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Beyond
YOUTH CUSTODY

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

UPDATE: NOVEMBER 2014

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Introduction

In April 2013, Beyond Youth Custody published an extensive review of the literature on the resettlement of young people leaving custody (Bateman et al, 2013). New publications are constantly added to the literature, so the shape of the evidence base changes incrementally over time. Beyond Youth Custody is committed to publishing regular supplements that take account of the latest developments in resettlement policy and practice, and disseminating the most recent research findings in the field. This is the latest in a series providing an overview of relevant publications that have appeared since the most recent update was published in August 2014. It aims to ensure that practitioners and policy makers involved with the resettlement of young people have access to the latest available lessons from research, policy and practice.

Continued falls in the imprisonment of young people and challenges for resettlement

In the recent past, the number of prisoners in England and Wales has risen sharply. Between 2002 and 2014, for instance, the prison population grew by 20% to a total of 84,485 on 10 October of that latter year (Prison Reform Trust, 2014). This represents a rate of custody that is high by European standards. In England and Wales, the rate of imprisonment is 149 persons per 100,000 of the total population, in comparison with 102 in France and 81 in Germany (Prison Reform Trust, 2014). Such levels of incarceration are also high relative to those outside of Europe: for instance, the rate of custody in Hong Kong which has "one of the highest imprisonment rates in Asia" is 141 per 100,000 (Chui and Cheng, 2014).

By contrast, the pattern of incarceration for children has, following a period of rapid growth mirroring that of adults, shown a sharp decline from 2008 onwards (Bateman et al, 2013). That trend has continued in the period since the publication of the last literature review update. In August 2014, there were 1,068 children detained in custody, fewer than at any date since April 2000 when the Youth Justice Board began to collect figures in their current form, notwithstanding modest rises in June and July of this year. The figure represents a decline in the imprisoned child population of 171 in comparison with 12 months previously and a fall of more than 64% compared to the highpoint in the period since 2000, reached in May 2008 (Ministry of Justice, 2014a).

The young adult prison population has also fallen, but the trajectory has not been so marked as that for children. As noted in the literature review, the number of young adults aged 18-20 in custody fell by 16% between 2008 and 2012. Since then, the rate of decline appears to have accelerated. As shown in table 1, on 30 June 2014, the young adult prison population was 9% lower than the population had been 12 months earlier; and 28% lower than it had been two years previously. Over the same period, the use of custody for young people aged 21-24 has also continued to reduce, although the falls have been more modest and the decline appears to be slowing. On 30 June 2014, the custodial population for this age group was 12,473, 11% lower than in June 2012, and 3% lower than in June 2013 (Ministry of Justice, 2014b).

Table 1
Custody by age: June 2012-June 2014 (30th of each month)

	June 2012	June 2013	Sept 2013	Dec 2013	Mar 2014	June 2014
18-20 yrs						
Males	7,156	6,084	6,044	5,727	5,759	5,533
Females	287	188	189	188	180	168
Total	7,443	6,272	6,233	5,915	5,939	5,701
21-24 yrs						
Males	13,460	12,361	12,293	12,014	12,136	12,021
Females	545	461	467	420	459	452
Total	14,005	12,822	12,760	12,434	12,595	12,473

As noted in the most recent update (Bateman and Hazel, 2014a), it is possible to understand these different trends, according to age, as a consequence of the sharper reductions in relation to children in custody filtering through to young adults. Such an account would be consistent with the fact that the decline in custody began earlier for those aged 10-17 years.

It has been argued that, while the continued falls in the number of young people detained within custodial institutions are obviously to be welcomed, recent trends pose additional challenges for resettlement services (Bateman et al, 2013). A previous update summarised evidence that, as children and young people whose offending is of a less serious or persistent nature are increasingly diverted from prison, the residual population is correspondingly more likely to display an entrenched pattern of offending. It is also likely to have a higher concentration of complex needs (Bateman and Hazel, 2014b).

This perception is reinforced by HM Chief Inspector of Prisons Annual Report which notes that as the number of children in custody has fallen the *needs and requirements* of this population have increased. Almost one in five of those in young offender institutions (YOIs) in 2013/14 considered themselves to have a disability and a third indicated that they had been in local authority care. The experiences of this latter group while in custody were inferior in a number of respects to those children who had not been in care (HM Chief Inspector of Prisons, 2014).

Evidence confirms that black and mixed heritage children within the youth justice system have increased levels of need compared to their white counterparts (May et al, 2010). Between August 2008 and August 2014, the representation of these two groups within the secure estate for children and young people rose from 21% to 30% (Ministry of Justice, 2014a).

No separate data of this kind have been published relating specifically to young prisoners aged 18-24, but it would not be unreasonable to suppose that a concentration of disadvantage may have occurred among this population as the overall level of incarceration has reduced. Indeed, HM Chief Inspector of Prisons has confirmed that as a consequence of the "dramatic fall in the number of young adult male prisoners, those held were often the most troubled individuals and establishments struggled to manage them safely, wherever they were held" (HM Chief Inspector of Prisons, 2014). One manifestation of the heightened vulnerability of this age group is that while young adults represent just 7% of the prison population, they account for more than 16% of self-harm incidents within the custodial estate. Young people aged 21-24 are also overrepresented on this measure, although not to the same extent, accounting for 15% of those imprisoned and 21% of recorded incidents of self-harm (Ministry of Justice, 2014c). In this context, resettlement is likely to have become a more challenging activity as the needs of those at whom the services are targeted have increased and become more complex.

Changes to the custodial estate and developments in resettlement

The falls in youth imprisonment have generated a reduced requirement for custodial capacity, leading to a reconfiguration of the secure estate. In its annual report for 2013/14, the Youth Justice Board records that it decommissioned 905 custodial places for children, including the three remaining young offender institutions for girls, during the course of the year (Youth Justice Board, 2014a). Since April 2014, however, as indicated above, the decline in imprisonment of children has continued and, in October 2014, the Board announced that it would withdraw from HMYOI Hindley (a total of 248 places) and Hassockfield Secure Training Centre (STC) (58 places), with both establishments returning to the Ministry of Justice by March 2015 (Youth Justice Board, 2014b).

The decision follows a critical inspection of HMYOI Hindley published in August 2014 (HM Inspectorate of Prisons, 2014) which found that, despite health services and resettlement provision being good, the institution was nonetheless struggling to keep vulnerable boys safe and that levels of violence within the establishment had risen since the previous inspection. However, Lucy Dawes, Deputy Chief Executive of the Youth Justice Board, commenting on the factors that had been taken into consideration, maintained

that the selection for closure should not be seen as a reflection on performance of particular institutions (Puffett, 2014a). The decommissioning of the under-18 facility will not affect young adult male provision at HMYOI Hindley which will remain in place. The closure of Hassockfield STC represents the first reduction in STC capacity since the opening of the first such centre at Medway in 1998.

Provision for 18-21 year olds would appear to be increasingly piecemeal, with this age group detained in a "wide range of establishments", including: YOIs that only hold young people aged under 21; those where young adults are held in separate young adult wings in adult prisons; and those where all prisoners over the age of 18 are totally integrated (HM Chief Inspector of Prisons, 2014). There are now 53 dual-designated custodial establishments that are permitted to hold young adults and adults within the same facility (Prison Reform Trust, 2014). There is no specific training for staff working with young adults and, as a consequence, provision does not always take account of their developmental needs, "with too little done to adapt to their lower levels of maturity" (HM Chief Inspector of Prisons, 2014).

The increasing dilution of the young adult estate also has implications for the resettlement of those incarcerated as children, since more of this group are transferred to the adult estate, with no specific provision for young people, than are released from the estate for children and young people (HM Chief Inspector of Prisons, 2014). Ensuring effective resettlement in such circumstances may be additionally challenging.

Such developments also imply that broader changes to the adult estate, which have always impacted directly on young people aged 21-24, will impinge on the resettlement of an increasing proportion of young people below that age. Despite a slight overall rise in prison numbers since the May 2010 election, custodial capacity has been reduced by 6,500 places in that period (Howard League, 2014). On 28 March 2014, the custodial population reached 99% of useable operational capacity. According to HM Chief Inspector of Prisons, population pressures have become "particularly intense" since autumn 2013 (HM Chief Inspector of Prisons, 2014).

The fall in capacity has been accompanied by a decline in the number of frontline prison officers from 27,650 in August 2010 to 19,325 in September 2013, a fall of 30%. Moreover, this latter trend is not simply a consequence of the closure, partial closure or rerolling of institutions, since staffing has also reduced in nearly all of the prisons that remain open (Howard League, 2014).

The combination of overcrowding and lower staffing has coincided with a rise in violence, with the number of serious assaults in custody growing by 38% in 2013/14 (HM Chief Inspector of Prisons, 2014). The recent period has also seen a growth in incidents of self-harm and suicide. While there may be a variety of explanations for these developments, HM Chief Inspector of Prisons has argued that:

It is impossible to avoid the conclusion that the conjunction of resource, population and policy pressures, particularly in the second half of 2013–14 and particularly in adult male prisons, was a very significant factor in the rapid deterioration in safety and other outcomes we found as the year progressed (HM Chief Inspector of Prisons, 2014).

From a resettlement perspective, the process of preparing young people for release is inevitably made more difficult where they are detained in an environment in which they feel unsafe. Significantly, too, a potential effect of overcrowding and understaffing is to undermine an institution's capacity to deliver purposeful activities and rehabilitative services. The introduction of a core day during 2013/14 in most adult prisons (excluding young adult YOIs, open and high security prisons) designed to maximise time out of cell has yet to yield a demonstrable impact. Almost half of adult male establishments inspected during 2013/14, including young adult YOIs, were rated as poor or insufficiently good in terms of the level of purposeful activity available (HM Chief Inspector of Prisons, 2014).

As noted in a previous update (Bateman and Hazel, 2014b), one consequence of the contraction in the number of establishments in which young people are held, while a welcome indicator of falling numbers, is

an increase in the average distance of the custodial institution from their home. In April 2014, 38% of 15-17 year olds in prison service accommodation were detained more than 50 miles from home. The equivalent figure for young adults aged 18-20 was 35% (Ministry of Justice, 2014d). This appears to be a particular problem for children detained in specialist units: 17% of those placed in the Keppel Unit, located in HMYOI Wetherby in Yorkshire, which accommodates 15-17-year-old boys with particularly high levels of vulnerability were more than 100 miles from home; at the time of the most recent inspection 12 out of 25 children held at the Anson Unit, also at Wetherby and the only remaining dedicated YOI facility for children serving long-term sentences, were from London (HM Chief Inspector of Prisons, 2014). Unsurprisingly, distance is a factor in maintaining meaningful contact with families, friends and professionals, a prerequisite of effective resettlement (Bateman et al, 2013). Only 37% of children report that it is easy or very easy for family and friends to visit them (HM Chief Inspector of Prisons, 2014).

The government is proceeding with plans for the longer-term reconfiguration of the youth justice custodial estate, first outlined in the green paper *Transforming youth custody* (Ministry of Justice, 2013a). Central to these plans is the development of a network of secure colleges and the Criminal Justice and Courts Bill, currently before Parliament, contains provision to expand the forms of institution in which children can be incarcerated to include this new form of provision.

One of the defining features of these proposed establishments is their size. The first purpose-built pathfinder secure college to be developed adjacent to HMYOI Glen Parva, and scheduled to open in April 2017, is projected to hold 320 children, equivalent to 30% of the current child custodial population and 43% of those currently placed in YOIs. This aspect of the proposal has proved controversial, as outlined in a previous literature review update (Bateman and Hazel, 2014a). Perhaps, significantly, the HM Chief Inspector of Prisons Annual Report recorded that outcomes for children in custody were "better in the smaller units" (HM Chief Inspector of Prisons, 2014).

Given the lengthy period prior to the opening of the first secure college, the government's plans for transforming youth custody also make provision for changes in the interim. A previous update outlined proposals for new resettlement consortia in four areas in England, selected on the basis of a high use of custody and a history of shared partnership working (Bateman and Hazel, 2014a). The Youth Justice Board more recently launched consortia in the East Midlands, North East London, South and West Yorkshire and South London on 10 November 2014. The intention is that the initiative will bring together the key resettlement agencies, including custodial institutions, youth offending teams, local authorities and other community partners to address the resettlement gaps in their respective areas. Lead local authorities have been established for each of the consortia and "enhanced offers" to children are currently under development (Youth Justice Board, 2014c).

Funding for the next five years has been obtained, through the European Social Fund, for youth resettlement support workers who will provide additional services, over and above statutory requirements, to children aged 16-18 leaving custody and subject to youth offending team supervision. The posts, which are due to come on stream from July 2015 in London, the Midlands and the North West, will operate on a payment by results basis (Youth Justice Board, 2014c).

At the annual Youth Justice Convention in November 2014, Andrew Selous, Minister with responsibility for Youth Justice, announced a 'stocktake' of youth offending teams (Puffett, 2014). While the review is not focused specifically on resettlement, it may have implications for local models of delivery of youth justice services, including those to children leaving custody.

Research findings

It is well established that young people leaving custody face a range of obstacles that derive both from their background and circumstances and from systemic factors that operate to impede desistance (Bateman et al, 2013).

Young people's perception of resettlement challenges

Qualitative research conducted with 16 young males in Hong Kong, with a mean age of 19, who had been released from custody within the past year, provides further insight as to how some of these challenges are perceived by young people themselves (Chui and Cheng, 2014). The authors note that social support and access to employment are both important indicators of whether young people are likely to desist from crime and emphasise the particular importance of both factors for young people who are in a process of developmental transition and located within the early stages of the employment market. Semi-structured in-depth interviews were used to explore participants' experiences and understanding of both of these issues.

The authors argue that Confucian values, which have a strong influence on Chinese culture, place a heavy emphasis on the role of the family as a social institution that imposes a range of reciprocal duties and expectations on family members. Nonetheless, the majority of the sample had had strained relationships with other family members prior to imprisonment and those relations had not improved during the custodial episode. While in detention the young men had received very little familial support and few visits from family members and this perceived neglect had exacerbated existing tensions, further reducing expectations of what assistance would be available on release. The fact that most young people's families were among those most likely to experience financial hardship also meant that disagreements over finance were common on release.

Although all participants were subject to statutory post-custody supervision and had been referred to social services or non-governmental organisations (NGOs) that specialise in working with offenders, they did not – with some notable exceptions – experience these agencies as offering useful social support on release. In particular, the young men were critical of agencies' failure to provide assistance with accommodation or employment.

At the time of interview, virtually all the respondents were unemployed or in low-paid casual employment. The young people were aware that their poor educational background and lack of experience made entry to the jobs market more difficult, but they also perceived that their status of having been incarcerated made it less likely that employers would offer them work. Unemployment tended to exacerbate other problems, in particular finding stable accommodation; a priority for many of the young people given the nature of their relationships with their families.

Drugs and reoffending

There is ample evidence documenting the relationship between drugs and offending (Hammersley, 2008) and young people in custody are significantly more likely to have misused substances than the general population (Bateman et al, 2013). Recent American research with adult women confirms the former relationship and established that frequent substance misuse prior to incarceration was one of the main factors predicting recidivism in the three years following release. Other powerful indicators were: youth (reoffending declined with age), age at first arrest (reoffending was higher for women who had first been arrested at a younger age); the number of prior episodes of incarceration; and parental status (women with no children, or who did not have custody of their children at the point of imprisonment, were more likely to offend, with the difference being most marked in the first three months after release). The increased risk of reoffending associated with previous drug use, however, was no longer evident after the first 12 months back in the community. The authors suggest that this implies that drug treatment interventions are likely to have the greatest impact in the period immediately after release when substance dependency appears to pose the greatest risk to desistance (Scott et al, 2014). This research focuses on adult women but may have some relevance to the resettlement of girls and young women in the justice system, given the prevalence of problematic drug misuse in this group (Bateman and Hazel, 2014c).

Post-custody drug-related interventions

The effectiveness of post-custody drug-related interventions with young people is considered in research conducted through the RAND Corporation's Safety and Justice Program in the form of an evaluation of the Substance Use Treatment and Reentry (STAR) Program delivered to more than 200 young people aged 16-25 recently released from juvenile detention in Los Angeles (Hunter and Yuang, 2014). The evaluation looked at males in the relevant age range in Los Angeles juvenile detention facilities who:

- had been identified as having issues with substance misuse
- were within four months of their anticipated release date
- had accepted an offer of post-release job training with Homeboy Industries (HBI) where the substance misuse programme was to be delivered.

The STAR intervention aimed to extend and enhance the provision offered through HBI's existing employment services which, in addition to job training, already comprised of case management, mental health counselling, access to education, parenting classes and tattoo removal. The intervention consisted of a five-session programme of motivational enhancement therapy-cognitive behavioural therapy 5 (MET/CBT5), a combination of treatments recommended by the funders for drug-using juvenile populations. Two sessions focused on motivational enhancement and the remaining three were given over to cognitive behavioural work. Weekly relapse prevention group sessions were also offered by HBI.

Young people enrolled in the MET/CBT5 programme were predominantly male (79%), were mostly of Hispanic origin (74%) (another 15% were African American) and had a mean age of 19. The majority had previous experience of violent victimisation and most reported symptoms consistent with post-traumatic stress disorder.

Of those who consented to treatment, 90% participated in at least one session and almost three quarters (73%) successfully completed the full five-session programme. Completers and non-completers were similar in terms of demographic factors and their indicators of need, such as previous offending, housing, employment, social connectedness and alcohol use. However, self-reported use of drugs following release increased the chances of not completing the programme. Reasons for non-completion were not always fully recorded but 10% of those who failed to finish the programme had been returned to custody. The level of engagement was accordingly promising.

Outcomes too were quite encouraging, for the most part showing modest improvements or stability over time. Employment rates were very high at commencement and after 12 months 70% of participants remained in stable employment. There was an increase over the same period in the proportion of participants with stable accommodation. Considering the nature of the population, the fact that 85% of participants had not been arrested after one year was regarded as a positive achievement. While just under a third of young people receiving intervention reported abstinence throughout the 12-month period, those reporting substance misuse at the start of the programme showed a reduction in use over time.

While these findings are suggestive of positive outcomes, the evaluation had a number of limitations, acknowledged by the authors. Most significantly, there was a potential for selection bias since participants had all volunteered to take advantage of the job training programme offered by HBI, raising the possibility that they may have been more motivated than the general custodial population to change their lives. Moreover, it was not possible to disaggregate the effect of the STAR programme and other supportive interventions which may have been accessed by participants. The absence of a control group also meant that any improvements demonstrated by participants could not be definitively attributed to the STAR intervention (Hunter and Yuang, 2014).

Bereavement

Young people who offend are more likely than their non-offending peers to have experienced previous traumatic events (Wright and Liddle, 2014). Partly as a consequence of this, the prevalence of mental ill health is significantly higher among young people in custody than in the general population (Bateman et

al, 2013). Further evidence to that effect is provided by recent research exploring the experiences of bereavement of young men in custody in Scotland and the impact of those experiences on their mental well-being (Vaswani, 2014). Previous studies have indicated a clear association between bereavement and offending by young people (see, for instance, Youth Justice Trust, 2003); moreover, the custodial setting is likely to complicate the grieving process, successful negotiation of which requires:

- Accepting the loss
- Working through the pain of grief
- Adjusting to the environment without the person lost
- Forming a new, and appropriate, bond with the deceased that allows the bereaved to move on (Worden, 1983, as cited in Vaswani, 2014)

Nonetheless, previous little research has been conducted into how the prison context impacts on young people who have experienced recent bereavement.

Vaswani's research focused on young men sentenced to at least six months in custody, excluding those due to be released within two weeks to allow time for any issues raised by participation to be explored before the return to the community. This generated a sample of 81, 41% (n=33) of whom completed a bereavement questionnaire. All but two also completed a full mental health screening in the form of a self-report inventory. A purposive sample of those with experience of bereavement (n=11) was subsequently interviewed to explore arising out of that experience in greater depth.

91% (n=30) of those completing the questionnaire reported bereavement experiences, ranging from one bereavement to 18, with a mean of 5.4. Of those bereaved, only one young person had not experienced two or more bereavements, and two thirds of individuals had experienced four or more. Moreover, over 75% of the sample had experienced a 'traumatic' bereavement defined in terms of the death being caused by accident, murder, overdose or suicide, and therefore unanticipated. Given that so few young people had not been bereaved, it was not possible to establish whether bereavement was related to poorer mental health. However, 'traumatic' bereavement was positively correlated with a higher mental ill health score, even though the relationship was not statistically significant (possibly a consequence of the relatively small sample size).

Interviews confirmed that the prison experience impeded the grieving process at every stage. Being in custody made it more difficult to accept the loss because opportunities to say goodbye and to attend funerals were restricted and contact to discuss the death with friends and relatives also bereaved was constrained. Emotions of sadness and anger tended to endure in an unresolved fashion as the (male) prison culture required that a facade of toughness be maintained, thereby inhibiting the process of dealing with the pain of loss. Adjusting to the new environment was problematic since confinement precluded the young men from properly understanding the implications of the loss for their network peers and family, and their own place within that network, in the community setting. Similarly, being deprived of their liberty made moving on through the establishment of a different form of emotional bond with the deceased more difficult for many participants. In some cases, however, bereavement had the effect of focusing young men's attention on the importance of making something of their own lives and reassessing their relationships, in a positive way, with surviving friends and family.

The author of the research concludes that custodial institutions should routinely screen for bereavement, both prior to incarceration and during the custodial episode, and find ways to "provide an environment that encourages non-avoidant strategies to dealing with bereavement" (Vaswani, 2014). Although take-up of bereavement services by young people is generally low, there may also be merit in offering opportunities to talk, particularly in the form of biographical or storytelling approaches. The implications for resettlement are not made explicit but it is clearly important that those responsible for services are aware of the prevalence of bereavement among young people in custody and seek to provide opportunities, within the resettlement process, to facilitate successful negotiation of the grieving process, both during the custodial period and on release. A more extensive and flexible use of release on temporary licence might constitute one mechanism through which that could be facilitated; helping to maintain contact with families and friends in a supportive manner might be another.

Mental health support

Starting from the known correlation between mental ill health and incarceration, an American study seeks to understand why relatively few young people access community-based mental health services on release (Aalsma et al, 2014). Based on in-depth interviews with young people who had scored highly on a mental health screening and had been released more than 30 days previously, and interviews with their carers (39 participants in total), the research attempted to establish how services received prior to incarceration, experiences within custody, and the process of returning to the community impacted on the likelihood that the young person would engage with mental health support on release.

12 of the 19 young people interviewed were in receipt of some form of community-based mental health provision at the time of interview. Whether or not young people accessed such services appeared to depend on a range of factors. While the experience of incarceration was regarded by many young people as a point of crisis that offered a window in which they were more open to changing their lifestyle, the extent to which that opportunity was realised was influenced by their experience of mental healthcare within the custodial institution and the speed with which provision was accessible on release. Delay in provision of support encouraged young people to return to old patterns of behaviour and made it less likely that they would engage with services. Carers described being kept out of the loop while their children were in custody and were mainly unaware of any intervention that had occurred in detention. They were also critical of a lack of coordination between the responsible agencies and the failure to keep families informed. The authors propose improved coordination of services during custody and on return to the community and advocate the use of motivational interviewing to maximise the potential offered by the sense of crisis associated with incarceration.

While the lessons might not be directly transferable to an English and Welsh context, the study would appear to confirm the importance of maintaining familial contact, ensuring good partnership arrangements to meet the range of assessed need and understanding resettlement as a process that commences while the young person is in custody. It also highlights the significance of deprivation of liberty, and by implication re-entry into the community, as points at which young people may be more open to forms of intervention that enhance the prospects of desistance (Bateman et al, 2013).

Family

A rather different nuance is provided by another US study which explores the capacity of families and other networks to provide support to young people returning to the community (Dolwick Greib et al, 2014). Focus groups with carers and other family members attempting to facilitate the resettlement process established that the circumstances of such individuals were frequently indicative of chronic stress. Moreover, participants experienced the return of other family members from custody, and the expectations placed upon them by resettlement agencies, as acutely stressful, exacerbating the level of strain with which they already had to contend, with the potential to undermine their capacity to provide a supportive environment, conducive to desistance. The authors propose that services take an approach which views the families of young people in custody as potential recipients of resettlement support, as well as providers of it.

Mentoring

Mentoring has frequently been advanced as a form of intervention that might be particularly effective in a resettlement context and features centrally in the government plans for *Transforming rehabilitation: a strategy for reform* (Ministry of Justice, 2013b). A recent US systematic review of the evidence, however, found mixed results (Abrams et al, 2014). There were few studies of mentoring in a resettlement context that used any form of control or comparison, making it difficult to attribute any improvement or deterioration in reoffending to the intervention. Of those that did involve a comparative element, a number did show positive results, but:

the absence of detailed information on the interventions, weak research designs, and the diversity of the mentoring programs contributed to an overall dearth of knowledge about the effectiveness of these interventions in reducing recidivism (Abrams et al, 2014)

The results do not necessarily imply that mentoring is ineffective but rather point to the importance of understanding how, and in what circumstances, particular types of intervention impact upon the outcomes for young people who participate in them. Moreover, if resettlement is seen as a process, rather than an activity, as argued by *Beyond Youth Custody*, one would anticipate that interventions generate positive results if they are appropriately embedded in an effective context.

Sports intervention

An example of research that attempts to locate a form of intervention within such a wider context, is provided by an evaluation of a sports-focused initiative delivered to young men aged 18-21 in a young adult YOI in England (Meek and Lewis, 2014; Parker et al, 2014). Sports academies provided an average of 20 contact hours per week, over a 12-15 week programme, with young people taking part in:

intensive football or rugby coaching, fitness training, and matches (including fixtures against visiting community and student teams) supplemented with group activities such as goal setting, thinking skills, team skills training, presentations from guest speakers and peer review exercises (Meek and Lewis, 2014)

Young people in the YOI could apply to take part in the academies and were subject to a subsequent selection process. The intervention allowed participants to achieve coaching qualifications in their relevant sport. Sporting activities were delivered by prison personnel in collaboration with community coaches. They were supplemented by individually tailored resettlement casework provided by a transition worker who offered support during the academies and, on a voluntary basis, in the community for up to six months post release. This resettlement support was additional to any statutory post-custody supervision.

Of the 79 participants, 54 completed the programme in full. A further 11 completed most of the programme but were released or transferred to another institution prior to completion. 14 young people withdrew, or were removed, from the programme. Initial interviews and focus groups in custody elicited participants' expectations of the academies and interviews with a sample of 38 participants were conducted subsequent to the return to community. Supplementary data were derived from interviews with staff involved in delivery of the academies. Although it was not an aim of the programme, respondents reported that participation in the academies improved their 'quality of life' within custody (Meek and Lewis, 2014); alleviating boredom, providing an opportunity to relieve tension through physical activity and incentivising good behaviour. Staff similarly reported a reduction in problematic behaviour within the institution, but also recorded shifts in attitude among prison officers, leading to a more person-centred focus to their work. As a consequence, there were improvements in relations between young people and prison staff, as well as between prisoners, who were accordingly better placed to act as mutual supports.

Feedback on the individual resettlement casework was overwhelmingly positive (Meek and Lewis, 2014) in terms of the practical assistance provided in preparation for release, the emotional support offered and the encouragement to formulate realistic, goal-oriented plans for the return to the community. In this context, the authors consider that sporting activity had provided a hook that allowed engagement in wider resettlement-related work. Young people welcomed the fact that the same staff providing individualised support within the custodial environment would also be available to provide assistance in the community, reinforcing a sense of optimism about the future and reinforcing a sense that change was possible.

A significant proportion of those interviewed in the community had gained employment and they tended to attribute their success in this regard to having obtained a qualification through the academy. Some also cited the increased confidence they had acquired through participation in the programme as having helped them to get work. In this sense, the authors suggest that sporting interventions such as the sports academies have the potential to:

offer not only an alternative means of positive self-definition ... but also an avenue for positive self-presentation to challenge preconceived stereotypes and the stigma often associated with ex-offenders (Meek and Lewis, 2014)

Personal narratives

The theme of how individual narratives can influence the likelihood of desistance is considered further in a study of young men taking part in the *Inner Reconstruction Project*, a group work cognitive treatment programme available to those detained in an American youth detention facility (Rajah et al, 2014). The research involved three waves of interviews: a baseline interview in jail; an exit interview within three weeks of release; and a follow-up interview within six months of the return to the community. Attrition rates were relatively high with just 24 of the 250 participants in the baseline interview taking part in the follow-up. More than half of the initial cohort was not released in time to take part in later interviews and contacting those who had returned to the community through the telephone numbers they had given proved problematic; providing an indication of the instability to which this group of young people were subject. The researchers also conducted non-participant observation of *Inner Reconstruction Project* group sessions.

The purpose of the study was to explore how personal narratives – in terms of what young people tell others account for their experiences – can function as primary mechanisms in the "social construction and maintenance of identity or sense of self" (Rajah et al, 2014). The researchers identified three types of narrative that typically could be discerned in the data collected from the three sequential waves of data collection. Victim narratives that tended to minimise responsibility for criminal behaviour were common in the baseline interviews. To the extent that such narratives persist, the research suggests that the prospects for desistance are diminished. The *Inner Reconstruction Project* attempted to modify this victimisation discourse by recognising the adverse circumstances which many of the participants have endured and the constrained nature of the choices that were thereby available to them. While allowing that adverse circumstances mitigated some responsibility for criminal activity – rather than challenging such justifications outright – programme leaders nonetheless sought to effect a shift to a narrative that emphasised the potential for individuals to exercise agency over their future behaviour, notwithstanding the hardships which they had suffered.

Following release, most interviewees tended to relay a modified narrative that demonstrated some commitment to the philosophy promoted by the intervention. Young people demonstrated what might be termed a redemption framework in which they presented themselves as changed individuals committed to, and confident in their ability to, give up crime. In promoting such a philosophy, the programme was aiming to maximise the potential of the window of opportunity afforded by the period immediately after release (Bateman et al, 2013) and to help young people to shift to adopt a new, pro-social identity in accordance with the research evidence emanating from what has become known as the desistance literature which emphasises the importance of agency in giving up crime (see, for instance, Maruna and Ramsden, 2004).

However, the third wave of interviews conducted after young people had been back in the community for a period of time, found that they often articulated a third narrative, referred to by the authors as a critical frame which reflected young people's experience of the reality of release. The obstacles that confronted them when they returned to the environment in which they committed their original offences, such as the difficulties of finding legitimate employment, the stigma associated with their record, tended to undermine some of their confidence in their capacity to desist from crime, led them to question the fairness of the labour market and the criminal justice system that had set them up to fail and to reflect critically on the naivety of some aspects of the redemption narrative to which they had previously subscribed.

The authors of the research conclude that effective rehabilitative work in custody can promote pro-social attitudes and a sense of agency by engendering narratives of change. They argue, however, that if the potential for desistance associated with that shift in identity is to be realised, comprehensive after-care provision that helps young people to confront the realities of social inequality and injustice that they are likely to face on release, is required in order to sustain redemption narratives in the face of the objective challenges of the return to the community.

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