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# Engaging young people in resettlement: research report

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**Beyond**  
YOUTH CUSTODY

**ENGAGING  
YOUNG PEOPLE  
IN RESETTLEMENT  
RESEARCH REPORT**



LOTTERY FUNDED

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# 1. Introduction

Young people in custody have a range of complex needs and are among the most vulnerable in society (Jacobson et al, 2010). The delivery of resettlement provision, aimed at improving future life chances and reducing reoffending, is accordingly a complex and challenging endeavour which requires a coordinated and holistic approach (Bateman et al, 2013a). It is clear from the literature that one of the prerequisites of effective intervention is that young people are fully engaged in the resettlement process (Bateman et al, 2013a). As Smith (2006) has argued, any programme, no matter how embedded in the evidence of 'what works', can only have the desired effect if it is successfully implemented, and successful implementation is dependent on engagement. Yet the knowledge base in relation to the engagement of disadvantaged and marginalised young people, and in particular those in conflict with the law and with complex needs, is underdeveloped (Prior and Mason, 2010; Stephenson et al, 2011).

This research report attempts to contribute to an understanding of effective engagement in a resettlement context. It is one of a series of thematic research reports produced as part of the Beyond Youth Custody (BYC) programme, under the Big Lottery Fund's Youth in Focus (YIF) programme. YIF aims to engender positive change in the lives of vulnerable young people, with a particular focus on young people leaving custody, care leavers and young carers. BYC is one of three England-wide learning and awareness projects that work to develop effective policy and practice in each of the three YIF strands. Focusing on the young offenders' strand, BYC exists to advance knowledge and promote positive resettlement for young people making the transition from custody to the community and beyond in order to improve outcomes.

This report synthesises findings from previous research on engaging disaffected young people and considers the implications of those findings for work with young people in the criminal justice system and, in particular, those leaving custody. This contextual information is supplemented by the findings of a small-scale study designed to elicit the views of staff in the 15 resettlement projects funded through the YIF programme. The intention of the study is to enhance the existing literature in this area by drawing on the practice knowledge and expertise of those working in the YIF programme who deliver services to this particular group of service users. It also provides a mechanism whereby the different professional perceptions of engagement across the YIF projects can be shared. This approach, combining an analysis of projects' experience with findings from the literature, will also be used for future thematic research. BYC hopes that such an approach will facilitate shared learning across resettlement services for young people and contribute to the development of evidence-based resettlement practice that builds upon the learning of professionals working in the field.

## 2. Methodology

The first element of this research is a literature review that draws on a previous study conducted by one of the authors on engaging disaffected young people (Hazel, 2003), updating and extending that earlier work. The search for sources focused on academic studies that pertain to the engagement of marginalised young people in the criminal justice system and outside of it, but also included 'grey literature', such as policy documents and good practice guidance dealing with key areas of interest.

Searches were carried out through academic databases and the internet using various combinations of the following search terms:

- 'Young person', 'young people', 'youth', 'child', 'children', 'service user'
- 'Engagement', 'engaging', 'participation', 'relationships with staff'
- 'Hard to reach', 'disaffected', 'disadvantaged', 'marginalised', 'disaffected', 'socially excluded'
- 'Offending', 'youth justice', 'criminal justice', 'involuntary client'

No explicit criteria for inclusion were established but the focus was on texts that appeared most relevant to the engagement of young people leaving custody. The review was not purposefully limited to English language sources, but all texts cited were written in English. No limitations were placed on the date of production of sources, but the large majority of texts included in the review were written within the last 20 years. The selected literature was analysed to identify the principal themes that emerge in relation to engaging marginalised young people.

The second element of the study is an online survey of practitioners working in YIF resettlement projects. The questionnaire consisted of a mixture of closed questions (using a four or five point Likert scale) and open questions that allowed a free text response. The topic areas were derived from an initial reading of the literature and are broadly reflected in the structure of this report.

A link to the survey was emailed to contacts in the projects who were invited to circulate it to other team members. A total of 20 responses were received during the survey period (May to June 2013), representing 10 of the 15 YIF projects in the resettlement strand.

Given the small scale of the survey, responses to closed questions were analysed simply in terms of numerical frequencies. Free text responses were themed largely by the section of the questionnaire to which they related. Whilst it is acknowledged that the sample is a small one, the responses provide added depth to the general principles derived from the literature.

## 3. The meaning of engagement

### The ambiguities of engagement

While the importance of engagement is widely recognised, its meaning is not always fully articulated. Research confirms, for example, that youth offending team (YOT) practitioners have struggled to identify what it refers to (Ipsos MORI, 2010). Part of the difficulty is that the term ‘engagement’ may mean different things in different contexts (Fredricks et al, 2004). In particular, it is common for the expression to be used in two distinct, if related, ways.

First, it can refer to the process whereby the young person engages with a project or an intervention. In this sense, engagement is a state that is internal to the young person – albeit that it may have external, behavioural manifestations. Second, however, engagement can refer to the mechanisms and strategies used by service providers to engage young people with project activities. Whilst it does address both of these issues, the current study focuses largely on engagement in the latter sense, as a means of promoting the former: it is concerned with the ways in which practitioners might enhance the prospects that a young person will become actively involved with resettlement provision, that he or she will become ‘engaged’ (in the first sense).

Such activities may be different to, and should be distinguished from, programmes of intervention that are designed to effect behavioural change or, in the resettlement context, to reduce offending. They are, however, a prerequisite for any programme of intervention to be successful. As Mason and Prior (2008: 12) put it:

For practitioners, the implication is that specific skills and knowledge (‘techniques’) are required to achieve engagement, in addition to skills and knowledge associated with the particular type of intervention.

If from a practitioner perspective, engagement is a ‘technical’ exercise, it is nonetheless important to have some understanding of what constitutes engagement from a young person’s perspective, what it is that practitioners are using their skills and knowledge base to achieve, and how, in turn, that might be measured.

### Engagement as a multi-faceted concept

The difficulties that practitioners sometimes experience in knowing how to understand engagement are not fully explained by the ambiguous nature of the concept; it is also a consequence of the complexity of identifying what constitutes engagement on the part of the young person.

Engaging young people in a service or intervention obviously requires their participation at some level. Previous research has suggested that ensuring ‘superficial’ compliance, in the form of attendance, is the primary focus for many professionals in the youth justice system (Hazel et al, 2002a: 9). But it is apparent that simple attendance at a project, or completion of a programme, may not be sufficient to constitute engagement. The latter implies more than passive involvement (Mason and Prior, 2008) since the purpose of intervention is to effect change and that generally requires more of the young person than keeping appointments. From a professional perspective, it follows that engaging young people consists of more than ensuring compliance or cooperation. As Mason and Prior (2008: 12) argue:

if a young person does not feel any commitment to the objectives of the programme and is not motivated to benefit ... from the programme activities, then they are not ‘engaged’.

There is, in other words, a more developed sense of engagement that implies some form of ‘relationship’ between the young person and the service provider.

It is apparent from Mason and Prior’s comments that motivation is a key prerequisite of this more developed form of engagement. Indeed, enhancing young people’s motivation is a recurring theme in the literature. For instance, Prochaska and DiClemente’s (1983) well known model suggests engagement will not occur

unless the young person's intentional state is such that they recognise the benefits to themselves of the intervention and are prepared to take action in order to effect change. But just as participation is not sufficient to demonstrate that a young person is engaged, so too engagement cannot be reduced solely to motivation. Commitment alone might not guarantee that the young person will immerse him or herself in the relevant activities in a manner that provides a realistic chance that programme objectives will be achieved.

So a young person might be genuinely committed to giving up offending, and motivated to avail him or herself of the support offered by a particular project, but their social or personal circumstances might nonetheless present an obstacle to full engagement in the programme. Alternatively, a young person might fail to see the relevance of particular activities to attaining his or her goals, or might feel antipathetic towards project staff. Finally, a potentially motivated individual may be confronted by the reality that the opportunities which he or she would wish to take advantage of may not exist in a form that is conducive to his or her engagement.

For such reasons, some commentators suggest that to show engagement a young person must also make progress against whatever plan of intervention has been agreed (see, for instance, Stephenson et al, 2011). There is a danger, however, that this sort of argument might become circular. Engagement is frequently seen as key to generating positive outcomes and as providing an explanation of why some interventions appear to work better with some young people than with others (Prior and Mason, 2010). But if a failure to achieve such outcomes is, by definition, indicative of a lack of engagement by the young person, then any explanatory potential of the latter concept is lost since engagement becomes, more or less, equivalent to successful intervention rather than a prerequisite for it. While good progress might accordingly be an indicator, or outcome, of engagement, the two cannot be equated.

Such considerations are sufficient to demonstrate that defining engagement is not a straightforward endeavour because, as Fredricks et al (2004: 60) have suggested, it is a concept with a "multi-faceted nature". To a large extent, discussions of engagement within the youth justice arena are "inferential" (Stephenson et al, 2011: 82) in that they draw on evidence from areas of practice with young people outside of criminal justice. Some of the educational literature in particular is helpful for understanding the various elements that make up engagement (see for instance, Guest and Schneider, 2003; Hodgson, 2002; Learning and Skills Council, 2002; Merton and Parrot, 1999). Fredricks and her colleagues (2004) in particular have noted that within the field of education, engagement has typically been defined in three different ways: behavioural, emotional and cognitive. They propose that engagement is best understood as a 'meta-construct' that unites each of these three elements "in a meaningful way" because it provides a richer characterisation of the various processes that contribute to full engagement (Fredricks et al, 2004: 60).

'Behavioural engagement' refers to the young person's participation and cooperation. In a resettlement context, it might be demonstrated by attending appointments, participating in activities arranged for him or her, and behaving in the manner expected while so doing without disrupting sessions, becoming aggressive to staff or other young people, and not attending under the influence of drugs or alcohol.

'Emotional engagement' refers to the young person's attitudinal relationship with the project and those who work in it. In a resettlement context, it might be manifested in the young person being motivated to attend, being enthusiastic about (at least some) activities and getting on well with staff. Some studies have distinguished between situational and personal interest (Krapp et al, 1992). The former involves the young person being keenly engaged in the project because they enjoy a particular activity. The young person's interest is in the activity itself rather than the project, and his or her attendance is dependent on being able to access the activity through the project. By contrast, personal interest is an orientation towards participation that is relatively stable, and even if initial participation is focused on the availability of particular activities, engagement would continue if the project no longer offered those activities. Emotional engagement involves the latter type of interest, leading to the young person identifying him or herself as someone who is aligned with the project and who values the services provided.

'Cognitive engagement' focuses on a personal investment on the part of the young person in achieving the goals of intervention and a commitment to attempting to master social and personal skills and to work towards cognitive and behavioural changes that may be necessary to do so. Whereas emotional engagement involves motivation to become involved with the project in various ways, cognitive engagement requires a commitment to self-development that is consistent with the expectations of the intervention.

### **Engagement as leading to a shift in identity**

It is important to acknowledge that these three constituents of engagement are complementary, overlapping and interlocking. While it is possible that a young person might demonstrate behavioural engagement without being emotionally or cognitively engaged, it is more difficult to conceive of circumstances where emotional engagement would not lead to some form of cooperation with intervention. Similarly, taking part in activities may function as a precursor to emotional engagement and, for some young people, may be a prerequisite of it. There is, moreover, no absolute distinction between aligning oneself with the activities of the project on the one hand, and identifying with its aims and the intended purpose of intervention on the other. Emotional and cognitive engagement are also closely interrelated. In this sense, whilst the three types of engagement may be distinguished conceptually, in real terms they are inextricably interrelated and interdependent.

It should also be recognised that engagement in relation to each dimension is not an all or nothing phenomenon; young people may be engaged to different degrees, in different ways, and at different times. The full engagement of young people with all three elements may be a goal towards which practitioners should strive rather than a realistic expectation in all cases, particularly given the characteristics of those who come to the attention of resettlement providers. Guthrie and Wigfield's (2000) suggestion that it is only credible to conceive of successful engagement where the full range of multiple components is present is accordingly overly prescriptive. To adopt such a definition would imply that very few young people are ever truly engaged in resettlement provision.

It is preferable to acknowledge, as Fredricks and her colleagues do (2004), that a young person may be considered to be engaged where not all of the elements have been achieved. Indeed, it may be helpful to think of engagement as a collection of interrelated, reciprocal processes that can, where successfully negotiated, act as a prerequisite for the young person to begin a journey towards adopting a changed identity or an altered understanding of who they are and what they would like to be.

### **Identifying and measuring engagement**

Given the above complexities, it is not surprising that identifying whether or not a young person is engaged with an intervention is no straightforward task. In a large-scale survey of more than 400 YOT practitioners undertaken for the Youth Justice Board, the highest ranking indicator of engagement/participation as indicated by respondents was whether the young person was "making proactive attempts to stop offending", followed by the young person "communicating effectively in sessions". These findings might be thought to suggest a prioritising among YOT staff of cognitive engagement – an understanding that young people can be considered to be engaged where they are already convinced of the benefits of desistance from crime. Nonetheless, the importance of emotional engagement was also recognised: the development of a "positive interpersonal relationship" featured quite highly, registering as the fourth most popular response out of nine indicators. Simply turning up when required was less likely to be regarded as signalling engagement or participation, with 15% of practitioners suggesting that it demonstrated neither (Ipsos MORI, 2010: 18).

The survey of YIF projects – while not directly comparable to the study of YOT staff described above since it offered a different range of possible responses – demonstrated a clear recognition of the multi-dimensional nature of engagement and provided further evidence that attendance at sessions may not, on its own, be sufficient to establish that a young person is fully engaged. Respondents were asked to indicate how important (on a four-point scale) they considered a range of six indicators – covering all three dimensions of engagement – to be in determining whether a young person had been successfully engaged in the work of the project. Most practitioners indicated that each of the factors was either quite or

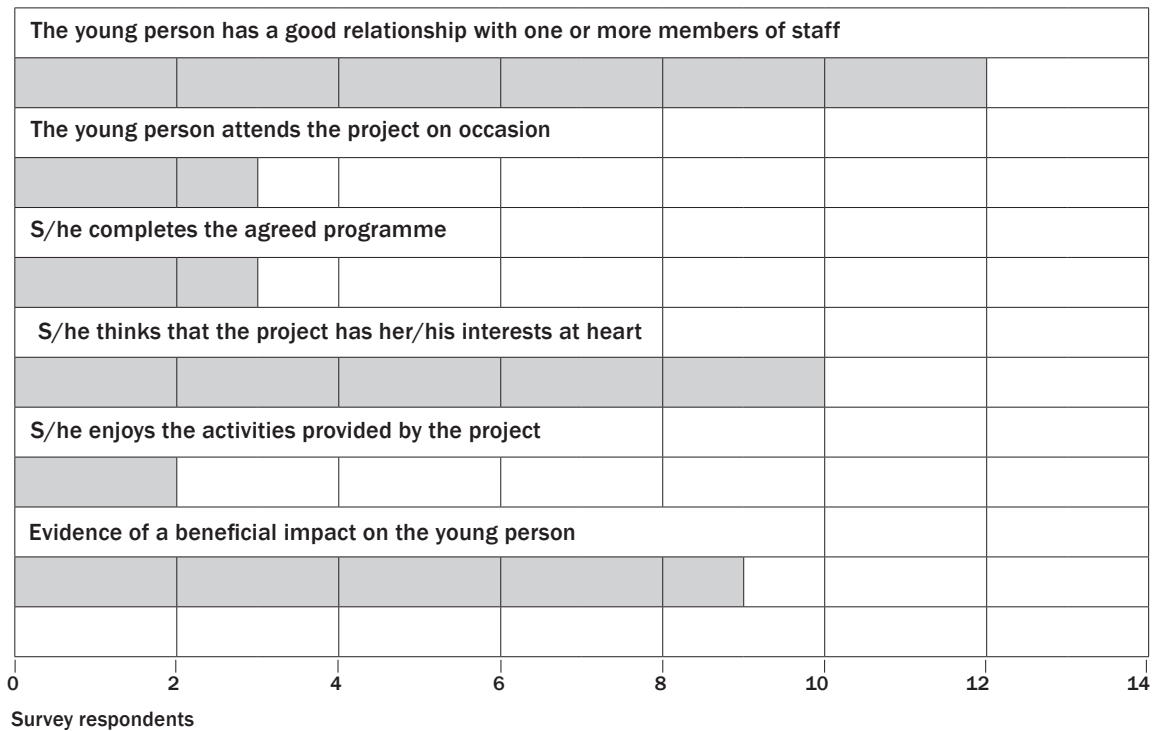


very important, but it was apparent that some indicators were regarded as having more influence than others. For instance, all respondents rated the young person believing that the project had his or her interests at heart as an important gauge of engagement, with all but one indicating that it was very important. By contrast, one third of practitioners thought that programme completion was not very important as a measurement of engagement.<sup>1</sup> One respondent articulated how a broad range of different factors might provide evidence of engagement:

The young person thanking you at the end of the day is a good sign that they have got something from it. They have not reoffended during the time they are with the project. They positively put on ... safety equipment during activities. They are inquisitive and ask for advice. They turn up early/on time. They will give the activities a go and justify why they don't want to do them instead of having anger outbursts etc.

When practitioners were asked to select the two measures that they perceived to be the most important indicators of successful engagement, there was a preference for those that involved emotional engagement, suggesting that emotional engagement might be prioritised over other dimensions. The young person having a good relationship with staff and thinking that the project has his or her best interests at heart ranked highest, as indicated in figure 1 below. Both of these indicators of engagement may be thought of in terms of relationships: the first concerns the relationship between young people and individual staff members; the second focuses on the engagement of the young person with the project more widely. Whilst both YOT practitioners and YIF project staff thus acknowledged the multi-dimensional nature of engagement and recognised that engagement could not be inferred from simple attendance, there was a tendency for the latter to focus more on emotional engagement. This difference might be thought to reflect the non-statutory basis of the work of many of the YIF projects.

**Figure 1: The two most important indicators of engagement as ranked by survey respondents**



<sup>1</sup> As noted above, the focus of the research is engagement itself rather than the issue of what works to prevent reoffending. There is of course a (complex) relationship between the two: engagement is a necessary condition of desistance (at least if desistance is as a consequence of the intervention); conversely, engagement may not be sufficient to guarantee a reduction in offending since the latter may depend on the nature of the intervention delivered once the young person is engaged. The relationship between engagement and reoffending is an issue that requires further exploration.

The importance of the young person having a good relationship with staff was also emphasised in a range of comments offered by professionals. Some suggested that emotional engagement was a prerequisite for other forms of engagement. As one put it:

For us, engagement is all about the relationship that is built and whether this holds over time. The young [people] we work with are often so damaged that the chaos of their lives prevents them from following what might be considered 'normal courses of action'. Through the relationship, we strive to restore some of their self-confidence and empower them to start to engage with other services.

Whilst there was strong support for evidence of impact as providing a measure by which engagement should be assessed, it was also recognised that, given the circumstances of young people with whom projects worked, expectations needed to be realistic. Another survey respondent said:

As we work with the most chaotic young people, I would say that it should be acknowledged that even the smallest of positives is a positive for the young person.

## 4. Barriers to engagement

### **Involuntary and resistant service users**

Young people eligible for resettlement services are, in many instances, subject to a statutory requirement to cooperate with intervention. Many of the YIF projects, however, operate on a voluntary basis, providing services complementary, or additional, to statutory provision, an issue which receives further attention later in the report. Where young people are 'involuntary clients', motivational issues are inevitably to the fore (Trotter, 2006; Ho and Chui, 2001; Chui and Ho, 2006). If compliance is a requirement of a criminal justice intervention, service users are more likely to regard the agency delivering the service as representing authority and may be more difficult to persuade that the interventions are in their interests (Cignolani, 1984). Whilst the literature on engaging young adults is relatively sparse, there is some research that pertains to the challenges posed for probation by the involuntary nature of intervention (Raynor and Ugwudike, 2013; Trotter, 2006; Bottoms, 2001; Vanstone, 2013 forthcoming). Whilst the theme of engagement is rarely addressed explicitly in such work, the focus on the difficulties of ensuring compliance resonates closely with the barriers to engaging young people more broadly.

It should be recognised, however, that not all involuntary service users are resistant to intervention: some may recognise a window of opportunity for change and willingly engage with services that offer support to that end. The statutory nature of intervention does not, in other words, preclude engagement, particularly where services adopt approaches that have been shown to encourage the three elements of engagement outlined earlier. Conversely, 'voluntary clients', who are subject to no statutory obligation to engage with the programme, may nonetheless be resistant for a range of reasons discussed below (McGuire, 2010; Rooney, 1992; Jackson, 2001).

### **Forms of resistance**

Resistance can take a variety of forms (Pipes and Davenport, 1990) which are perhaps most usefully understood as the converse of different elements of engagement. 'Behavioural resistance' may be passive – for instance, non-attendance or refusing to take part in activities – or proactive, such as where the young person disrupts sessions or provides false information (Chui and Ho, 2008). 'Emotional resistance' might involve the young person cooperating with activities where they are under pressure to do so, but without the development of an associated positive attachment to the project or the staff who work in it. 'Cognitive resistance' is likely to occur where the young person does not feel the necessary motivation to change and does not recognise the potential for intervention and support to enhance his or her long-term interests. All three forms of resistance will need to be overcome if resettlement providers are to engage effectively with young people.

Where attendance is a compulsory element of intervention, behavioural resistance may be relatively easily addressed – although research suggest that rates of non-compliance by young people within a statutory context are nonetheless quite high (Bateman, 2011; Hart, 2011). But as argued in the previous chapter, participation in activities alone does not constitute engagement. Emotional and cognitive resistance are unlikely to be successfully addressed unless the young person moves from participating in the intervention to avoid sanction to cooperating with service delivery because he or she sees the value in so doing. This is sometimes referred to as effecting a shift from extrinsic motivation, focused on compulsion, to intrinsic motivation that derives from a concern on the part of the young person to gain benefit from the opportunities offered by resettlement services (Williams and Streat, 2002).

### **Environmental circumstances of young people**

As indicated in the previous chapter, the background and social circumstances of young people who come to the attention of resettlement projects mean that many will lead chaotic lives (Bateman et al, 2013a; Cooper et al, 2007). This makes it more difficult to spark an initial interest in resettlement activities since

a considerable part of young people's efforts are directed towards dealing with day-to-day contingencies, coping with rapid change, and managing the impact of socio-economic disadvantage (Jones, 2002; Farley, 2003; Chawla and Heft, 2002).

All of the practitioners surveyed to inform the current study considered that young people's chaotic circumstances represented a barrier to engaging them in the work of the project, with most considering that this was a very significant obstacle. In this context, it is perhaps not surprising that a lack of stable accommodation was cited as one of the factors that frequently operates to impede engagement; all but one respondent also indicated that issues with drugs and alcohol were obstacles to be overcome. Respondents also drew attention to difficulties that young people had in accessing appropriate employment or training and to the associated financial pressures that may increase the risk of recidivism.

### **Mental health and a lack of familial support**

The literature affirms that levels of mental ill health among the youth custodial population are disproportionately high (Hagell, 2000; Leon, 2002; Douglas and Plugge, 2006) and that backgrounds of disrupted care and a lack of familial support are common (Bateman et al, 2013b). In addition, for YIF survey respondents a lack of support in the home environment was noted as a significant barrier to engagement.

### **Peer pressure, self-perception and labelling**

Although the relationship is no doubt a complex one (Coleman, 2011; Farrington, 1995), there is evidence that socially marginalised young people tend to congregate together and that this can increase the risk of offending (Kazdin, 2000) and undermine affinity with service providers who may be seen as representing authority (Bond, 1999). All respondents to the survey reported that the influence of negative peer pressure constituted a barrier to engagement, with more than half believing it to be a significant difficulty.

Social exclusion, and in particular contact with the criminal justice system, renders young people vulnerable to stigmatisation (Walther et al, 2002; Steer, 2000). Such processes can impact on the way that professionals approach young people and the expectations that they may have of them (Willis, 1978; Jussim and Harber, 2005). As one respondent to the survey put it: "initial engagement with the project workers can have a negative effect on the young person". At the same time, the ascription of a 'label' can reinforce a young person's sense of identity as being anti-authority (Becker, 1997) tending to undermine their preparedness to work with agencies whose perceived function is to rehabilitate or resettle (Cignolani, 1984). Similar dynamics would appear to apply equally to young people in the youth and adult criminal justice systems (Barry, 2007).

This dual aspect of labelling, whereby stigma can influence both the manner in which professionals approach young people and the way that service users respond to such approaches (Miller, 2003) is one indicator of the fact that external obstacles to engagement are frequently exacerbated by internal ones. Socially excluded young people often suffer from a lack of confidence and low levels of self-esteem (Social Exclusion Unit, 2000; Ministry of Social Development, 2003). All but three respondents to the survey recognised such issues as representing barriers to engagement.

### **Previous experience of services**

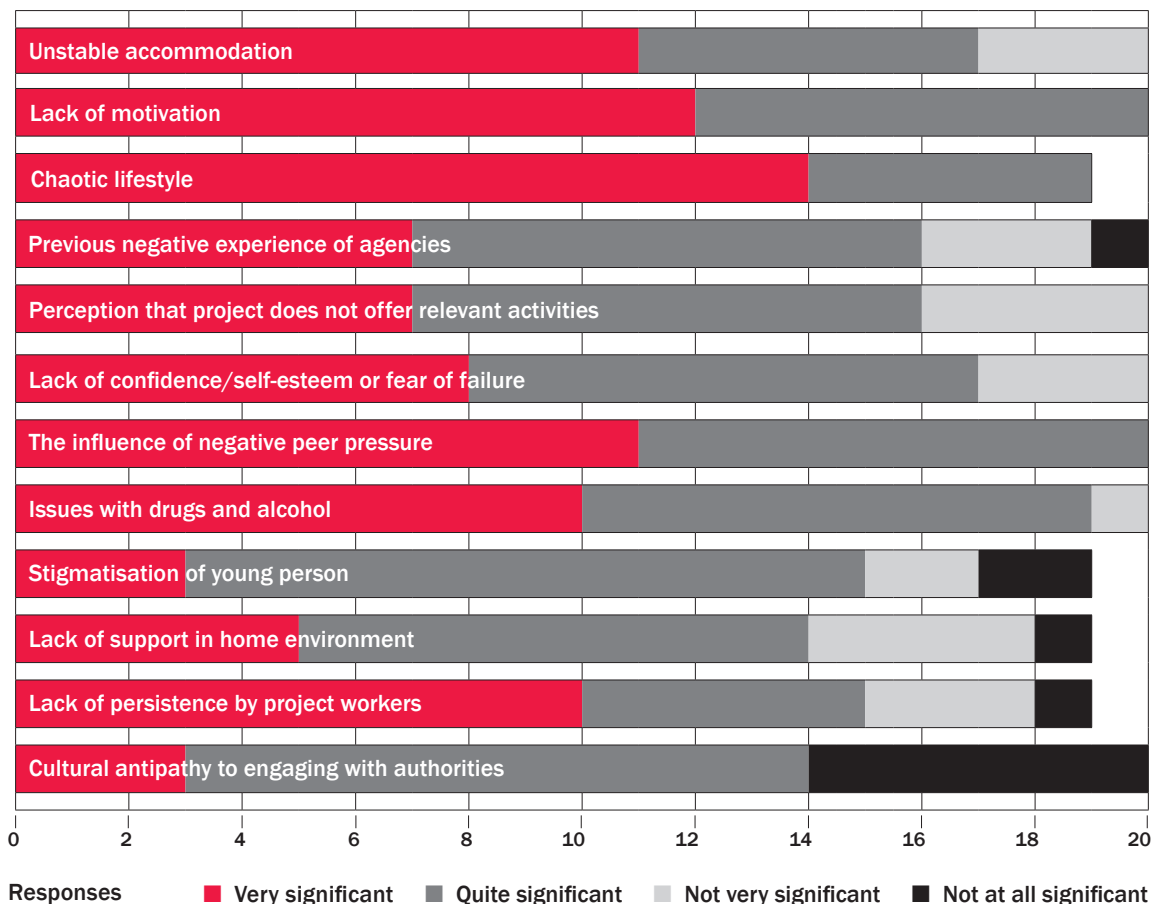
Young people in conflict with the law are also liable to have had experiences of previous failure across an array of settings and fear of repeating such experiences can make them wary of engaging with service providers unless they are convinced that things will be different this time around (Naylor et al, 2008; Lyon et al, 2000; Bateman et al, 2013b). One respondent to the survey noted that mistrust of the project would prevent a young person engaging where, for instance, there was an outstanding warrant for his or her arrest, "despite the fact that you are not a law enforcement agency". The impact of previous unhelpful encounters with agencies was regarded as an obstacle to engagement by most survey respondents and there was a clear view that, unless staff were prepared to be persistent, initial reticence was unlikely to be overcome.

### Lack of motivation

Young people’s antipathy towards service providers impacts on their motivation to engage, or at least generates a strong perception on the part of professionals that they lack the necessary commitment. More than 90% of YOT practitioners surveyed by Ipsos MORI thought that a lack of motivation impacted on young people’s willingness to engage in interventions (Ipsos MORI, 2010). A reluctance to change is also a challenge for those working in the adult criminal justice system (Ugwudike, 2013 forthcoming). All of those responding to the survey of YIF projects similarly considered that a lack of motivation to change was a barrier to engagement; for many this was a significant obstacle. In this context, one respondent suggested that frequently young people were not ready to think “about their future [or to understand] how the small choices [now] affect their bigger choices later in life”. This of course raises the question of how a lack of motivation among young people to reflect on their current lifestyle might be overcome. This is addressed in greater detail later in the report.<sup>2</sup> Respondents also believed that a perception on the part of the young person that projects did not offer activities that would be relevant to them also acted as an impediment to participation. There is a reciprocal relationship here since such perceptions are likely to reinforce reduced levels of motivation, and a lack of commitment is, in turn, likely to undermine young people’s openness to appreciate the potential advantages of service provision.

The obstacles to engaging young people in resettlement activity are accordingly considerable. Project staff who responded to the survey were keenly aware of the difficulties. The extent to which they regarded a range of factors as constituting barriers to engagement is shown in figure 2 below: chaotic lifestyles, lack of motivation, accommodation difficulties and peer pressure appear particularly salient. This is important since it suggests a strategy of focusing on current presenting barriers to initial engagement rather than needing to address longer term background challenges as a prerequisite for undertaking any meaningful work.

Figure 2: Respondent ratings of how significant a barrier to engagement various factors are



<sup>2</sup> See chapter 7.

**A window of opportunity**

A further difficulty for resettlement is that the transition from custody can be a particularly disorientating period for young people who “have to adjust to a less regimented and more pressured environment, re-establish relationships and reconstruct their previous lives” (Bateman et al, 2013a: 23). One respondent described how the contrast between the custodial environment and young people’s experience on release might tend to diminish their ability to engage in resettlement provision:

The transition from custody can be a very difficult one without support ... some young people thrive in custody, routine, stability, friends, food, health etc. and then the outside can seem to lack some of these when they are released ... These are often the most marginalised and disaffected and disadvantaged young people. Change does not often occur quickly.

At the same time, the point of release also represents a window of opportunity during which young people are frequently open to reflecting on where their lives are going, and may be particularly motivated to engage with interventions that they perceive might assist them to change their lives (Hagell et al, 2000; Hazel et al, 2002b). As well as identifying barriers, survey responses also demonstrated a wide understanding of approaches that might serve to mitigate them during the crucial period of transition. It is to these that we now turn.

## 5. Initial engagement

### Meeting young people on their own territory

The period around first contact between the agency and the young person is critical. On the one hand, many of the barriers discussed in the previous chapter of the report may be at their sharpest until trust has been established; conversely, the window of opportunity described in the previous chapter is frequently time limited and the potential for engagement may be diminished thereafter. Projects may therefore need to adopt innovative, flexible responses if initial resistance is to be overcome and maximum advantage is to be extracted from the motivation to change that frequently accompanies release from custody.

Given that socially marginalised young people are likely to be less well placed to take advantage of opportunities to enhance future prospects than their more integrated peers, they may not respond to traditional methods of engagement such as leaflets, posters or referral through mainstream agencies (Hazel, 2003). This was endorsed by the survey of YIF projects, with just two respondents indicating that writing letters to the young person and his or her family was usually successful in facilitating engagement. “Bombarding the young person with paperwork” was, according to one practitioner, particularly unhelpful. Another suggested that “lots of photo evidence of what you do” was preferable to written information.

Approaching young people through agencies with whom they were already involved was regarded as a much more promising approach: a large majority of respondents considered that this was usually, or often, “successful”. This latter technique receives some support in the literature, particularly where the existing agency has managed to develop a good relationship (Gray, 2002; Combe, 2002; Bond, 1999; Farley, 2003; Connexions, 2002). For some respondents to the survey, the crucial element in determining whether an approach through a third party would be successful was the extent to which there was a bond of trust between the young person and the intermediary. Provided that element was in place, initial engagement might be fostered either through another agency, a family member or other trusted adult.

Building a good reputation with existing service users provided a useful mechanism for encouraging new referrals by allaying mistrust – an approach also identified as beneficial in the literature (Gray, 2002; Steer, 2000). As one respondent put it: “peer referrals are often successful; word of mouth about the good work we do”. In this context, the use of peer mentoring or peer ambassadors, as developed by some of the YIF projects, may be a helpful way of overcoming resistance and maintaining engagement over the longer term. However, almost one third of those surveyed had either not tried this approach, or did not know whether it was effective.

The importance of meeting the young person on his or her own territory is a recurrent theme in the literature on engaging disaffected young people, suggesting that some form of detached or proactive outreach work may frequently be required for initial engagement (Ghate, 2000; Chui and Ho, 2006; Naylor et al, 2008; Johnson et al, 2000; Steer, 2000). The necessity of reaching out to young people was echoed by the large majority of practitioners surveyed for the current study. As one put it:

A key ... is being able to meet the young person where they feel comfortable and where access is easy ... in general young offenders don't like to venture out of their own territory too much; it is essential to provide outreach venues near where they live: **cost** [*emphasis in the original*] of travel is a major problem.

Another expressed similar views:

Outreach venues – take the project workers to where the young offenders are geographically, locally (e.g. local McDonalds etc) ... Ideally three or four project ‘bases’ where young offenders can also attend regularly as well as outreach sessions.

Drop-in or taster sessions were regarded as useful alternatives. Home visits were also regarded as an effective way of making contact.

### **Contact prior to release**

The literature on effective resettlement emphasises the importance of developing a relationship with young people while they are still in custody (Bateman et al, 2013a) and it is clear that a number of YIF projects regarded establishing a relationship prior to release as key to maximising initial engagement. For instance:

The sooner that we can meet with a young person after they have been sent to custody and the frequency of our visits to see them in custody are factors that we have seen have led to positive engagement. Positive engagement in custody on the whole has led to positive engagement post release.

Other respondents reaffirmed the evidence, suggesting that a focus on the point of transition to the community is necessary if resettlement providers are to take advantage of the window of opportunity that release offers (Bateman et al, 2013a). Intensive intervention at this juncture was regarded as a way of attempting to address the chaotic nature of the lives that young people would shortly return to.

### **Characteristics of the intervention and of staff**

Two other themes emerged from the responses to the survey, relating to organisational factors on the one hand and characteristics of staff on the other. (Both issues are considered in more detail later in the report.) Several respondents argued initial engagement was made easier where project activities were attractive to the group of young people with whom they were trying to develop a relationship, either by making them enjoyable (there were no respondents who thought that such an approach was rarely effective) or clearly relevant to the young person's future prospects.

Emphasising the voluntary nature of intervention, where that was a possibility, was also a common strategy that might complement the offer of attractive services. As one project worker put it:

We are fortunate insofar as we are not aligned to any statutory organisations where young people may have developed a negative relationship. We are able to 'invite' young people to have our support rather than impose it.

The evidence from statutory services confirms that the compulsory nature of intervention can deter young people from engaging with it, and that levels of non-compliance (and breach action) are high (see for instance, Moore, 2004).

In terms of staff qualities, there was a strong consensus that persistence and being unwilling to 'take no for an answer' were crucial precisely because of the characteristics of young people – a lack of motivation in particular – that pose an impediment to initial engagement. Persistence was also considered critical to maintaining engagement over the longer term – an issue considered in due course.

The evidence base in relation to matching staff with young people, according to gender, ethnicity and other characteristics, is mixed. Some research has suggested that ensuring a staff profile similar to the client group can be beneficial, both for assisting with initial engagement and keeping young people engaged (Ghate et al, 2000; Gray, 2002). Service users, by contrast, tend to regard such characteristics as less important than other personal factors (May et al, 2010), although responses may differ according to the gender and ethnicity of the interviewer (Calverly et al, 2004). In the study conducted on behalf of the Youth Justice Board, a slim majority of YOT practitioners recognised that "the characteristics of staff – e.g. age, gender, ethnicity, background – affect the engagement of young people," but only 10% agreed strongly with the statement. The authors suggested this finding indicated that "staff feel this is fairly, but

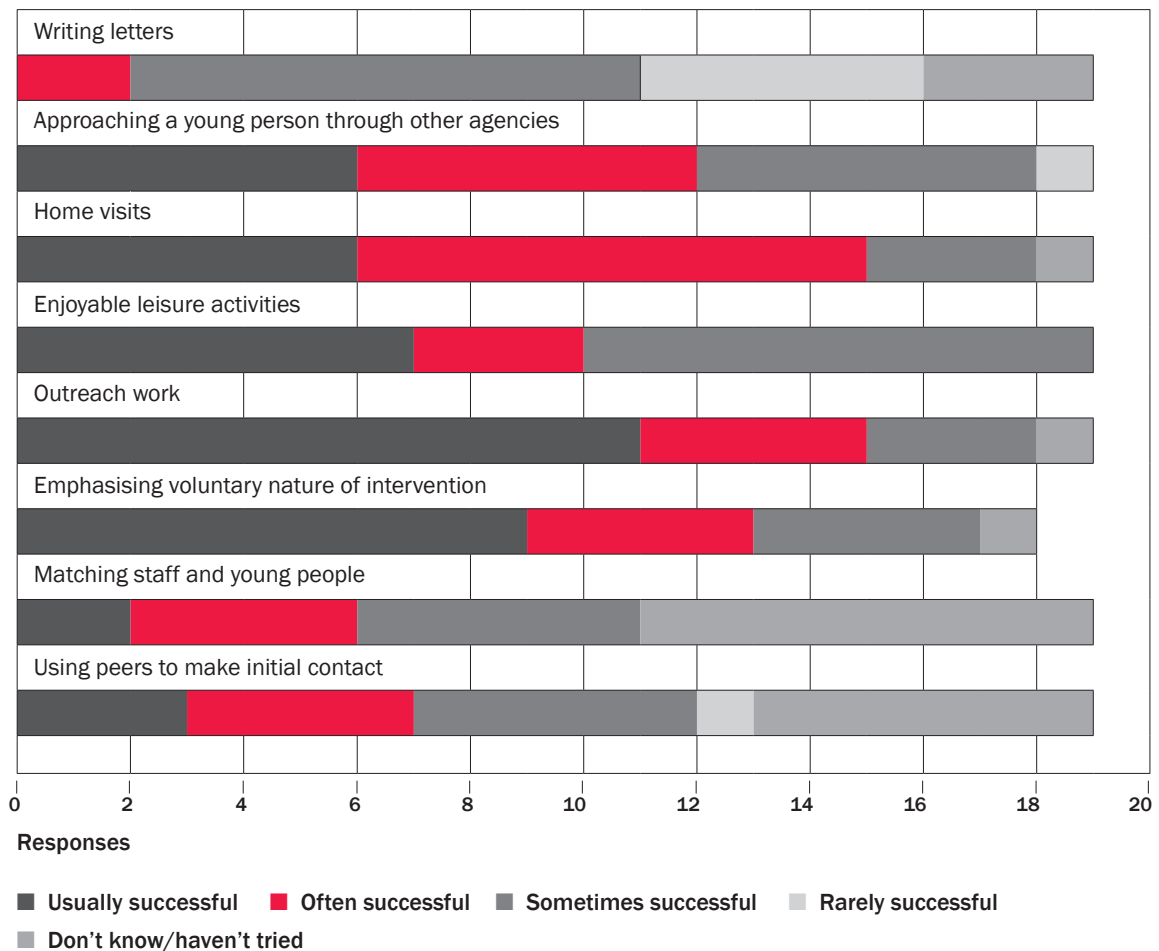


not very, influential” (Ipsos MORI, 2010: 39). A higher proportion of YOT workers considered that matching could make a difference where a young person was failing to engage. In practice, however, less than 0.5% of allocation decisions were made on this basis (Ipsos MORI, 2010).

There was some support for the idea of matching from YIF staff participating in the survey for the current research. Around four in 10 respondents thought that matching staff and young people in terms of gender, ethnicity and interests was “often or sometimes successful”. At the same time, a higher proportion indicated that they did not know, or had not tried to engage young people in that way. (The survey did not explore whether projects attempted to match staff and young people in other ways.) Overall, this approach received less endorsement than any other, with the exception of writing letters. Relationships were regarded as key (a theme considered in more detail in due course) and in recognition of the diverse nature of the population of service users, respondents overwhelmingly endorsed the view that the staff group as a whole should incorporate a range of different approaches rather than all working in the same way. On occasion, this might involve matching. But the absence of any free text comments on the issue suggests that this was not a core strategy adopted by most YIF projects.

The full range of responses in relation to the perceived success of various approaches to involving young people in the first instance is shown in figure 3.

**Figure 3: Respondents’ views on the effectiveness of different approaches to facilitating initial engagement**



The significance attached to outreach work, voluntarism and the provision of enjoyable activities all point to the importance of negotiating a space in which a trusting relationship might develop over the longer term. The role of enjoyable activities is explored in greater detail later in the report.

## 6. Organisational issues

### Resourcing issues

Given the difficulties inherent in engaging young people in resettlement provision, it is clearly important that interventions are properly resourced. In particular, given the need for persistence noted in the previous chapter, project staff need to be given the time to develop meaningful relationships with young people, to offer high levels of contact where that is required, to provide individualised programmes of activities and to ensure a flexible response (Gray, 2002; Naylor et al, 2008; Cooper et al, 2007; Eadie and Canton, 2002). Sixty per cent of YOT practitioners in the study conducted for the Youth Justice Board thought that having a flexible approach was very important if young people were to be successfully engaged. Almost half also thought that smaller caseloads would make a key difference to engaging young people (Ipsos MORI). The significance of allowing adequate time to work with marginalised young people was well articulated by one of the respondents to the survey for this study:

Almost all of our service users have poor educational experiences, difficult family relations and/or have struggled within the care system and it takes time for a young person to build a trusting relationship and accept support. Having sufficient time to achieve this level of trust is fundamental to successful engagement.

The more marginalised the group of service users, the greater the necessity for higher staffing ratios (Steer, 2000; Moore, 2004). It is important too that young people are afforded access to the right form of provision at the right time and, in most cases, this will require a multi-agency approach to facilitate referral onwards or the purchase of relevant services (Mason and Prior, 2008; Johnson et al, 2000; Straudt, 2003; Cooper et al, 2007). The necessity of being able to provide a flexible response if young people were to experience interventions as being focused on their needs was highlighted in the following comment from one of the YIF project staff:

Some young people ... are happy to attend a project that offers them a number of services as they then feel they do not need to travel far to have their needs met. Then there are young people that would rather visit a project that has a specific focus as they do not need other services. All young people and their needs are different and I think this is the key – to understand their differences and ensure your programme is identifying that and tailoring the programme to that individual – rather than trying to make that young person fit in with that specific project.

### Environmental and cultural considerations

For many disaffected young people, territory and environment carry a particular significance. The literature accordingly suggests that a focus on outreach work for initial engagement must be complemented by projects having access to appropriate physical space that is conducive to working with that group (Patton and Morgan, 2002; France et al, 2012; Naylor et al, 2008). The importance of suitable premises was reflected in survey responses for this study. More than three quarters of YIF staff agreed that projects needed to provide a physical space that appealed to young people and in which they felt safe, with over half agreeing strongly. This perception was, however, tempered by the fact that almost half of practitioners also considered that the nature of premises was less important than the work that went on inside them.

The nature of interventions is considered in greater detail in the following chapter of the report, but it is important to acknowledge that the ethos of the agency influences the manner in which activities are delivered and experienced by young people. Effective engagement is more likely where the project promotes a culture that manifests a commitment to the active involvement of young people as competent individuals (Hazel, 2003), acknowledges the complexity of the “lived experiences” of those with whom they work (Prior and Mason, 2010: 215), and addresses “the mercurial nature of a young person’s journey from adolescence to adulthood” (Farrow et al, 2007: 87). Mason and Prior (2008) suggest that a youth work ethos is likely to embody the qualities required for effective engagement. Merton and colleagues

(2004, cited in Mason and Prior, 2008: 32) characterise the distinctive combination of methods that constitute youth work as follows:

voluntary engagement, active involvement, informal education and professional flexibility and underpinned by a shared set of values ... It promotes the voice and influence of young people. Fundamentally, youth work with individuals and groups stems from negotiation and mutual agreement. It serves as a springboard for social learning – in its broadest sense – that young people can use to express and achieve their aspirations.

A commitment to young people's active involvement must be manifested in concrete terms, taking practical steps to facilitate engagement and overcome resistance. These steps might include the provision of transport where young people live at some distance from the project, or they feel uncomfortable travelling through territory with which they are unfamiliar or where they feel unsafe. Reimbursement of fares can also be a significant mechanism for undermining young people's reasons for not attending and shows an understanding, on the part of professionals, of the financial pressures that young people and their families face (Ipsos MORI, 2010).

Respondents to the survey endorsed the importance of project ethos: more than half of survey participants believed that working inclusively with young people was more important than the nature of the activities themselves. None disagreed with the statement, suggesting perhaps that other staff considered inclusivity and the type of intervention delivered to be equally important. Inclusivity also entails recognising diversity: ways of engaging young people from minority ethnic backgrounds may be different to those that are successful in promoting participation among their white peers (May et al, 2010; Mason and Prior, 2008). Similarly, effective engagement of girls and young women may require a different emphasis (Bateman et al, 2013b). Such recognition may not be best achieved by matching staff characteristics to those of young people (see the previous chapter), but an inclusive approach ought to "look beyond the immediate context of the intervention to [take account] ... of the context of young people's lives" (Mason and Prior, 2008: 18).

An inclusive approach also has implications for how behavioural resistance is understood. The survey conducted for this study asked practitioners for their views on young people failing to attend appointments. All respondents bar one disagreed that such non-attendance was usually indicative of a lack of interest in the service which suggested that attempting to engage was futile. Rather, such non-attendance should be understood as signalling that a more proactive approach was required. As one practitioner put it:

It's important that you stick with them through the bad times as well as the good – if they are going through a chaotic time and not turning up, go to them and keep reminding them you are there to support them and want to work with them.

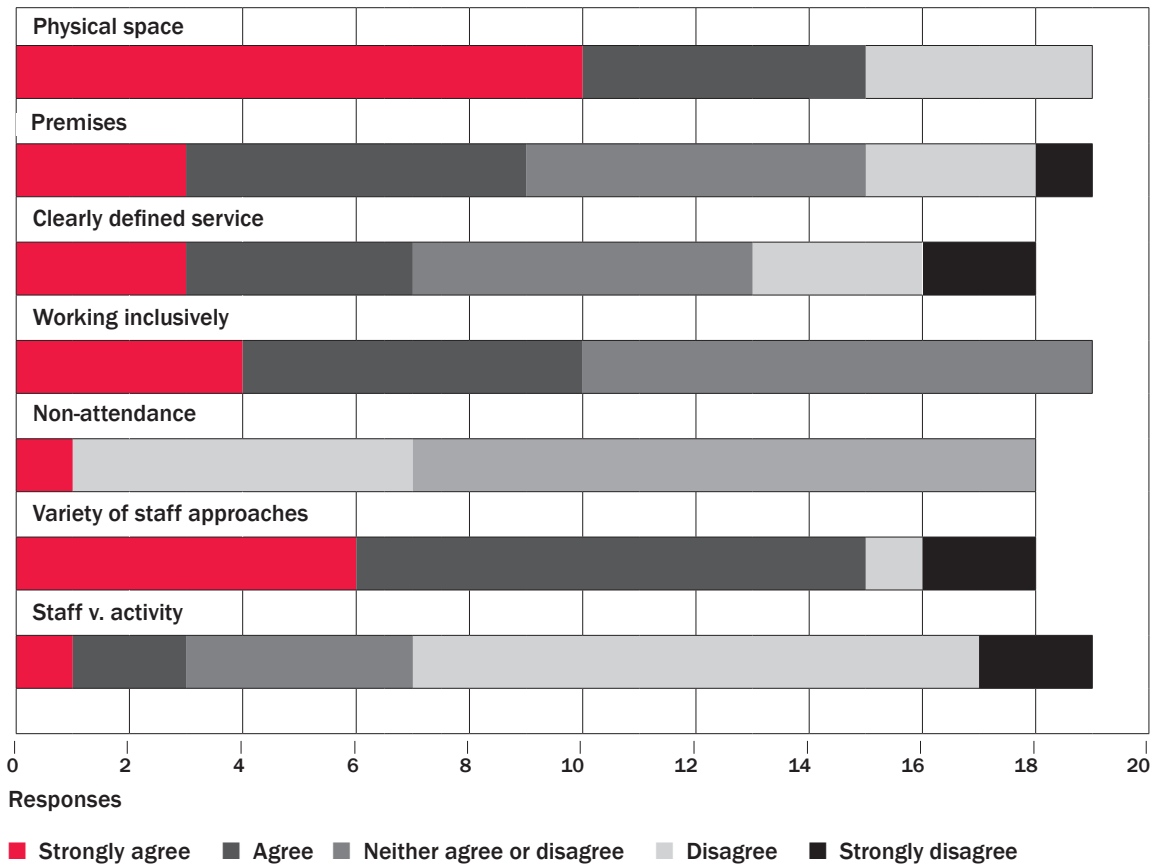
Another pointed to the value of:

A non-judgemental approach and ensuring that the young people know we have their best interests in mind and will continue to offer support even if there is a period of non-engagement/relapse/reoffending or custody.

The close relationship between inclusivity and persistence if young people's engagement is to be sustained is apparent, but it poses particular problems for resettlement providers operating within a statutory setting where compliance with intervention is a requirement of custody licence conditions. Bottoms (2001) in his key contribution to the debate on enforcement in probation work convincingly argues that, in such contexts, practitioners should seek to engender 'normative compliance' rather than rely on coercive measures and the threat of breach. This is likely to be particularly true for young people who are prone to prioritising short-term interest over long-term consequences (Farmer, 2011).

Figure 4 below shows the full range of project staff responses in relation to how various organisational issues impact upon engagement. It suggests that, for YIF practitioners, having a suitable physical space that appeals to young people, a staff team that offers a variety of different approaches to the work, and an inclusive project ethos may be more important for the purposes of engagement than the activities undertaken. This is not, however, to suggest that the nature of interventions offered to young people does not have a significant impact on whether or not young people are engaged.

**Figure 4: Respondents' views on organisational factors affecting engagement**



**Key**

<b>Physical space</b>	Projects need to provide a physical space that appeals to young people and in which they feel safe
<b>Premises</b>	The nature of premises is less important than what happens inside them
<b>Clearly defined service</b>	Projects should focus on clearly defined areas of service provision so that local young people know what they do, rather than offering a broad range of services
<b>Working inclusively</b>	Working inclusively with young people is more important than the nature of activities that you undertake with them
<b>Non-attendance</b>	When young people do not attend sessions, it usually means they are not interested in the service, so there is no point in trying to engage them
<b>Variety of staff approaches</b>	Having a staff group with a variety of different approaches is likely to engage more young people than a staff team who all work in the same way
<b>Staff v. activity</b>	Although good staff are important, it is the nature of the activity undertaken with the young person that makes the real difference

## 7. Project activities

### Activities to motivate engagement

Making a difference through intervention is at the heart of the resettlement process and initial engagement of young people will not be sustained unless the services provided appeal to them in one way or another beyond the period of early contact. There is considerable literature on using activities that are enjoyable, rewarding, practical, exciting or challenging (Farley, 2000; Steer, 2000). They typically include outward bound or adventure programmes (Taylor et al, 1999), sports (Home Office, 2006; Nacro, 2008a), music (Ipsos MORI, 2010), arts (Tarling, 2012; Jermyn, 2004) or other forms of structured leisure activities that might be attractive to young people.

Such approaches have been employed particularly in preventive work with young people considered to be at risk of offending (Mason and Prior, 2008), though not exclusively so. For instance, almost half of those taking part in the Summer Arts College joint initiative by the Youth Justice Board and the Arts Council England were subject to intensive supervision and surveillance programmes for young people who would otherwise be in custody (Tarling, 2012; see also Nacro, 2008a). Whilst the evidence on the impact on reoffending is mixed (Nichols and Crow, 2004), such interventions have proved particularly useful in overcoming behavioural resistance (Golden et al, 2002). As one practitioner from the YIF projects put it:

A young person has to enjoy the activities and programmes they are engaged in post release, otherwise they will not sustain commitment to the activity.

Whilst the role of 'enjoyable' activities in the first instance is likely to be to encourage initial interest (see figure 3 in chapter 5), thereby facilitating what has been referred to above as 'behavioural engagement', their contribution to combatting other forms of resistance and developing the young person's relationship with the service should not be underestimated. As one review has noted (Edcoms, 2008: 38), they can function as "enrichment activities" either as a precursor or complement to other forms of (potentially more focused) intervention.

A large majority of YIF project workers who responded to the survey agreed that enjoyable activities should be used as a hook that enables a subsequent focus on other issues. Such activities can help to establish a bond with the project, staff and peers and enhance young people's motivation where that is required. Improving motivation emerged as a key theme with a slim majority of respondents indicating that this should take priority over other forms of intervention. However, a considerable number neither agreed nor disagreed with the statement, suggesting perhaps that they considered that activities should attempt to do both simultaneously or, alternatively, that it would depend on the needs of the individual young person.

It should be acknowledged of course that an exclusive focus on one form of activity, such as sport, can equally act as a block on engagement for some young people (Stephenson et al, 2011). Young women may not share the same interests as young men, and pursuits regarded as enjoyable change with age so that activities that appeal to teenagers may not successfully attract those in their mid-twenties.

At the other end of the scale, it is clear that formal sessions based on completing paper exercises, in the name of offending behaviour work, tend to be unpopular with young people and can inhibit engagement (Hart, 2011). Adults subject to supervision similarly report that discussions around offending are less helpful than other aspects of probation intervention (Farrall, 2002). Despite the restorative intentions associated with such interventions, young people also tend to regard reparation and mediation as being primarily punitive, and since such activities are imposed upon them rather than chosen, they do not automatically lead to emotional or cognitive engagement (Hazel et al, 2002a).<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> The issue of young people's participation in, and ownership of, the intervention is considered in more detail later in this chapter.

Mason and Prior (2008), drawing on the work of Trevithick (2005), argue that activities such as motivational interviewing (Miller and Rollnick, 2002) which aim to enhance motivation through empathy and “a belief in the possibility of user-led change” may be more effective than approaches “grounded in assumptions about problem behaviours being caused by individual deficiencies” (Mason and Prior, 2008: 30). They acknowledge, however, that while there is strong evidential support for motivational interviewing as a technique for working with those with addictive behaviour, the evidence base in relation to working with other groups is limited.

More recent research has reported promising findings in relation to child and family social work (Forrester et al, 2011). One study of the use of motivational interviewing with those on probation who have substance misuse problems established positive attitudinal changes by comparison to a control group (Harper and Hardy, 2000). In combination, such research might suggest that there is scope for the development of a greater use of this approach with young people in the criminal justice system. However, in the latter study, increased contact with probation officers, whether or not they used motivational interviewing, was also reflected in changed attitudes among service users. Stephenson et al (2011: 78) surmise that techniques such as motivational interviewing may be effective because they offer “a framework within which to apply some of the interpersonal skills identified by other research”. The significance of staff qualities is considered later in the report.

### **Activities offering practical, emotional and developmental support**

But if enjoyable activities can provide a hook for initiating and sustaining a young person’s interest, there is also potential for such forms of intervention to enhance self-esteem and self-confidence (NIACE, 2002). Practitioners in the survey for the current study ranked activities which had that effect as being among the most likely forms of intervention to contribute to sustained engagement. (Respondents’ ratings are shown in figure 5 on page 22.)

Whilst some research has suggested that a focus on self-esteem per se may not reduce reoffending (Mason and Prior, 2008), it can nevertheless constitute an important element of a broader range of interventions (Chapman and Hough, 1998). Similarly, Burnett (2004: 186), in her defence of traditional one-to-one probation work, points out that “non-directive methods” can be effective in: “draw[ing] out service users’ self-determination and capacity to make responsible choices”.

Provision of practical support with housing benefits or education and training was ranked as the type of activity most likely to encourage sustained engagement. Given the high levels of difficulty that young people have with finding stable accommodation, training, employment and sufficient income to survive (Glover et al, 2012; Bateman et al, 2013a), the logic underpinning such views is evident. Moreover, in the case of older young people who are moving towards or have obtained independence from their families, practical assistance may be more attractive than activities designed to appeal to interests (Farrell, 2002). Nonetheless, enjoyable activities have a contribution to make here as well since they may help to develop wider, transferable skills. More generally, provision that enhances employment prospects is important if engagement is to be maintained. As one YIF practitioner noted, this might involve: “worthwhile courses with a tangible outcome for the young person”; another indicated that “projects should ensure they provide every type of opportunity for young people to succeed through small, quick, achievable steps”.

### **Responding to what young people want**

Research conducted from the perspective of young people in custody indicates that they are more likely to respond positively to services that they perceive as: enjoyable in their own right; offering emotional support; useful in addressing current problems; or relevant to enhancing their future prospects. They tend to be resistant to interventions that they do not view as providing one or more of those benefits (Bateman et al, 2013b). Such findings imply that interventions which define the nature of the problem on behalf of the young person are less likely to be effective in engaging them, and this poses a greater challenge where service provision is statutory and the status of clients is ‘involuntary’. Young people frequently

experience interventions within the youth justice system as undermining their sense of agency – “quite contrary to the assumption of engagement and responsibility that the system hopes to achieve” (Hazel et al, 2002: 14). Studies conducted in other areas echo such conclusions. Ghate and Hazel’s (2002) research on interventions designed to improve parenting, for instance, indicated that engagement was significantly more likely where provision was perceived as a response to difficulties identified by service users themselves.

Such views were affirmed by respondents to the survey. As noted above, many projects valued the fact that their services were voluntary rather than tied to statutory agencies, and one response noted that referrals from probation or YOTs were often less successful than self-referral or introduction through existing service users. Significantly, in this context, the review of techniques for effective engagement conducted for the Youth Justice Board, which focused mainly on YOT provision, contains little discussion of responding to young people’s interests. One exception is a description of a bike workshop whose success, according to the worker who managed it, derived from the fact that it involved doing “what the young people are into, not try and put a round peg into a square hole” (Ipsos MORI: 58). Another exception is found in an interview with a young person who contended that provision of services that are attractive to young people – particularly those that they would not be able to access otherwise – is central to the process of engagement:

Ask the young people what they want and what would they really, really like to do ... because it’s stuff like music, football, all of that stuff, everything, there’s loads of things what young people want to do but probably, I don’t know if the YOT can provide it or not, but yeah just, I just think they should ask what they want really, and see what the feedback is and what they can do (Ipsos MORI: 56).

The importance of services adapting to what young people want was also highlighted by respondents to the survey of YIF projects as a precursor to addressing more problematic issues further down the line. For instance:

Young people vote with their feet. They need to be allowed to say “No” even when we think something will be right and help them. Ultimately it’s their lives and we are guests in this. We can try and propose things at key moments.

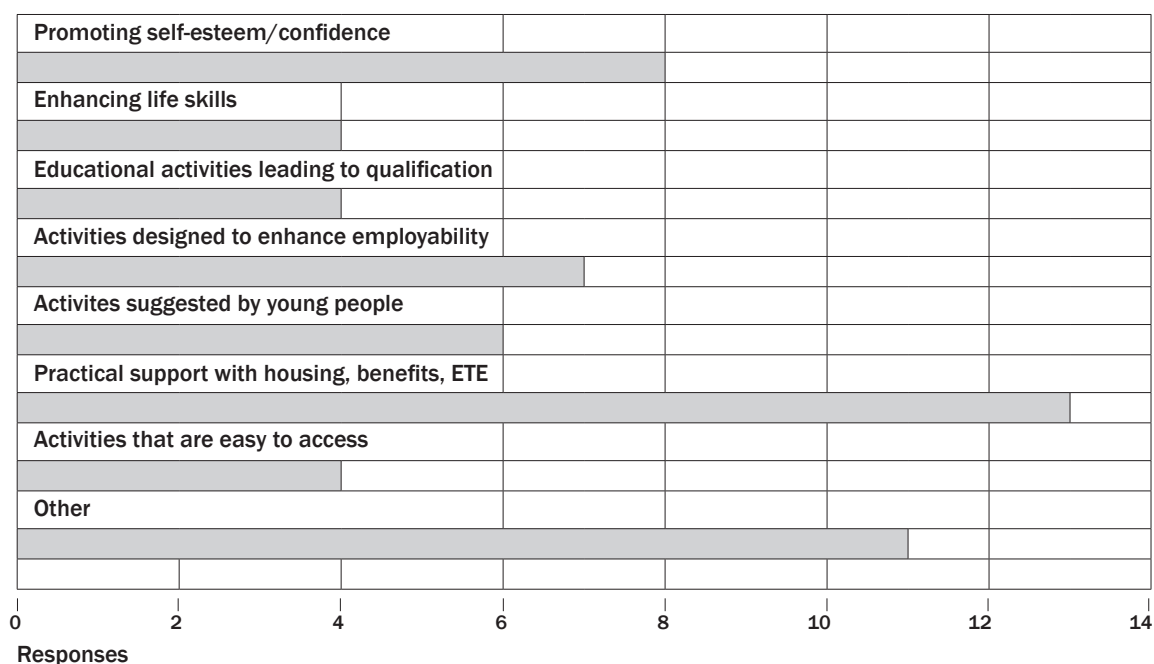
There was an acknowledgement that responding to young people’s interests and concerns was not always possible, either because of resource implications or because certain activities were inappropriate. In such circumstances, it was important to:

explain why the preferred options cannot be provided, so that a young person understands, in order to identify best second choice options and to maintain a young person’s engagement.

### **Incentives and rewards**

Over the longer term, young people’s interest needs to be reinforced by having clear goals, progressive pathways that allow achievement, and by offering the requisite levels of support to ensure that the chances of attainment are enhanced (Hazel, 2003). A recurrent theme in the responses of YIF project staff was that, given the previous experiences of failure typical of the young people with whom resettlement services work, it was important to celebrate success since “often progress ... can be very small and slow to arrive”. Recognition at various levels, either through feedback and praise, letters to home or acknowledgements of achievement in documents published by the project (Children and Young People’s Unit, 2001) can be supplemented by activities that lead to accreditation, either through nationally recognised qualifications and awards or locally developed certification (Combe, 2002; Ipsos MORI, 2010). Practical remuneration in the form of vouchers, or payment in kind through access to fun activities or IT facilities, should also be considered (Armstrong Schellenberg et al, 2003; Steer, 2000).

Figure 5: Activities most likely to contribute to sustained engagement as ranked by survey respondents



### User involvement and participation

One mechanism highlighted in the literature for ensuring that provision reflects young people's interests, and their own perceptions of need, is to involve service users in the development and delivery of interventions (Ministry of Social Development, 2003; Shier, 2001). Indeed, participatory approaches are increasingly regarded as a pre-condition for effective work with marginalised young people, including those in conflict with the law (Hart and Thompson, 2009; Lee and Charm, 2002). While the research literature has not demonstrated a clear correlation between a participatory approach and improved outcomes, this is in large part a difficulty of isolating the individual effects of broad ranging programmes of intervention (Stephenson et al, 2011). Moreover, user involvement in isolation cannot be expected to:

counteract the effect of other factors that might be present in a young offender's life, past or present (e.g. substance misuse, abuse, neglect, learning disability, homelessness, detachment from education and employment) (National Youth Agency, 2011a: 8).

Whilst participation does not provide a 'magic bullet', some commentators have nonetheless argued that criminal justice practice has hitherto failed to impact on reoffending rates precisely because the focus on 'what works' has tended to take insufficient account of the views of service users and failed to involve them in programme planning (Silvestri, 2009; Nacro, 2008b). Research has, for instance, shown that young people typically have very little say in how their time with YOT staff is spent (Hart and Thompson, 2009; National Youth Agency, 2011b; Hazel et al, 2002a). The experiences of young people subject to probation supervision are similar in this regard (Farrall, 2002). This lack of self-determination undermines effective resettlement because needs cannot be met and vulnerabilities addressed unless young people are engaged with the service. Failure to promote user involvement is also counterproductive because desistance from offending depends in large measure on the development of agency – a sense of optimism on the part of the young person that he or she can overcome the genuine obstacles that might otherwise impede attempts to move away from criminal activity (McNeill, 2006; McNeill, 2009; Bateman et al, 2013b).

Participation might mean different things in different contexts. Roger Hart's well-known model portrays a continuum, in the form of a ladder, which offers increasing responsibility to young people, ranging from "manipulation" at one extreme to "young person initiated, shared decisions with adults" at the other (Hart, 1992; see table 1 overleaf).



**Table 1: Hart's ladder of participation (adapted from Hart, 1992)**

Level	Description	Participation/non-participation
Rung 8	Young person initiated; shared decisions with adults	Degrees of increasing 'genuine participation'
Rung 7	Young person initiated and directed	
Rung 6	Adult initiated shared decisions with young people	
Rung 5	Consulted and informed	
Rung 4	Assigned but informed	Non-participation
Rung 3	Tokenism	
Rung 2	Decoration	
Rung 1	Manipulation	

In practice, the degree of participation is likely to be constrained by a variety of factors according to the purpose of the intervention and the context in which it occurs. As Hart and Thompson (2009) point out, a young person being sentenced for an offence can reasonably expect to have his or her views heard in court but it would not generally be thought appropriate for him or her to decide on the sentence. Thomas (2009: 8) who adopts a slightly different model of participation, derived from Fajerman and Treseder (1997), argues that a framework of:

'consulted and informed' may best suit YOTs. This involves deliberately asking children about their views and taking them seriously. However, the extent to which this can be done is dependent on the legislative framework ... and the need for compliance with the conditions of any court order.

The limits on participation associated with resettlement intervention will likewise be determined by whether intervention is compulsory, the expectations of referrers, and agency policy. Irrespective of these considerations, however:

true participation involves at least some element of empowerment: the young person is not just allowed to speak, but their voice is taken into account in any decisions that are made with/about them. If this component is lacking, the invitation to express a view does not go beyond the tokenistic (Hart and Thompson, 2009: 8).

The literature on participation deals with user involvement at two levels, which are not always clearly distinguished. At a strategic level, user involvement might include having a role in selecting and training staff, contributing to agency policy, and sitting on steering groups or advisory bodies (Hazel, 2003; Lewis, 2001). Such an approach to service development can help to engender an inclusive ethos for the project which might in turn be helpful in overcoming initial resistance on the part of young people to engage in the first place. However, strategic user involvement of this kind is more likely to involve young people who are already engaged with the service.

Participation at the level of the individual might therefore be considered as more significant in terms of establishing and maintaining the engagement of young people who may not wish to involve themselves in project development. The central concern of individual participation is establishing mechanisms that facilitate the young person having a choice over the type of activities that he or she engages with, making a genuine contribution to goal setting, and sharing intervention planning with project staff. From the point of view of the agency, such an approach facilitates engagement; from the perspective of the young person, it can foster a sense of ownership and responsibility (Lee and Charm, 2002). As one respondent to the YIF survey suggested:

We as professionals often have an idea of what young people may like to do but this isn't always correct. It needs to be something they want to do and they have been involved in setting up. Their involvement is key as this gives them ownership and encourages their attendance.

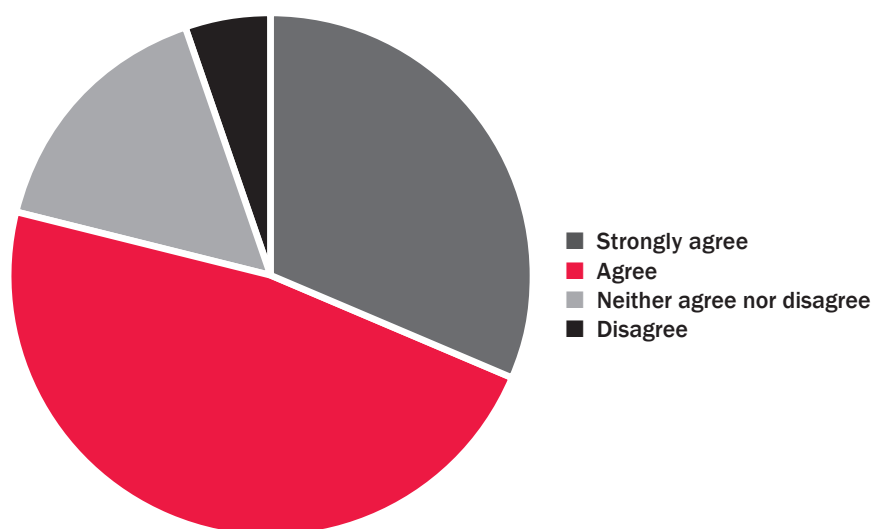
## 8. Relationship dynamics and the qualities of effective staff

### The importance of relationships

There is an emerging consensus in the research literature that positive relationships between staff and service users are crucial to establishing and maintaining the involvement of disadvantaged young people in programmes of support (McNeill, 2006; Trevithick, 2005). As Mason and Prior (2008: 12) contend: “at the centre of effective engagement are relationships”. Dowden and Andrews (2004: 205) observe that interpersonal influence “is arguably the most important” correctional principle.

Research conducted on behalf of the Youth Justice Board found that 94% of YOT practitioners agreed that developing a good relationship with young people was a necessary precursor of effective engagement (Ipsos MORI, 2010). Young people surveyed during the course of that study concurred. As one succinctly remarked: “If I didn’t like him, I’d probably not ... really want to turn up” (Ipsos MORI, 2010: 25). As indicated in figure 6 below, just one respondent in the survey informing this report disagreed with the statement that effective intervention with young people is about relationships rather than programmes. A further three indicated that they neither agreed nor disagreed with the sentiment, suggesting, perhaps, that they recognised both elements may be required.

**Figure 6 | Extent of agreement expressed by respondents with the statement: “Effective intervention with young people is about relationships, not programmes”**



### The nature of effective relationships

But if there is near unanimity on the significance of relationship, there is less clarity as to what forms of interpersonal relations are most likely to promote effective engagement. There is a general recognition that relationship building with marginalised young people frequently takes considerable time, effort and perseverance on the part of staff (Ipsos MORI, 2010; Batchelor and McNeill, 2005; McNeill and Batchelor, 2002; Lee and Charm, 2002). This view was confirmed by YIF staff who responded to the current survey. As one respondent put it:

Workers in this field need time to establish rapport and relationship and then longevity in terms of the time they can work with young people. These are often the most marginalised and disaffected and disadvantaged young people. Change does not often occur quickly, they need a worker that is consistent and can stick around for a good chunk of the transitional journey.

And again:

These young people will have had many agencies involved with them that may not have had the capacity to be persistent, so being able to do this is beneficial to the young person as over time they get used to you, they appreciate the effort you have put in and more often than not they do respond positively, it just may take time and determination.

There was considerable agreement among respondents that meaningful staff/young people relationships could only develop over a substantial period of time. A majority also considered that nearly all young people could be engaged if staff were sufficiently persistent.

There was also a strong consensus that persistence and a commitment to working over the longer period needed to effect change were crucial because of the traits of young people, particularly a lack of motivation, that pose an impediment to engagement. As one respondent suggested: “Perseverance, professionalism and resilience are key to making this work.” This echoes previous research highlighting the importance attached to such qualities by YOT staff (Ipsos MORI, 2010). Another respondent articulated a similar sentiment that also has implications for the length of intervention:

... with this client group we need patience and time to work effectively. Short interventions with young people with so many engrained issues, chaos and crisis are unlikely to work, often they have had loads of workers. They want and need consistency.

### **Managing expectations**

There is a general accord in the literature that young people should be clear about what they can expect from professionals who work with them and what is expected of them. For example, 88% of YOT workers surveyed for research commissioned by the Youth Justice Board indicated that establishing and maintaining boundaries was very important (Ipsos MORI, 2010). Moreover, practitioners considered that effective relationships depended upon consistency in this regard (Ipsos MORI, 2010). At the same time, how strictly such boundaries should be enforced is less evident (Stephenson et al, 2011; Bateman, 2011).

The authors of the Youth Justice Board report, for instance, summarise YOT perceptions as to what constitutes an effective relationship as staff being “firm but fair” (Ipsos MORI, 2010: 67), and yet 60% of practitioners also indicated that flexibility of approach was “very important”. It is clear that firmness (depending on how it is manifested) might in fact operate to reinforce young people’s resistance: breach for failure to attend statutory appointments remains commonplace even where young people might be considered to have engaged well (Hart, 2011). Moreover, the responses of young people in the same research suggest that they do not necessarily identify firmness as a characteristic that they welcome in a positive relationship. Many, for instance, described their YOT worker as “akin to a friend or big brother or sister to them, rather than a teacher or other authority figure” (Ipsos MORI, 2010: 26). As one put it: “The thing that helped was she wasn’t strict in any way” (Ipsos MORI, 2010: 27). Another attributed his good relationship with his YOT worker as being due to the fact that:

He’s a funny person and he gives good advice. He’s like a dad. He’s like a dad and that. He gives a lot of good advice and he’s good to talk to. I feel like I could tell him anything (Ipsos MORI, 2010: 27).

In this context, Eadie and Canton (2002: 14) have cautioned against inflexibility in the interests of enforcing boundaries, arguing that “rule-breaking by young people is not at all uncommon and that the wisest course may be to support young people as they grow out of crime”.

It should be noted too that the Ipsos MORI (2010) research is ambiguous since it does not acknowledge that fairness is a subjective concept: service providers might consider that their actions are fair in circumstances where that perception is not shared by service users. From the perspective of the agency for instance, a fair approach might require reacting in the same way to two young people who manifest the same behaviour irrespective of their circumstances. National standards have tended to encourage such

an interpretation of fairness (Robinson and Ugwuodike, 2012). A flexible approach that responded to individual need might lead to a rather different interpretation of fairness.

In this context, McNeill (2009) helpfully maintains that engagement depends ultimately on the young person regarding any exercise of authority as being legitimate. This implies, he contends, that professionals' relationships with young people ought to be predicated on an explicit recognition on the part of the former that the latter will frequently have been the victims of what he terms "social injustice" (McNeill, 2009). A negative confirmation of this argument is provided by research that considers relations between minority ethnic young people and the police. The former's experiences frequently engender a perception that police authority is not exercised legitimately, undermining trust and compromising a willingness to engage with individual police officers (Sharpe and Atherton, 2007).

The survey conducted for the current study suggests that YIF practitioners are aware of the importance of responding to young people in a manner that acknowledges where they have suffered previous hardship or previous victimisation has occurred. As one respondent put it:

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.

### **Qualities required of staff**

If relationships are key to engagement, research also suggests that the development of successful relationships is in large part contingent on the qualities of staff. There is a growing body of literature on the nature of the skills required of professionals to undertake effective work with young people. Trevithick (2005) for instance provides an overview of the characteristics that she considers necessary for effective social work intervention and, by implication, for promoting engagement. They include:

- A non-judgemental attitude
- Demonstrating empathy
- Showing an interest and conveying warmth
- Conveying a sense of genuineness
- Manifesting a belief in client self-determination

Chris Trotter (2006) in his work on engaging with 'involuntary clients' proposes that effective staff are those able to demonstrate 'pro-social modelling' – an approach which has some affinity with motivational interviewing, described earlier in the report, and which has demonstrated improved relationships between staff and service users in criminal justice settings (Cherry, 2005). The skills required for pro-social modelling show a considerable overlap with the characteristics of effective social work professionals identified by Trevithick and include:

- Being reliable; a stable presence in the young person's life
- Presenting as open, honest and fair
- Being friendly and able to use humour appropriately
- Helping with problems identified by the client rather than by the worker
- Being empathetic – showing a genuine concern for the young person's problems
- Supporting young people to develop strategies to address such problems
- "Working in a collaborative, friendly, optimistic way so that the client develops trust in the worker as someone who can genuinely help them with their problems" (Trotter, 2012: 1-2)

From a resettlement perspective, it is significant that recent research has found that girls in custody made a clear distinction between staff who ‘cared’ and those who did not. The distinction moreover was thought to pertain across custodial institutions, YOTs and children’s social care. From the young women’s perspective, good relationships only developed with professionals they perceived to be in the former category (Bateman et al, 2013b: 74). Caring was demonstrated where staff were compassionate, offered emotional support, acknowledged the impact of earlier negative experiences and the previous failure of agencies to deal with them, and provided practical advice and support in response to the needs articulated by the girls themselves (Bateman et al, 2013b). Young people, it would appear, place a high value on staff qualities that are consistent with those identified as prerequisites in the literature for effective practice. YOT practitioners also acknowledge that a preparedness to ‘go the extra mile’ on behalf of the young person was appreciated by service users as an indication of caring (Ipsos MORI).

Such findings were echoed in the comments of YIF project staff, who overwhelmingly thought that some professionals were much better than others at developing good relationships with young people, irrespective of their training and qualifications. One respondent, for instance, highlighted that:

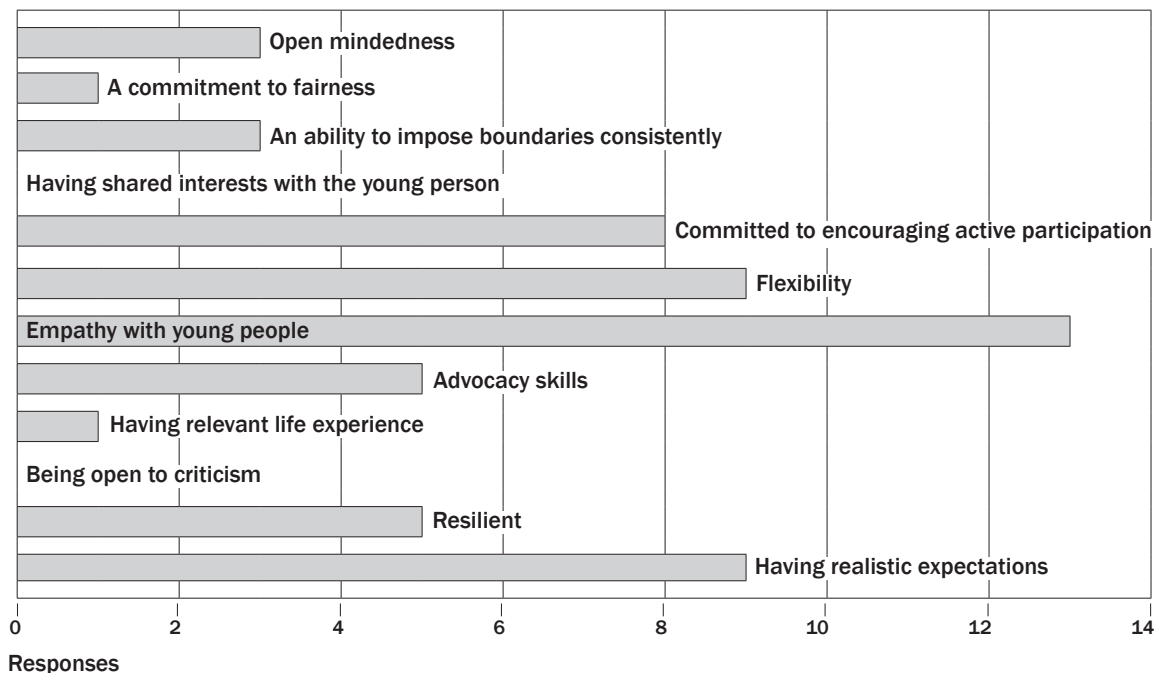
Showing the young person you are interested in them and you care is also important. Remembering things they have told you they like – again this shows interest and makes them feel that they are important to you, so much so you would remember that they love chocolate Buttons (for example). These young people have often been pushed from pillar to post for a lot of their lives with no real consistent support.

Another suggested that it might be necessary to let young people:

know you are there even when you may not be actually seeing them regularly. A reminder: “I’M STILL HERE IF YOU NEED ME”.

YIF survey respondents, when asked to indicate the three staff qualities which they considered to be most important in establishing effective relationships, ranked empathy with young people most highly, followed by flexibility and having realistic expectations of the young people. As shown in figure 7 below, a commitment to encouraging the active involvement of young people was also regarded as significantly more important than an ability to impose consistent boundaries.

**Figure 7: Respondents’ rating of the importance of staff qualities in establishing effective relationships**



The views of staff in this respect are consistent with those of young people who regard empathy and a genuine concern with children's well-being as essential attributes of professionals with whom they would be likely to engage. Professionals who demonstrate an ability to listen and provide emotional support are more likely to enjoy a good relationship with young people with whom they work (Bateman et al, 2013b). Staff who look at the person rather than at what he or she has done, and those who treat young people with respect are particularly valued (Evans et al, 2006). Young people are also more likely to respond to workers who strike an appropriate balance that avoids both 'infantilisation' and 'adultification', by encouraging a sense of self-belief and promoting self-determination appropriate to the young person's age and stage of development while simultaneously providing encouragement and emotional and practical support (Bateman et al, 2013b).

## 9. Conclusion

### Engagement as a model of transformation

Engagement encompasses more than attendance; it is a complex process that includes emotional and cognitive dimensions which, in combination, can facilitate, or function as a prerequisite for, a shift in the young person's sense of identity. This report presents a model of engagement that involves resettlement providers facilitating a journey for young people in terms of how they perceive themselves from a socially marginalised offender to a socially included non-offender. Engagement with resettlement services can accordingly be understood as a platform which, where it is successful, can help the young person to commence a process of transformation conducive to their fuller integration into mainstream society. Importantly, therefore, the activities, practical support and relationships that are integral to achieving engagement with resettlement services are thus also key to promoting a shift in identity that makes resettlement itself more likely.

### A three step model

One way of conceptualising the material presented within this report is to think in terms of the young person's journey as consisting of three steps, although in practice these stages may not be followed in a linear fashion in each individual case:

#### Step 1: The project engaging with the young person

This step is concerned with establishing a meaningful connection with the young person initially, and interesting them in the services provided. This stage will frequently involve work on enhancing motivation. If the young person is already motivated to change, it will be concerned with translating that motivation into participation in project activities. Either way, it is initiating the young person's relationship with resettlement support and is achieved where the young person displays what Fredricks et al (2004) characterise as behavioural engagement.

#### Step 2: The young person engaging with the service

This step is concerned with sustaining and developing the young person's relationship with the service provision. More specifically, it consists of the young person identifying with the project staff, the service provision and the objectives of intervention and becoming involved in a meaningful way with, and learning from, the interventions offered. This stage accordingly involves the young person developing a relationship with the service that would also incorporate emotional and cognitive engagement as characterised by Fredricks et al (2004). Where successfully achieved, it both contributes to, and requires a shift in, identity on the part of the young person.

The literature on engaging young people, which for the most part is not specific to young people leaving custody, tends to stop at this point in the journey. However, the nature of resettlement suggests that there may be merit in considering a third stage.

#### Step 3: The young person engaging with wider society

This step acknowledges that successful resettlement requires more than the establishment of a relationship between the young person and individual service providers. It is concerned with the young person having achieved a shift in identity, as a consequence of engagement with resettlement activities, which is no longer dependent on the relationship with particular services, but enables him or her to develop a constructive engagement with a broader range of agencies and wider society. It involves translating the potential for a transformed relationship between the young person and the world around him or her, which engagement with resettlement services has made possible, into reality. It might be manifested by the young person engaging with constructive mainstream leisure pursuits, achieving stable accommodation, maintaining positive personal relations, moving into sustainable education training or employment, and desisting from offending.

This third step is important to resettlement because the process relies on the young person engaging with a broad range of agencies (Hazel et al, 2002; Bateman et al, 2013), and the transition from support to independence at the end of the licence period or when resettlement intervention comes to an end. A full understanding of this stage raises a number of additional questions for researchers, outlined below.

Ensuring engagement from the perspective of resettlement providers involves finding ways of facilitating the young person's journey at each stage. At step one, engagement involves initiating a relationship between the project and the young person. At step two, it concerns providing activities and delivering them in a manner that sustains and deepens the young person's commitment to the project as a vehicle for effecting changes in his or her identity. At step three, it entails finding ways to enable the young person to build on the relationship that he or she has established with the service provider, and his or her newly emerging identity becoming more fully integrated in wider society. Ultimately, this final stage depends on the young person having been supported to develop the motivation, self-esteem, skills and other necessary means to disengage from the support of particular services, thereby avoiding over-dependency.

### **Principles of effective engagement**

Engaging young people in resettlement activities is a challenging process. There are significant barriers that can impede the engagement of marginalised service users and these are frequently exacerbated in the case of young people in conflict with the law who have extensive, often negative, previous experience of criminal justice agencies. There are, however, a number of principles which, the evidence suggests, can enhance the prospects that young people will be successfully engaged throughout the three stages described above.

Reaching out to young people in environments where they feel comfortable, and providing activities, interventions and support which are flexible and delivered in response to service users' articulated interests and needs are essential to promoting engagement in the first instance. Expectations must be realistic and progress, however small, acknowledged, reaffirmed and rewarded. Encouraging user participation, and involving young people as agents in their own resettlement rather than defining problems on their behalf are both of central importance. Persistence, perseverance and patience on the part of staff are required in equal measure.

Relationships lie at the heart of successful engagement. This involves not only interpersonal relations between staff and young people – essential though those are – but also relationships between young people and the service, with peers in the project, and with wider society. A focus on developing such relationships, rather than on participation per se, provides the best prospect for ensuring engagement and helping to effect a change in how young people view themselves and their future life chances.

The extent to which appropriate relationships develop is in large part contingent on the qualities and skills of practitioners. Staff who are able to demonstrate that they care about young people's well-being, who acknowledge the extent of earlier negative experiences and disadvantage, are committed to service user self-determination, and promote a sense of agency and optimism are more likely to exercise interpersonal influence with young people, thereby increasing the prospects of full engagement and, in the longer term, beneficial outcomes.

### **Questions raised by the research**

As noted earlier in the report, the research on engagement in resettlement is largely 'inferential' in that it derives from fields outside of the criminal justice arena. The knowledge and expertise of practitioners captured by the survey of YIF projects go some way to address this weakness, and provide a clear baseline for further investigation of the issue. Nonetheless, important questions about engaging young people in resettlement remain, and each of these questions is addressed under the relevant step below. The model of engagement as a staged journey consisting of different forms of relationships provides a useful framework for highlighting gaps in the knowledge base and for structuring outstanding questions for research. Perhaps unsurprisingly, some of the questions outlined below mirror gaps in the research literature on the resettlement of young people identified previously by the BYC programme (Bateman et al, 2013a).



### Step 1: The service engaging with the young person

- What approaches are most conducive to promoting initial engagement specifically within the custodial environment? Will they be equally relevant at each stage of the sentence or remand period?
- How does initial engagement differ between sentenced and remanded young people? Do their expectations and motivations differ, and how can services best respond to any differences?
- Given the rapid decline in the number of young people in custody, and the associated reduction in the number of custodial units, how is initial engagement affected by the increasing distance from home of placements? How can this best be negotiated or mitigated by service providers?
- To what extent is the success of initial engagement affected by whether resettlement provision is compulsory, associated with licence conditions, or voluntary? What sorts of approach are more likely to be successful in each case?

### Step 2: The young person engaging with the service

- How does the transition to adulthood relate to sustained engagement with a service? Can an effective relationship with one agency ease this transition and the movement between other respective agencies? Conversely, how does the transition affect that relationship?
- To what extent, and in what ways, is the engagement of the young person affected by the relationship of resettlement providers with the criminal justice process where there may be a threat of breach for non-compliance? How does a third sector agency negotiate this, particularly if they are obligated to inform the state sector of non-compliance?
- To what extent is engagement related to the prevention of reoffending? Are young people who appear to be most engaged those who show the highest reductions in recidivism? Are different types of engagement reflected in different outcomes?
- To what extent are the processes and activities that promote engagement distinct from (or similar to) those that promote broader behavioural change?

### Step 3: The young person engaging with wider society

- How can engagement with services be sustained through to, and beyond the end of, a licence or period of resettlement intervention? Does this change over that time?
- What methods are most effective in transferring engagement from one service (or practitioner) to other services (for instance, from a resettlement service to sustained engagement with education, training and employment)?
- How do staff best manage young people's expectations of what services will be available to them once resettlement provision comes to an end, particularly within an economic context of limited resources and employment opportunities?
- How can services best ensure engagement without longer-term dependency? What forms of engagement are conducive to promoting wider inclusion rather than over-dependency?

There is also a lack of knowledge as to how young people themselves experience engagement in resettlement and how they understand relationships with service providers. More specifically, little is known about how engagement is affected by gender, race, age and other demographic characteristics. Given the argument in this report that successful engagement is a process of promoting a shift in identity on the part of the young person, it seems likely that such characteristics would impact on young people's experience of the journey. This raises the following questions:

- To what extent and in what ways is successful engagement in resettlement affected by the individual characteristics of diverse groups of young people?
- What are the implications of such differences for providers of resettlement services at the different stages of engagement?

More broadly, the focus on engagement as a process of shifting identity poses questions as to the nature of effective resettlement itself and how it is measured. If resettlement can also be understood in terms of effecting shifts in how young people see themselves and in how they relate to individuals and agencies, the current policy discourse that prioritises reductions in reoffending as indicators of success might be open to criticism (see for instance, Bateman et al, 2013a). BYC will continue work with policymakers and practitioners to consider the implications of such questions for resettlement.

## Annex – a note on measuring engagement

Given the complex multi-faceted nature of the concept of engagement, measuring it in operational terms presents difficulties. Fredricks and her colleagues (2004) provide an overview of the various measures used in education to monitor different forms of engagement, but none of these capture full engagement in the form considered in this study and to which resettlement projects are likely to aspire.

There are a number of engagement measures used in therapeutic settings, including some that focus specifically on work with (adult) offenders. The Treatment Engagement Rating Scale, for instance (described in Drieschner and Boomsma, 2008) has been developed in Holland specifically for a forensic setting but is likely to be less useful for projects in the voluntary sector, particularly those which adopt more of a youth work model.

A measure developed to test engagement in group work may be more relevant to projects whose primary focus is working with young people in groups (The Groupwork Engagement Measure, described in MacGowan, 2006). The tool consists of 37 items across seven dimensions drawn from group work theory (in an American setting) which largely capture the various elements of youth engagement. The dimensions are: attendance; contributing; relating (to the worker and to other group members); contracting; and working on problems.

The Working Alliance Inventory has been validated in a number of social work related and therapeutic fields and has been shown to be a good predictor of outcomes (Horvath and Greenberg, 1989). It consists of two complementary sections completed by the practitioner and service user respectively, but may be overly focused on goals and achievements to capture the full range of engagement in a resettlement context. A shorter version, which is easier for staff and service users to complete, has been developed over the past 10 years (described in Hasper and Gillaspay, 2006). The Working Alliance Inventory has also recently been adapted to measure the engagement of (US adult) offenders on probation. This version of the measure only requires completion by the service user (described in Tatman and Love, 2010).

An alternative, less direct approach to measuring engagement is to focus on practitioner skills. Trotter (2012) has developed a manual for coding effective practice skills for professionals supervising young people in the (Australian) juvenile justice system. The skills measured are largely those associated with pro-social modelling. As indicated in the main body of the report, better reported outcomes are associated with service users working with professionals who are rated more highly by independent researchers.

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