BRIDGING THE GAPS

NEW APPROACHES TO IMPROVING OUTCOMES FOR CARE EXPERIENCED YOUNG PEOPLE GIVEN PRISON SENTENCES

JULY 2020
Young people who have spent time in care are estimated to be 25% over-represented in the male prison system. Despite the efforts of the many passionate and hardworking staff, the support the young people receive from Children’s Social Care and Justice services are frequently fragmented. This, combined with them often having a limited positive social network can increase their chances of re-offending.

1 MoJ 2012.

CARE LEAVERS CAUGHT IN A VICIOUS CYCLE

Adverse childhood experiences, which may have been exacerbated by experiences of care

Lack of suitable housing combined with the label of ‘offender’ can impact access to employment and a sense of belonging

This vulnerability can increase their chances of further involvement in crime

Lack of suitable housing combined with the label of ‘offender’ can impact access to employment and a sense of belonging

People with experience of care are more likely to have a positive social network when they arrive in prison

Our vision

Young people (male and female aged 18-25) with experience of care are no longer over represented in the prison system.

Those young people who are serving prison sentences identify and develop a sustainable community of coordinated support that contributes to their rehabilitation.

There is a system change involving Children’s Social Care and Justice services taking an integrated approach to supporting this cohort.

Young people know what support they can expect before and following release.

Improved outcomes for this group include reduced re-offending, having a place they can call home, improved health and well being and an equal likelihood of being in education, employment or training as their peers in the general population.
PHASE ONE
OUR STARTING POINT

Generating deep insights to really understand the problem from multiple perspectives, especially those of young people with experience of care who have been in prison. One key piece of learning was that the fragmented and uncoordinated nature of available support could exacerbate the young people’s likelihood of reoffending.

PHASE TWO
WHERE ARE WE NOW

Co-designing and prototyping two radical new solutions.

1. Identifying and mobilising a sustainable community of support for the young person whilst in prison and on release.
2. Co-ordinating the assessment and planning of the three key statutory providers so they are integrated and the young person knows what they can expect.

PHASE THREE
NEXT STEPS

Piloting new solutions in the West Midlands and generating demand with future adopters.

PHASE 2 ACTIVITY

Between October 2019 and January 2020 we ran a series of 7 workshops with care experienced young people in prison and the professionals across Children’s Social Care and Justice tasked with supporting them. Together with the young people and our partners in the West Midlands we delved deep into the insights generated in Phase One of the work and co-designed a powerful set of responses. These responses were underpinned by a series of design principles that were agreed in the workshops.

INSIGHTS AND LEARNING
DESIGN PRINCIPLES

Essential principles that should underpin the newly designed approach

1. Early identification of care leaver status is crucial for maximising support
2. Young people with care experience and the staff supporting them must be clear about who is responsible for offering what support
3. Care experienced young people are at the centre of all decision making and service provision
4. Staff from the range of services working with this cohort have a shared understanding of the young person’s strengths, needs and vulnerabilities
5. A collaborative, joined-up approach from the services supporting and planning with the young person is in place prior to, during, and after release from custody
6. Risk is considered holistically and calculated best interests, risk to self (harm/exploitation) and risk of reoffending after release from custody

LEARNING FROM WORKSHOPS WITH YOUNG PEOPLE IN PRISON

What would encourage you to self identify as having had experience of care?
Understanding why it would benefit me.
A peer worker talking to me about how self-identifying has helped them.

What do you want from the staff supporting you?
All young people stated they want (i) connection/someone to talk to (ii) support with family (iii) support with future goals.
From their Personal Advisor (PA) and Probation Officer (PO) the cohort said they would like support specifically with employment, housing and education. From prison staff they wanted support with things that impact on them whilst they’re serving their sentence.

This crossover of support confirms the importance of staff working together in a coordinated way.

Where do you can you get support?
Many young people reported getting lots of support from prison staff and from family (both birth and foster/adoption). There was also a large number of young people wanting support from physical and mental health services as well as drug and alcohol services on release. These responses remind us that all young people are unique and will therefore need a network of support around them that is specific to their individual needs.
NEW SOLUTIONS

Using the design principles, we used the workshop spaces to create a new set of solutions. These were:

DEVELOPING SUSTAINABLE SUPPORT NETWORKS
Offering each young person the opportunity to identify and develop a lasting support network whilst in prison and on release. This might include extended family members, friends and professionals previously engaged with, e.g. teacher, sports coach. Together this network would offer coordinated support to the young person.

DEVELOPING INTEGRATED PLANNING PROCESSES
Coordinating assessment and planning between Children’s Social Care, Prison, Probation/CRC staff so that the young person is at the centre of plans, does not have three unrelated plans written about them and knows who is responsible for offering them what type of support.

PROVIDING LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT
Developing a training and support offer so those involved in supporting the young person (both in their personal network and the practitioners) are aware of the strengths, needs and vulnerabilities of care-experienced young people and understand each other’s roles in the new ways of working.

PROTOTYPING

Next we put these new solutions to the test by prototyping them with three young people. Prototyping is a disciplined approach to learning through doing. It is a useful way to rapidly test how user friendly and effective an approach or service is. Ensuring the new design really works for the people using, and working in, the services is at the heart of prototyping. It creates an opportunity to take managed risks and create the space for innovation.
Craig is 21. He is coming to the end of a 2 year prison sentence. It is the responsibility of Craig’s Probation Officer to plan for his safe return to the community and provide support so he doesn’t commit any further crimes.

The key services involved in offering support to Craig are Children’s Social Care (CSC), the Prison Service, the local CRC and the Probation Service (PS). It can be very difficult to know who in the contact list is working together or agreeing actions. This has often presented challenges with young people who are not consulted when their Resettlement Plan is being developed.

We wanted to trial an integrated approach to planning for Craig’s future so all the key professionals tasked with supporting him could input to his Resettlement Plan. In particular, Craig’s Personal Advisor (PA) has been working with Craig and his family since Craig was 15 and was keen to contribute his insights. We spoke to the Care Leavers Champion at the prison where Craig is held and this person then arranged for him to be released to a friend of his mother’s. The PO was concerned that this would constitute a risk and recommended Craig be released to Approved Premises. The PA was concerned that previous referrals to these premises had ended badly for Craig and additionally felt that the decision not to allow him to his mother’s house was based on historic evidence, however recent changes in Craig’s behaviour and medication meant his future was no longer a known quantity.

On the day of release the friend of Craig’s mother went missing and Craig became homeless. Fortunately he was found emergency accommodation for the weekend and then stayed with his aunt after his mother went missing. A permanent hostel placement was found. Craig and additionally felt that the decision not to allow him to his mother’s house was based on historic evidence, however recent changes in Craig’s behaviour and medication meant his future was no longer a known quantity.

Throughout the integrated planning process it was immediately apparent that the PA disagreed with the Probation Officer’s (PO) decision not to authorise Craig to be released to his mother’s house. The PO was concerned that this would constitute a risk and recommended Craig be released to Approved Premises. The PA was concerned that previous referrals to Approved Premises had ended badly for Craig and additionally felt that the decision not to allow him to his mother’s house was based on historic evidence, however recent changes in Craig’s behaviour and medication meant his future was no longer a known quantity.

However, Craig’s case was very different from previous cases involving child protection. Craig was very anxious about the idea of going to the prison to introduce to Jane. The prison Staff wanted to test the new ideas brought the community health worker into the prison chaplain, Jane, and her aunt and uncle. A key issue for Jane was that she has been assessed as being at high risk of harm. The Community Offender Manager felt that Jane needed to go to an Approved Premises (AP) on release. Jane was very anxious about the idea of going to the AP and stepped out of the meeting 3 times. The PA, Mental Health Worker and Personal Officer were concerned about the impact of another institutional setting and suggested that Jane’s aunt and uncle could provide support for Jane, with support in place. Jane’s aunt said they wanted her to stay with them and had decorated a room for her. The mental health worker explained that once an address for Jane’s release had been agreed she could bring the community health worker into the prison to introduce to Jane.

As a result of the discussions, a risk management plan was proposed for the COM to take to the Multi Agency Public Protection Arrangements panel for agreement. This included a clause for Jane being placed in a local women’s service (starting immediately) and visits from the Police to the AP. This would be for a minimum period.
POTENTIAL FOR CHANGE

THE CURRENT SYSTEM

ARRIVE IN PRISON

IN CUSTODY

PRE-RELEASE

ON LICENSE/COMMUNITY

WARM TRANSITION PATHWAY

VP aware of personal situations and needs

Lack of clarity of support and resources available

Point of call for PAs and network of care leavers

Supports POMs to coordinate care

MULTI-DISCIPLINARY AND MULTI-AGENCY TRAINING ENSURES BETTER PLANNING AND RISK MANAGEMENT, A CO-ORDINATED APPROACH AND A SHARED PRACTICE MODEL

BREAKING THE GAP

JULY 2020

10
We identified a set of opportunities for innovation.

**CHALLENGES & OPPORTUNITIES**

1. **Early identification of care leaver status is crucial for maximising support**
   - **CHALLENGES**: Difficulty in identifying young people with experience of care in prison
   - **OPPORTUNITIES**: Coordinating assessment and planning with the young person prior to going into prison and on their release

2. **Young people with care experience and the staff supporting them must be clear about who is responsible for offering what support**
   - **CHALLENGES**: Lack of data regarding care experienced young people in prison
   - **OPPORTUNITIES**: Providing clear information to young people about the support available to them

3. **Care experienced young people are at the centre of all decision making and service provision**
   - **CHALLENGES**: Duplication of assessment and plans
   - **OPPORTUNITIES**: Supporting the young person to self-identify and access the support they need

4. **Staff from the range of services working with this cohort have a shared understanding of the young person’s strengths, needs and vulnerabilities**
   - **CHALLENGES**: Joint planning and information sharing is not shared between organisations
   - **OPPORTUNITIES**: Creating a shared practice model that is trauma-informed

5. **A collaborative, joined up approach from the services supporting and planning with the young people is in place prior to, during, and after release from custody**
   - **CHALLENGES**: Barriers to data sharing between organisations
   - **OPPORTUNITIES**: Co-ordinated approach assists in identifying and engaging members of support network

6. **Risk is considered holistically and calculates best interests, risk to self (harm/abuse) and risk of reoffending after release from custody**
   - **CHALLENGES**: Very young people are not always included in the planning and decision-making process
   - **OPPORTUNITIES**: Streamlining processes to ensure young people are consulted on their care plan and the design and delivery of services
WHAT NEXT?

Based on our insights we propose a third phase of this work which will pilot the opportunities that have been identified. We are ready to pilot these approaches with a cohort of young people in prison and ‘through the gate’. As they have been co-designed by and prototyped with a small sample of young people with experience of care in prison and on licence, we are confident in the suitability of the approaches.

In addition, during phase three we would like to deepen insight and prototype new solutions in two other key areas surfaced during our original scoping: housing and peer support/mentoring.

We believe the direct impact of the pilot will be to reduce reoffending, enable rehabilitation and increase the chances of a positive future for our cohort of young people. In addition, it would facilitate greater alignment of support across the young people’s personal networks and the development of a common approach to Children’s Social Care and Justice Services.

We will gather evidence to demonstrate how and why this approach works and we will develop a business case that shows the potential cost savings made by adopting this approach. This will include demonstrating that spend in one government department would result in savings in another.

Our indirect impact will be through production of visual, easily accessible learning materials from the programme; a set of tools to help future adopters to understand and adapt the model to their context; an ongoing, national programme of engagement with future adopters of the model to generate demand; and an external evaluation of impact.

We have strong commitment from our partners to continue the work and we want to build on that momentum.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to thank all those who supported Phase Two of the work - in particular the young people who attended workshops; Barrow Cadbury Trust for funding the work; HMPPS; National Probation Service, Reducing Reoffending Partnership CRC, Care 24/7 National Leaving Care Benchmarking Forum; Prison Reform Trust; Care Leavers Association, Barnardos, Birmingham Children’s Trust, Wolverhampton LA and Coventry LA for their commitment, insight and valuable contributions to workshops and prototyping. In addition, this work has been developed at Innovation Unit by Frances Flaxington, Ella Walding, Jessie Ben-Ami and Aviv Katz.

If you would like to be involved in taking this work forward please contact:

Jessie Ben-Ami
jessie.ben-am@innovationunit.org
Innovation Unit creates new solutions for thriving communities: solutions which build, support and recognise human potential and the critical importance of thriving relationships.