms of suicide attempts and not just focus on individual risk factor profile. In order to address the complex needs of those leaving custody, an assertive engagement model with co-ordinated input from resettlement teams is advocated.

### Mental health

Aiming to explore the factors that predict reincarceration of young people with a mental health problem, Kasinathan (2015) conducted a clinical audit in a Juvenile Justice Centre in New South Wales, Australia. The clinical audit examined 51 health files and follow-up data of young people in custody who had been treated for mental disorder in the centre and referred to community mental health services upon release from custody.

Previous generic studies of young people in custody have found that younger age, ethnicity, substance use and/or disrupted education are related to rapid reincarceration. However, this study identified having a serious mental illness as the strongest predictor. Treatment as part of resettlement was found to be a protective factor, with a positive correlation found between the time spent in treatment and the length of time before reincarceration.

However, several barriers were identified as impediments to engagement with treatment. The research notes that young people leaving custody straddle adolescent and adult mental health services which may create engagement barriers. Poor familial resources, stigma and side effects of medication were also considered to be factors that exacerbate poor engagement with mental health services. The study concludes that it is critical for resettlement service providers to focus on ensuring attentive post-release care to support young people leaving custody with a mental illness.

Coincidentally, a research article from the USA has warned that mental health and substance abuse services need to do more to support those (adults and children) leaving prison (Frazier et al, 2015). Similar to Kasinathan (2015), the researchers note that mental illness and substance abuse – often co-existing disorders – place those leaving custody at a high risk of recidivism and reincarceration. They express concern that there is no continuum of care when people leave custody, in part because of laws and policies preventing sharing of patient information in that country. The article concludes that service providers need to form partnerships to share referrals and provide healthcare services.

A second journal article from the United States has reached the similar conclusion that service provider partnerships are necessary to help people leaving prison with substance abuse and mental health problems (Hamilton and Belenko, 2015). Although not looking at recidivism, the researchers examined the relationship between pre-release services and health treatment in the community. They found that both a needs assessment while in custody and pre-release services facilitated post-release treatment access. Like Frazier et al (2015), they argued for an integrated delivery system, this time between justice agencies and public health providers, focusing particularly on behavioural health.

### Children in custody: coping strategies to survive adversities

Recent research on how children sentenced for violent offences experience their time in custody has raised a number of findings relevant to resettlement that are worth exploring in some depth here (Holligan, 2015). Central to the study's conclusions is first that custody presents a number of adversities that exacerbate the children's vulnerabilities and inhibit both wellbeing and resettlement, which is well established in the literature (Bateman et al, 2013). However, the second central concept is that, in coping with the adversities of prison life, the children demonstrate coping skills that service providers should already be tapping into.

The children displayed immense stoicism and resilience, yet the Criminal Justice System does not capitalise on these assets to support resettlement and recidivism. Through life story interviews, the researcher identified four key themes that explore these concepts:

- **Separation and anxiety**

Consistent with previous research, Holligan identifies separation from family and loved ones as a key pain of imprisonment. As highlighted in the forthcoming BYC Families and Resettlement guide, imprisonment can damage family life and relationships, exacerbating emotional vulnerabilities of the young person. Holligan suggests “the separation pains of incarceration place strain on social ties with those on the outside” giving rise to anxiety and anger in the young person (2015:396). Without support to negotiate, maintain and repair familial relationships, the children may react with anger and anxiety within the prison. This can have a detrimental impact for rehabilitation and resettlement.

- **Mundane coping strategies**

The research notes that most participants within the study were confined to their cells for 23 hours every day. In order to manage their confinement, the young people often developed ritualistic coping strategies, paying close attention to the time of day as an organising framework to manage their confinement. The research identifies the stoicism, problem solving strategies and capacity for life planning demonstrated within these strategies. However, consistent with Hasley (2007) who identified a sense of 'pointlessness' in young people's conceptualisation of their imprisonment, Holligan (2015) suggests that in talking about managing their time, the young people did not engage with their confinement as moral repair or rehabilitation. Such conceptualisations are therefore unlikely to engender the shift in identity which is considered as critical for resettlement (Goodfellow et al, 2015).

- **Prison as refuge**

As highlighted in BYC reports (Goodfellow et al, 2015), the research presents relationships as being key to facilitating the required shift in identity away from crime to ensure effective resettlement. Prison was identified as a refuge from their outside lives, providing positive role models in the format of 'older screws'. However, Holligan draws on the importation model to explore the way in which 'stuff' from the outside world is brought into the prison, such as 'gang conflicts' and other forms of symbolic distinction. The prison environment is seen to reproduce the cultures of violence. Prison subcultures therefore facilitate the maintenance of bonds with their criminal allegiances and their own criminal identity, reinforcing networks and cutting potentially protective human ties, facilitating the readjustment on release to typically high crime community of origin.

- **Pecking order**

Violence has historically been highlighted as a major dimension of prison subcultures. Sykes's classic study (1958) suggested that violence plays a central role in stabilising prison order. With other more traditional forms restricted, violence is used to gain symbolic capital. Holligan (2015) highlights how violence is used to gain respect and reputation in the threatening prison environment. However, the research goes on to explore the way in which violence is also used within the prison environment to overcome historical experiences of hurt, shame and rejection.

Overall, Holligan concludes that the custodial environment perpetuates offending trajectories. Whilst young men in prison demonstrate immense stoicism and resilience in coping with the adversities of prison life, a more rehabilitative culture is required to promote positive desistance outcomes.

### **The views of children on education in a young offender institution**

Coinciding with the review of education in prisons, a new research study has explored the perspectives of children and young people in a YOI in relation to education provision. While the education of children in custody has become a central policy agenda of government recently, Little (2015) argues that minimal attention has been given to the exploration from the perspective of children experiencing education inside prison.

Education is one of the Youth Justice Board's identified 'resettlement pathways' (Youth Justice Board, 2014). The main aim of education in custody for children and young people is to provide “suitable and sustainable education, training and employment throughout their sentence and beyond” (Youth Justice Board, 2014: 4). However, Ofsted (2010) have found that children often do not have satisfactory education plans on arrival to or upon leaving custody.

Consistent with previous research, this study found that negative experiences of education were common. However, there was a recurring theme among the young people that education was key to their perceived successful resettlement. Restricted choice and practical barriers were identified as key themes that prevented children's meaningful engagement in education. Little (2015) notes that choice is important to facilitate children's engagement. However, the issue of ‘meaningful choice’ was often prohibited. Many respondents identified being given a choice about which courses they wanted to attend and had strong preferences. However, options were significantly restricted by the type of course available at the time. For the minority of children in custody who already had qualifications such as GCSEs, choice was even further constrained. With often limited access to a suitably qualified tutor, children in these circumstances were often referred to self-directed distance learning. However, many participants indicated that they had limited confidence to contemplate or motivation to complete this form of education and it was therefore not always a viable option.

Concentration was identified as a barrier preventing children and young people in custody from engaging with meaningful education. Disruptive peers often impeded focus in education in the prison environment, particularly where participants were concerned for their own safety. Concentration was also restricted owing to anxieties over other issues which were perceived as being more immediate such as their own mental health or concerns over family issues. While education was recognised as key to their successful resettlement, paradoxically, concerns over resettlement, such as employment and accommodation, impacted their ability to concentrate on education. Little (2015) suggests that such concerns affect how children feel about themselves, their lives and their perceptions and motivations about education and learning. A more holistic and integrated approach to resettlement and education is therefore required to ensure positive outcomes for children and young people.

The researchers identify some interesting considerations to better facilitate engagement with education for children and young people in custody. However, as acknowledged by the researchers, this study is limited to one YOI holding young males. Further consideration is needed to understand the specific educational needs of girls and young women, whose offending, criminalisation, resettlement needs and responses to education are distinct from boys. The research highlighted that previous educational experiences, mental health and family relationships all impact on engagement with education. In comparison to boys in custody, girls are more likely to come from seriously deprived backgrounds with turbulent familial relationships and have specific mental health, emotional and educational needs (Bateman and Hazel, 2014b). While education both inside and outside of prison has historically facilitated the perpetuation of gender stereotypes, it can also be a focus for change (Centre for Youth and Criminal Justice, 2015). Therefore, gender specific educational services which recognise girls' distinct learning needs and styles are imperative to support the resettlement of girls and young women from custody.



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