



‘Nothing’s really that hard, you can do it’
Agency and fatalism:
the resettlement needs of girls in custody

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Executive summary and recommendations

Introduction and background

This report presents the results of a qualitative study, funded by the Sir Halley Stewart Trust, of the resettlement needs of 17-year-old young women in a single young offender institution in England and Wales. Using in depth qualitative interviews with 16 girls in custody and two follow up interviews in the community, the study aimed to give expression to the girls' views on what support they thought would be required, both while in prison and in the form of resettlement provision on release, if they were not to reoffend. The sample size, while small, is equivalent to the capacity of the young offender institution where field work was conducted and to around one third of the total female population of the secure estate on any one day. Field work was conducted between December 2011 and November 2012.

Girls constitute a small proportion of children below the age of 18 in custody and have consequently tended to be 'invisible' from a research perspective. Yet girls in prison are among the most vulnerable young people in society and recent falls in youth imprisonment have tended to amplify that vulnerability, as less serious cases have been diverted to community based interventions. Such developments have posed additional challenges for the already difficult task of providing effective resettlement.

The context: previous relevant research findings

While there is little research specific to the resettlement of girls, there is a body of knowledge relevant to the current study. The literature on resettlement more broadly indicates that the transition from custody to the community should be as seamless as possible. Planning for release should commence from the point of incarceration and services in the community should build on interventions delivered in custody. The point of transfer to the community presents both opportunities and risks, as young people are often more committed to give up offending, but breach and reoffending are also more common in the period immediately after release.

Girls' criminal behaviour differs from that of boys in important respects: girls are less likely to engage in delinquent activity and, when they do, their offending is less serious and desistance occurs earlier. Girls in trouble tend to be more vulnerable than their male counterparts and relational issues, within a variety of contexts, are pivotal to an understanding of female crime. Family conflict and relationships outside the home are both a dominant feature of explanations of girls' offending and a necessary part of the solution: intervention should aim to provide opportunities for girls to explore alternative, less damaging, interpersonal relationships; moreover, relationships between staff and the young women with whom they work should model more appropriate interactions based on mutuality and empowerment.

Recent studies considering how young people give up offending have drawn attention to the importance of subjective factors in determining why pathways of children who share similar histories of adversity can nonetheless differ. Those who desist from offending are more likely to distance themselves, psychologically and emotionally, from their previous behaviour and develop a sense of self-belief that they have the capacity to overcome obstacles and take advantage of opportunities. Effective resettlement practice should accordingly aim to encourage young people to engage with intervention because they recognise the benefits for themselves rather than because it is a requirement of a court order. The development of such forms of motivation depends, in large part, on the quality of relationship between young people and staff.

Vulnerable, disadvantaged, and deprived of their liberty

The young women interviewed for the study were highly troubled and troublesome. The majority had disrupted care histories, a background of educational failure and disengagement, and had experienced a range of other difficulties. Most had accrued an extensive criminal record and many had committed very serious offences, including two girls who were serving long term detention for incidents leading to loss of life. Against this background, resettlement of the sample group posed a substantial challenge and desistance from crime would require considerable change.

Obstacles to resettlement

The majority of the girls had had extensive previous contact with criminal justice and social care agencies, including in many cases, prior experience of custody. Their perception of earlier intervention was largely negative and led to a sense of pessimism about the capacity of agencies to deliver services that would impact positively on their futures. Such negative assessments were however directed primarily at agencies and institutions rather than individual workers. The intervention of some staff was regarded very warmly, an issue explored further below.

Interviewees' accounts of the current custodial institution reflected two contradictory perceptions: first, they reported a lack of support appropriate to girls of their age, what might be described as a process of 'adulteration'; second, they complained of being 'babified' by the establishment, treated as less mature than their stage of development warranted. From the girls' perspective, this 'infantilisation' did not function to safeguard them, or meet their welfare needs. Conversely, the denial of their childhood status tended to disempower them further, rather than promoting a sense of agency and autonomy.

A seamless sentence?

Within the institution, girls tended to rate elements of the programme according to whether they saw them as being relevant. Interventions were well regarded to the extent that they were seen as: helping to change the way that the girls thought about themselves and others; or providing information, or other benefits that would be directly useful on release. On this measure, although respondents appreciated the importance of qualifications for their longer term future, the educational provision was largely found wanting because it was not sufficiently differentiated to individual experience and ability, was repetitive, and did not

lead to qualifications. Girls also resented its compulsory nature on the grounds that young people of their age in the community could choose whether or not to continue their formal education.

Opinions on other forms of provision were more mixed, but it was clear that some of the girls had benefited from offending behaviour input, counselling, sessions on substance misuse, or activities, such as art, where they were able to develop new skills and achieve in areas that they had not previously experienced.

There were examples where the provision within custody prefigured resettlement services planned for the period after release. One young woman, whose youth offending team worker had arranged for her to undertake a child care course on release, indicated that she would be able to commence her studies while in custody. This sense of knowing what arrangements were in place clearly had a positive impact on her state of mind, engendering a sense of optimism and excitement about the future. More frequently, there was little evidence of proactive forward planning or of provision in the institution being tailored to the individual so as to anticipate what would be available on release.

Agency and fatalism

While the distinction was far from absolute, and some respondents shifted from one position to the other in the course of interview, young women tended to display two different attitudes towards their future. Some conveyed a clear impression of optimism, bedded in a sense of agency, about what would happen when they left custody. This was not simply a case of expressing good intentions about not getting into trouble in the future, since nearly all of the girls did so. It was rather that some young women communicated a powerful determination that they would take a different course from the one they had pursued hitherto, in spite of the obstacles. As one interviewee argued, '*Nothing's really that hard, you can do it*'.

By comparison, some girls gave the impression of having a much reduced sense of agency. Hopes about the future evinced by this group were quickly tempered by the realisation of the obstacles in their way. Such respondents betrayed an underlying impression of fatalism. While the current study did not seek to explore outcomes, the research team were persuaded that those girls who displayed a clear sense of purpose, backed by an optimism in their own capacity to make any changes required, were considerably less likely to return to custody than those who were fatalistic about their future prospects.

There appeared to be a relationship between the services provided to young women and the likelihood that they would develop an optimistic outlook. Where arrangements were in place and young women had a clear understanding of the plans for their release, they were more likely to feel enthusiastic about the possibilities; if young women reported a good relationship with their allocated workers, that appeared to increase their confidence in being able to overcome the obstacles they faced; and where professionals conveyed a strong sense of belief in girls' capacity to change that could also have a positive impact on their sense of agency.

Relational issues

A common theme arising during the interviews was family dynamics and these appeared significant whether or not young women were likely to return to the familial home on release. For some girls, the family provided a reason for giving up crime, as well as a resource for facilitating resettlement. But families did not always provide an inspiration for desistance and were not always seen as a source of support. Even in such cases, however, family relationships generally loomed large in how girls saw themselves and thought about their future.

Relationships with professionals also featured as a significant factor in the girls' testimonies. Those young women unable to fall back on the resources of their family were particularly reliant on quality relationships with resettlement providers. In general, girls tended to have a relatively low regard of social care and youth justice agencies, but this perception did not always extend to individual workers. There was a strong consensus that professionals could generally be classified according to whether they 'cared' or not. The distinction was thought to pertain across custodial institutions, youth offending teams, and children's social care, in more or less the same terms. Caring staff were frequently characterised as compassionate and contrasted with those who came to work for more instrumental, generally financial, reasons.

It was not always obvious by what criteria girls distinguished caring workers from other staff. For some, it was the personality or demeanour of the worker. The importance of listening was emphasised by many of the respondents. On the one hand, this was considered indicative of the worker wanting to understand their concerns. On the other, it was presented as a precursor to the provision of practical advice and assistance that would address the individual's self-defined needs rather than reflecting agency priorities or a standardised form of intervention. Reliability and the provision of accurate information were also considered important indicators of a caring response.

On this account, a caring worker would exemplify the characteristics that Chris Trotter's (2006) research has identified as necessary traits of an effective youth justice practitioner. These include being: open and honest; non-judgemental; empathetic, showing a genuine concern for the young person; a reliable, and stable, presence in the young person's life; friendly and able to use humour appropriately; and someone who demonstrates a confidence in the young person's capacity to change, however inauspicious previous experience. It was apparent that where staff exhibited such skills, girls were more likely to respond by engaging in resettlement activities. The ensuing relationship also seemed more conducive to fostering a sense of empowerment and militating against a fatalistic outlook. It was possible to discern, in some cases, the development of a virtuous circle in which caring professionals fostered a sense of agency and engaged in forward planning, in partnership with the girls, to facilitate the transition back into the community. The associated increased certainty about what the future held in turn enhanced a sense of optimism in the young women that it was possible to overcome the obstacles which impeded their paths to desistance.

Knowledge by experience: on return to the community

The two girls interviewed, post release, were atypical of the custodial sample. Both had a limited offending history, enjoyed the support of their families, knew where they would be living on leaving custody, and had clear plans for their future. Yet both experienced their release as extremely traumatic, found the return to the community disorientating and distressing, and elected to remain indoors for a week or more. Young women who do not have the option of returning to the family home are likely to find the transition even more difficult, highlighting the importance of provision of high levels of personal and emotional support, in the period around the transfer back to the community.

Both girls acknowledged that, by comparison with some of their peers, they were extremely fortunate. While struggling to articulate in detail what forms of intervention might be of most benefit to young women who were more vulnerable than themselves, they were able to identify that emotional support and compassion ought to be regarded as priorities. Forward planning, particularly in relation to accommodation and arrangements for obtaining a legitimate means of income, were also regarded as important. Practical assistance at the points where it was most needed was also deemed a necessary condition of desistance. Provision of such services was not, however, considered as sufficient to ensure that young women would give up offending. Rather it was seen as constituting building blocks that would enhance the prospects that young women in trouble would be able to shake off the damaging fatalism that defined many of their outlooks and develop a sense of agency and optimism in their ability to change.

Conclusion

The extent of adversity experienced by the cohort of girls in the current study is a vivid illustration of the challenging nature of the resettlement of all young women. There were however marked differences within the sample in how the young women saw their future, and in their assessments of their own capacity to influence what happens. Perspectives ranged from a resigned fatalism to an enthusiastic self-belief. In the context of the broader literature on desistance, such subjective considerations may have a significant bearing on the manner in which girls respond to opportunities and challenges that arise in custody and on transfer to the community. A sense of agency is, in other words, likely to enhance the prospects of desistance, while a fatalistic outlook tends to be associated with continued offending.

The dichotomy was far from absolute however. Many of the girls displayed some ambiguity, articulating resignation as to their fate at one point and manifesting an impression of optimism about their potential for self-determination within the same interview. This dynamic might be thought to be at the heart of effective resettlement for young women since other measures regarded as indicative of good practice are related to it in a variety of ways. Particular forms of input function both to enhance opportunities for rehabilitation while, simultaneously, helping to engender a sense of empowerment in girl prisoners that makes it more likely that they will take advantage of such opportunities. The prospects that

such a dynamic will develop is more likely where girls perceive their worker to 'care' about them. The importance of developing practice that promotes agency, in a 'caring' manner, is perhaps the key lesson to be derived from this study.

Summary of recommendations

- 1: Practitioners should consider how best to effect a sense of agency, or empowerment, in girls with whom they work.
- 2: Practitioners should be aware of, and attempt to compensate for, girls' previous negative experiences of professional intervention.
- 3: Custodial institutions should strive to provide an environment that recognises, and attempts to address, the tension between offering emotional and practical support to vulnerable girls while respecting, and promoting, their autonomy as young women.
- 4: Efforts should be made to ensure that interventions within custody are relevant, and perceived by the girls to be relevant, to their particular circumstances, hopes and fears for the future, previous experiences, and stage of development.
- 5: Educational provision in particular should be based on an assessment of the individuals' prior experience and attainment and reflect their interests and ambitions.
- 6: The aims of particular interventions, and how it is anticipated they will be achieved, should be as transparent as possible and negotiated with the young women who undertake them. To the extent that it is compatible with public protection, participation in particular elements of the programme should be voluntary, based on the girls' understanding of the benefits for themselves.
- 7: Sentence planning should ensure that provision within custody is clearly integrated to that intended to be available on release. Where educational input has the potential to lead to qualification, care should be taken to ensure that girls are able to complete the course in the community if they are unable to do so within the secure estate.
- 8: Planning to ensure that resettlement provision addresses the individual circumstances of the young women should commence as soon as possible after sentence, to allow thorough assessment, facilitate participation of the girls themselves in what will happen to them, and to ensure clarity as to what the future holds. Such planning can in turn promote a sense of optimism and agency. A greater use of release on temporary licence, to promote engagement with community based services, before the end of the custodial element of the sentence, should be encouraged.
- 9: Service providers should acknowledge and prepare for the traumatic nature of leaving custody. The use of release on temporary licence should be considered in all cases as a mechanism for making the experience of transition to the community a less abrupt one.

High levels of emotional and practical support should be afforded in the period before and after return to the community. Arrangements should be in place to ensure that all girls are met at the gate by someone with whom they have a good relationship.

10: Promoting family contact should be regarded, by both secure estate staff and professionals in the community, as a necessary element of resettlement provision for girls. Consideration should be given to how communication with family members might be improved and family visits to custody facilitated. Release on temporary licence should be recognised as a potential mechanism for maintaining familial relationships.

11: Professionals should aim to embed resettlement work with girls in a relationship founded on empathy, caring and empowerment. Such an approach should be predicated on a commitment to service user participation, sympathetic listening, maintaining regular personal contact, acting as an advocate, early planning for release, and a belief in the capacity of girls to take control of their own rehabilitation.

1. Introduction and background

About the study

This report presents the findings of a small scale study, funded by the Sir Halley Stewart Trust, of the resettlement needs of girls¹ in custody in England and Wales. It focuses on a sample of 17-year-old young women in a single young offender institution as they approach the point of being released into the community. The intention was to explore how the experience of incarceration might impact on the young women's sense of self, what interventions might support them while they were incarcerated to reduce their risk of re-offending on their return to the community, and what services might facilitate their reintegration upon release.

Using in depth qualitative interviews, the study aimed to give expression to the girls' views on the extent to which they thought the provision received while they were in custody would help them to desist from offending on release. Participants were also asked to reflect on what support and assistance they thought would be required, both while in prison and in the form of resettlement provision in the community, if they were not to reoffend.

The research was funded by the Sir Halley Stewart Trust with field work conducted between December 2011 and November 2012.

Girls and the youth justice system

Despite a recent media-led wave of concern about apparent increases in girls' offending (Sharpe, 2012), females within the youth justice system have traditionally been an ignored constituency. The development of service delivery has tended to be male oriented and the research which informs it is has, more often than not, been gender neutral (Bateman, 2008; Worrall, 2001). At the same time, because stereotypical imagery of femininity casts girls in a

¹ The terms 'girls' and 'young women' are used interchangeably throughout the report. Both expressions are social and legal constructs. The former has the advantage of reflecting the status of females below the age of 18 years as children under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Children Act 1989. The authors acknowledge that the expression also risks 'infantilising' those to whom it is applied, denying their agency as individuals making the transition to adulthood.

light that emphasises passivity and domesticity and excludes offending or aggressive behaviour, those young women who are sanctioned for law breaking have transgressed norms in a way that teenage boys who offend have not (Gelsthorpe, 2005: Gelsthorpe and Sharpe, 2009). The same might of course be said in respect of adult women offenders, but girls have not had the benefit of a government sponsored review, such as that led by Baroness Corston, considering the distinctive needs of females in the adult criminal justice system (Corston, 2007).

This lack of attention reflects in part the fact that boys are significantly overrepresented among those who come to the attention of youth justice agencies and that youthful law breaking is predominantly a male activity. Girls also tend to '*grow out of crime*' at an earlier age than their male peers (Smith, 2006). Nonetheless, girls make up a significant minority of the youth offending population. During 2011/12, according to Youth Justice Board data, young women were responsible for 17.9% of all offences leading to a substantive youth justice disposal² (Ministry of Justice/ Youth Justice Board, 2013a: supplementary table 4.3). This proportion, contrary to what press reporting might lead one to expect, has not risen significantly in the recent period but has remained broadly consistent for at least the last two decades (Nacro, 2008). It would accordingly appear that the needs of one fifth of those who come to the attention of the youth justice system have conventionally received little consideration.

The lack of focus on girls might be considered unfortunate. While vulnerability is a characteristic of the large majority of children in trouble with the law, young women display particularly high levels of welfare need (Williams, 2008). Socio-economic indicators, such as low family income, poor housing and large family size, appear to be particularly important in explaining young women's delinquent behaviour (Farrington and Painter, 2004). Girls who offend are more likely than boys to have been victims of physical and sexual abuse (Social Exclusion Unit, 2002) and this inevitably reflects experiences of more pronounced family

² Substantive youth justice disposals, at the time of the fieldwork, consisted of court convictions, reprimands, warnings and youth conditional cautions

difficulty (Batchelor, 2005). More than half of young women in trouble have had contact with social services during their childhood (Arnall and Eagle, 2009). Thirty four per cent have deliberately self-harmed and 15% have attempted suicide; experience of bereavement and loss is common (Arnall and Eagle, 2009). Alcohol use among this group is, perhaps not surprisingly, widespread, and '*regular intoxication [is] commonplace*' (Sharpe, 2009: 70).

Girls and custody

The underrepresentation of girls in custody is significantly more pronounced than in the youth justice system more generally. During 2011, boys accounted for 94% of those sentenced to detention (Ministry of Justice, 2012a); at any one time, during 2011/12, girls constituted, on average, 6% of those held within the secure estate for children and young people (Ministry of Justice/ Youth Justice Board, 2013a: supplementary table 7.6). Young women's '*invisibility*' (Williams, 2008: 20) is accordingly greater when they are locked up, with almost no research focusing on this small, but extremely vulnerable, population (although see Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Prisons, 2004; Batchelor, 2005; Douglas and Plugge, 2006; Wilkinson and Morris, 2002).

The relatively few girls who are deprived of their liberty are among the most vulnerable children in society. A profile of children in custody during 2008 confirmed that in most cases the effect of imprisonment was to '*punish disadvantage*' (Jacobson et al, 2010) with more than half coming from a deprived household and a similar proportion having been excluded from mainstream education. The research found that the majority of the incarcerated population had experienced a range of '*disadvantage factors*' with 80% having suffered at least five (Jacobson et al, 2010: 72). Against this backdrop of cumulative deprivation and exclusion, however, there is evidence to suggest that the experiences of girls prior to custody renders them even more vulnerable than their male counterparts.

One influential report, for instance, noted that two out of five female and one in four male young prisoners report having suffered violence at home. Young women were also three times as likely to have been the victim of sexual abuse (Social Exclusion Unit, 2002). A

review of the health needs of girls in juvenile young offender institutions found that almost three quarters (71%) had some form of psychiatric disturbance and almost half suffered from depression (Douglas and Plugge, 2006). Thirty six per cent of the sample had self-harmed within the last month, and most of these episodes were designed '*to relieve feelings of anger, tension, anxiety or depression rather than to draw attention to their situation*' (Douglas and Plugge, 2006: 55). Sexual health was also a significant concern: 23% had at some time been diagnosed with a sexually transmitted infection and only one out of 73 young women in the sample reported that she always practiced safe sex (Douglas and Plugge, 2006).

More recent research, conducted for Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Prisons, confirms that on many indicators girl prisoners are more vulnerable than their male equivalents. During 2011, 44% of young women held in such establishments had previously been in local authority care compared to 30% of boys. Forty one per cent of 17-year-olds reported that they were 14 years or younger when they last went to school; the equivalent figure for boys was 36%. Nineteen per cent of females had problems with alcohol, higher than the 13% recorded for boys, although they were less likely to have difficulties with drugs (Murray, 2012).

Against such a background, it is scarcely surprising that outcomes following custody – particularly when measured by rates of reoffending – have been consistently poor over time (Hagell and Hazel, 2001). Moreover, recidivism rates for children are much higher than those for adults. For instance, 72.6% of children released from custody, during 2010/11, were reconvicted within 12 months (Youth Justice Board / Ministry of Justice, 2013: supplementary table 9.9) compared with an equivalent figure of 47.2% for adults (Ministry of Justice, 2012b: supplementary table 18a).

Imprisonment performs considerably less well than other forms of youth justice disposal and reoffending rates within one year for the total youth offending population are considerably lower by comparison at 35.8% (Youth Justice Board / Ministry of Justice, 2013:

supplementary table 9.1). To an extent, this accords with what might be expected given that incarceration is intended to be reserved for those whose offending is more serious or persistent. However when individuals are matched for relevant characteristics, such as age, gender, offence and antecedent history, community sentences continue to outperform custodial disposals (Ministry of Justice, 2012c). In large part, this is a consequence of what Nacro (2003: 5) has identified as a:

'glaring contrast between, on the one hand the welfare needs of most young people whose offending leads to them being locked up, and on the other hand the ability of custody to deliver a service that addresses those needs'.

The issue of girls' resettlement is beset by a number of paradoxes however. One of those contradictions is that, despite the fact that young women in prison appear to be more vulnerable than their male equivalents, they are significantly less likely to reoffend. The most recent data on recidivism following release from custody are not broken down by sex; a reflection perhaps of both the relatively low numbers of girls in the secure estate and the tendency to adopt a gender-neutral approach. Figures for the overall youth offending population are, however, disaggregated and these indicate that a smaller proportion of girls come to attention of youth justice agencies again within one year by comparison with boys: 24.7% as against 39.2%. That this pattern also applies to custodial sentences is confirmed by earlier data which do allow the requisite analysis, as shown in table 1.

**Table 1 Reconvictions within 12 months of disposal by gender (2009 cohort)
(Derived from Ministry of Justice, 2011: supplementary table A5)**

	Disposal type	Percentage reconvicted
Girls		
	Pre-court disposal	16.7
	First tier penalty	36.2
	Community sentence	55.9
	Custodial sentence	58.1
Boys	Pre-court disposal	27.2
	First tier penalty	47.3
	Community sentence	69.0
	Custodial sentence	73.1

Reoffending thus increases in line with the level of intervention for both boys and girls, with imprisonment performing worse than any other form of disposal. At each stage, however, girls' recidivism is lower than that of their male peers.

Statutory provisions, placement and resettlement

The large majority of children sentenced to imprisonment are subject to a detention and training order, the sole custodial disposal available in the youth court. The order must be made for a determinate period of 4, 6, 8, 12, 18 or 24 months. By default, it is served half in custody and half in the community subject to statutory supervision, though there is provision for early or late release (Nacro, 2007a). Orders for detention longer than the two years maximum permitted in the youth court, are available in the Crown court in cases involving 'grave crimes'. Children subject to the latter forms of imprisonment are automatically released at the half way stage but are required to comply with licence conditions until the expiry of the sentence (Nacro, 2007b).

Young people under 18 years of age who are detained through the youth justice process are placed within the secure estate for children and young people, consisting of three different types of establishment:

- Young offender institutions (YOIs) – managed by the Prison Service and a subsidiary part of the prison estate for adults
- Secure training centres (STCs) – privately managed custodial units, initially established as a response to changes in legislation during the 1990s that allowed children below the age of 15 years to be sentenced to custody in the youth court
- Secure children’s homes (SCHs) – managed, for the most part, by local authorities. Such establishments may accommodate children secured on welfare grounds, through family proceedings legislation, as well as those deprived of their liberty for offending.

These forms of custodial provision differ from each other in terms of size, staff to child ratios (and associated placement costs), and the fact that SCHs have an orientation that is primarily care-based, and are subject to the guidance and regulations that govern residential provision for looked after children. Allocation to particular establishments is determined by the Youth Justice Board’s placement team in consultation with the responsible youth offending team, with decisions influenced by age, gender, individual needs and personal circumstances. In practice, however, discretion as to placement is constrained by the relatively small proportion of the custodial population who can be accommodated outside of the YOI sector. In January 2013, for instance, 17% of the 1,374 children held in the secure estate were placed in STCs with a further 11% in SCHs (Youth Justice Board, 2013a).

In 1999, the government adopted a target to remove all girls below the age of 17 years from prison service facilities, though it was not met until 2004 (Bateman, 2008). Until that year, economies of scale dictated that girls placed in YOIs were detained in establishments that also accommodated adult women. During 2005, however, five discrete units for 17-year-old females were opened within the prison sector (Bateman, 2008). In the interim period, as custodial sentences have fallen, two of the specialist YOI establishments have closed.

The present configuration of custodial provision accordingly varies considerably depending on the gender of the young person. While all girls below the age of 17 years of age are

placed in STCs or SCHs, boys aged 15 years and above are detained in YOIs unless considered vulnerable. Moreover, while male YOIs hold between 30 and 60 detainees on a wing, prison service units for girls are considerably smaller, with capacity ranging from 16 to 26. Similarly, the staff to child ratio for girls in YOIs is substantially higher, at around 1 to 4, than that for boys, at around 1 to 10 (Youth Justice Board, undated). As a consequence, provision for girls in custody, has improved significantly in the recent period. Nonetheless, the Youth Justice Board (2012) acknowledges that:

'current services provided to girls require a more specific focus on meeting their needs, given their particular characteristics and past experiences' (paragraph 36).

The government is accordingly committed to a further review of provision for girls within the secure estate (Youth Justice Board, 2012).

As indicated above, children sentenced to custody are released subject to statutory supervision for a period determined by the overall length of the order. The purpose of this 'resettlement' period is to provide continuity of provision from custody to the community (Bateman et al, 2013). In this context, resettlement is an integral part of the sentence and young people may be returned to court for failure to comply with any conditions of their licence. The requirements will vary according to the child's circumstances, but National Standards for Youth Justice prescribe minimum contact ranging from once a fortnight to twice a week, depending on the assessed level of risk (Youth Justice Board, 2013b: paragraph 9.53). While Youth Justice Board guidance (2010) suggests that post custody supervision may have a range of objectives, the principal aim of the youth justice system, enshrined in section 37 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998, is to prevent offending. It is clear that, from the perspective of the criminal justice system, the primary purpose of resettlement activity is to reduce recidivism (Bateman et al, 2013).

Trends in the use of custody for girls

Over the recent period, levels of youth incarceration have shown substantial fluctuation (Bateman, 2012a) and those shifts have been particularly marked in respect of young women.

In the early 1990s, the use of custody for girls was so low that the White Paper which preceded the introduction of the Criminal Justice Act 1991 speculated whether it might be possible to abolish imprisonment for young women other than for 'grave crimes' (Home Office, 1990). This prospect soon evaporated, however, and the period from 1993 to 2006 saw a rapid expansion in children deprived of their liberty. The increase for girls moreover was considerably greater than that for their male peers: while the total number of custodial sentences imposed on children below the age of 18 years increased by 54.6%, the equivalent female rise was 297% (Nacro, 2008).

In the intervening period, those trends have gone into reverse and there has been a sharp decline in child imprisonment. The fall has been more pronounced for girls: between 2006 and 2011, the number of boys sentenced to imprisonment dropped by 36% compared to a 45% reduction for young women (Ministry of Justice, 2012a).

Such reductions are clearly welcome but they bring with them an array of additional difficulties which are particularly marked in the case of girls. As less serious cases have been diverted from custody, the contracting population is inevitably comprised of a more vulnerable group of children. For instance, a recent survey of 17-year-old girls in YOI found that the proportion who reported not having been in school since the age of 14 years or younger had risen, from 31% in 2006–2008, to 55% in 2010/11. Over the same period, the proportion of girls in prison who have children of their own more than doubled, from 9% to 24% (Summerfield, 2011). As the demand for custodial provision has fallen, the Youth Justice Board has reduced capacity, including, as noted above, the closure of two of the dedicated units for 17-year-old-girls. One consequence of decommissioning is that the average distance from home to where children are detained has risen substantially: in March

2011, 10% of the YOI population was placed more than 100 miles from their area of origin (Summerfield, 2011). Separate figures are not available for girls, but given that there are only three remaining YOIs for young women to cover the whole of England and Wales, it is inevitable that the majority of girls accommodated within such units will be placed a considerable distance from their home area.

Paradoxically, therefore, the recent fall in the number of girls incarcerated has led to additional challenges for resettlement provision: both the vulnerability of population to be resettled, and the circumstances in which they are held, have exacerbated what was already a difficult task.

2. **Methodology**

Overview

The broad aim of the research was to identify some of the important ontological and social processes that might assist, or hinder, girls at the point of transition from custody to community and beyond. The study adopted a qualitative approach involving in-depth interviews with 17-year-old girls detained in a single young offender institution who were subject to a custodial sentence. The intention was to interview young women as they approached the point at which they would be released and then conduct follow up interviews with them in the community.

The purpose of the interviews was to explore:

- Girls' experiences and circumstances before receiving a custodial sentence
- Their experiences during incarceration
- Their aspirations for, and expectations of, their lives upon their release from custody
- The extent, and nature, of support that they anticipated would be available on release
- Their experience of re-entry back into the community
- The support networks and services available to them
- What further assistance they felt they needed to support them through this difficult transition
- Longer term situational factors (employment, housing, relationships).

It was anticipated that the interviews would provide a phenomenological account of participants' experiences that were relevant to their reintegration into the community following a period of decarceration.

Sampling

It was decided that the study should focus on girls detained within prison service accommodation, all of whom are 17 years of age. The rationale for this selection had two elements. Firstly, this age group accounts for the majority of children in custody: at January

2013, 53% of the population of the secure estate were 17 years old (separate figures for girls are not published) (Youth Justice Board, 2013a). Secondly, effective resettlement is particularly crucial for this group of girls whose transition to the community intersects, in most cases, with the transition to adulthood (from a criminal justice perspective at least). The current period of resettlement accordingly represents the last opportunity for youth justice services to impact on future development; any further reoffending will result in involvement with the adult criminal justice system, where there is no legal requirement to consider the defendant's welfare and resources for resettlement and rehabilitation are more limited.

A convenience sampling approach was adopted. A single YOI was selected on the basis of its geographical location and all girls serving custodial sentences within the unit, who would be eligible for release within the period of fieldwork, were targeted for inclusion.

The original intention was to interview between ten to twelve girls in custody and then conduct follow-up interviews, with as many as possible, on their return to the community, allowing sufficient time for readjustment, engagement with resettlement provision, and an opportunity to reflect on what services had been helpful and what other forms of support would be beneficial. In the event, the rapid decline in the numbers of young women in custody had a significant impact on the study.

In December 2010, when the project was designed, the female population of the secure estate for children and young people stood at 107; by January 2012, the equivalent figure was 50. As a result, by the time that fieldwork commenced the unit was operating at significantly below its capacity of 16. A proportion of the girls detained were remanded to custody and not eligible for participation in the study since statutory resettlement provisions only apply to those released during a custodial sentence. At the same time, the fall in imprisonment was accompanied by a rise in average sentence length; a consequence of the fact that girls whose offending is less serious or persistent were increasingly more likely to

receive a community based disposal (Bateman, 2013). Many of those in the unit were accordingly not scheduled for release until after the fieldwork was completed.

These developments were inevitably reflected in the number of girls who were suitable for inclusion in the study. It became evident from an early stage that it would be difficult to access a sufficiently large sample on the basis of the original selection criteria. It was accordingly determined that sentenced young women with release dates beyond the conclusion of the study should be included. This allowed an oversampling of those within custody but had a consequent effect on the availability of potential participants for follow up. Interviews were conducted with 16 girls within the YOI, equivalent to around one third of the total female population of the secure estate on any one day. Eight of those young women remained in custody at the end of the fieldwork. Seven of the girls were white, four were black and five of mixed heritage, a higher black and minority ethnic representation by comparison with the composition of the secure estate as a whole. One young woman was pregnant at the time of interview. The impact of the change in selection criteria was that the original target for follow up interviews was not met. In spite of considerable effort on the part of the research team, just two of the available eight girls, both white, were successfully interviewed in the community. The reasons for such a high rate of attrition are discussed in due course.

Ethical considerations

Ethical approval for the research was obtained, internally to the University of Bedfordshire, from the Institute of Applied Social Research Ethics Committee and the University Research Ethics Committee. Successful applications were also made to the NOMS' Integrated Research Application System and to the governor of the young offender institution within which the girls' unit was housed. A letter of endorsement for the study was provided by the Chief Executive of the Youth Justice Board for England and Wales.

It is clear that participants should be considered a 'vulnerable' group and care was accordingly taken to ensure that their dignity and rights were respected throughout the

research process. Written information about the project was made available through staff on the unit to potential participants. Researchers met with those girls who expressed an initial interest in taking part to explain the process, and what it would involve, in more detail. Participation was contingent on participants giving informed written consent to being interviewed. Interviewees were told that they did not need to answer any questions unless they wished to do so and that they could withdraw at any time.

At the end of the custodial interview girls were asked if they would be willing to take part in a follow up interview on release. Many of the young women were uncertain as to where they would be living and, in such cases, it was agreed that contact would be made through an appropriate professional (most commonly the youth offending team worker with responsibility for the post-custody licence) who would act as gatekeeper.

Efforts were consciously made to safeguard the girls' emotional well-being. All interviews were conducted by senior research staff with extensive experience of work with vulnerable young people. Interview schedules were semi-structured, allowing the young women to tell their own stories. While they were asked about their circumstances prior to entering custody, care was taken to make future opportunities, and how they might be supported, the primary focus of discussion rather than reinforcing previous failures, or highlighting deficits. This approach was in part informed by the research team's reading of the literature, outlined in the next section of the report, that endorses a future orientated approach to girls in trouble.

Where consent to do so was forthcoming, interviews were electronically recorded. In the two cases where girls opted not to consent to recording, contemporaneous notes were made of the answers. All interviews were subsequently transcribed and stored on password protected computers. Participants were assured of anonymity and guaranteed confidentiality unless information came to light that suggested that they or others might be at risk of serious harm. Such disclosure did not prove to be necessary.

It was not possible to offer any form of incentive for participation in the study within custody, but girls interviewed in the community were given a £10 token to thank them for their time.

Data analysis

All interviews were conducted face to face and lasted between 45 and 90 minutes.

Discussion was guided by a semi-structured interview schedule, consisting of a range of prompts for the interviewer. Recorded material was transcribed verbatim and in full; notes taken during the two non-recorded interviews, were typed up and the notes made available for analysis.

Interview material was analysed using a 'framework' approach (Ritchie and Spencer, 1994), regarded as a technique particularly suited for dealing with qualitative data in applied social policy research (Srivastava and Thomson, 2009). Following a process of immersion in, or 'familiarisation' with, the data, the researchers developed a 'thematic framework' reflecting the dominant themes emerging from the participants' responses. Interview transcripts were then subject to 'indexing' and 'charting' (a form of qualitative coding) to illuminate participants' perspectives in relation to the identified themes.

Limitations of the research

The study is based on a small number of girls, all of the same age, in a single establishment. The findings cannot accordingly be considered representative of the female experience across the secure estate for children and young people. On the other hand, the sample size is equivalent to a third of the total number of young women in custody at any one time, and a considerably larger proportion of those detained in young offender institutions under sentence. In these circumstances, the findings fill a considerable gap in the literature (Bateman et al, 2013) and provide useful insights into the perspectives of girls detained in the secure estate that may form the basis for wider research, inform policy and contribute to the development of effective practice.

The study was designed to focus on the experiences of girls as they understand, and choose to express, them. It should be acknowledged that the responses provided by participants are personal and subjective and may be open to a variety of possible interpretations. Indeed, the answers that girls gave did not always provide a consistent picture throughout the whole interview. No attempt was made to triangulate the data by comparing the girls' accounts with any third party records or by seeking the views of professionals responsible for service delivery. The nature of the study also precluded any consideration of outcomes.

However, the importance of the subject's experience and understanding of a criminal justice intervention, in determining whether it will have the desired effect, is increasingly recognised (see for instance, McNeill, 2009). The literature emanating from desistance theory, discussed later in the report, suggests that subjective factors can make the difference between continuing to offend or 'going straight' (Maruna, 2001). Located within that broader literature, the findings of the current study have the potential to contribute to a better understanding of the resettlement process insofar as it relates to girls in custody as they approach the transition to adulthood.

3. The context: previous relevant research findings

While there is very little literature specific to the resettlement of girls, there is a considerable body of knowledge that is relevant to the current inquiry. Three areas of previous research are particularly useful in providing a context for framing the findings:

- the resettlement of young people
- the aetiology of girls' offending and effective responses to it, and
- young people and desistance from offending.

The current section of the report provides a brief overview of the literature in relation to each of these questions.

The resettlement of children from custody

By comparison with that for adults, the evidence base in regard to resettlement practice for young people is underdeveloped, though a number of recent evaluations have ensured that it is growing (James et al, 2013). The literature identifies some general principles that inform effective resettlement. While implementation may need to be adapted to ensure that it is gender sensitive, the principles themselves are, for the most part, at a sufficient level of generality to be helpful in framing an understanding of the issues that apply to the resettlement of girls as well as boys.

If the transition from custody to the community is to be negotiated successfully, it should be as seamless as possible. Provision within the custodial establishment should be focused on what needs to change if the young person is to stop offending when she or he is released. Service planning should be forward looking rather than reflecting institutional concerns in relation to behaviour management and being determined by which programmes are readily available within the establishment. From the other end of the telescope, it is vital that resettlement provision in the community builds upon, and is consistent with, interventions delivered within the secure estate (Hazel and Liddle, 2012).

The necessity of ensuring a smooth transition also has implications for the nature of sentence planning. Ensuring an integrated programme of support across the custody – community divide requires that all those with responsibility for resettlement services, both within and without the secure estate, are engaged in joint planning as soon as possible after sentence (Bateman et al, 2013).

Research confirms that a range of factors impact on the likelihood of reoffending following a custodial episode. Many young people in trouble have chaotic home lives and lack stable accommodation. The disruption associated with incarceration frequently worsens accommodation status (Hazel et al, 2012). As noted above, educational underachievement is associated with the type of offending that may lead to deprivation of liberty, and a custodial record makes it harder to access education, training or employment on release. In this context, it is not surprising that when young prisoners are asked about what could be done in custody to prepare them for release, and upon transfer to the community to assist resettlement, they most commonly refer to support in accessing education, training, legitimate forms of income and a stable address (Glover et al, 2012). Significantly for the current study, adult young women prisoners report the highest levels of unmet need (Hamyln and Lewis, 2000). Such factors are interwoven in complex ways. Children living in unstable accommodation are less likely to be able to sustain education or employment. Conversely, a consistent source of income and a structured lifestyle may increase the prospects of finding and maintaining a suitable place to live. A secure base may also be a prerequisite of young people addressing other issues such as problematic drinking or substance misuse (Thomas, 2013 forthcoming).

Addressing such difficulties, requires that joint planning, and groundwork for the return to the community, should commence at an early stage: accommodation, education or employment, and other forms of support services should accordingly all be in place long before release if resettlement is to be effective (Hazel and Liddle, 2012). Provision within custody should be individually tailored to prepare the young person for what is arranged for

her or him in the community and to act as a bridge between the individual's previous experiences and achievements and what will be expected of them when they leave prison (Bateman et al, 2013).

The point of release offers a window of opportunity since, the evidence suggests, many young people are more committed to adopting a non-criminal lifestyle immediately on their return to the community than they were prior to being imprisoned (Hazel et al, 2002; Farrant, 2005). Conversely, however, the transition to the community is also a time of enhanced risk. While the traumatic impact of incarceration is generally acknowledged, it is less often recognised that the return to the community can be equally distressing and disorientating as young people struggle to come to terms with lack of structure that comes with their freedom, renegotiating relationships with friends and family, and re-establishing a role for themselves in a very different environment from that they have left (Hazel et al, 2002; Youth Justice Board, 2006). Despite young people's good intentions, the period immediately after release is thus also marked by having the highest rates of reoffending and breach (Hazel et al, 2010). Enhanced support around the transition, with high levels of personal contact in the period before and after release, and involvement in resettlement activities immediately on the return to the community, is accordingly crucial. In this context, it is argued that good relationships between staff responsible for resettlement service delivery and the young person need to have been forged while the child is still in custody (Hazel, 2004).

Relationships between staff and young people are themselves key in ensuring that the latter engage with resettlement services and develop the confidence and motivation to take full advantage of them (McMurrin, 2002). This theme is echoed in the literature on working with girls in trouble and on desistance from offending as discussed below.

The aetiology of girls' offending and effective responses to it

Girls are significantly less likely to commit offences than boys and, where they do so, their offending is generally of a less serious nature (Sharpe, 2012). During 2011, for instance,

while one third of substantive youth justice disposals made in relation to boys were imposed for the, relatively minor, offences of theft and handling stolen goods, the equivalent figure for girls was 59% (Ministry of Justice, 2012a). The situation in relation to more serious offences is less straightforward. Violent offences are more equally distributed; indeed, as table 2 indicates, violence against the person accounts for a slightly larger percentage of young women’s criminal activity than it does boys’ offending. However, a significantly higher proportion of girls’ violent offences result in a pre-court disposal, signifying that they do not cross the threshold of seriousness at which prosecution is in the public interest.

Table 2 Violent offences by gender 2011
(Derived from Ministry of Justice, 2012: supplementary table A5.5 and Q2.E)

	Girls	Boys
Violent offences as a proportion of all offences	15%	13.9%
Proportion of violent offences leading to a pre-court disposal	55.8%	39.1%
Proportion of violent offences leading to conviction	54.2%	60.9%

The above data relate to detected offending but self-report studies confirm that female offending accounts for a relatively small proportion of youth crime (Flood-Page et al, 2000). Such studies suggest that, at 12-14 years of age, a similar proportion of girls and boys admit having committed an offence within the past year. From that point on, however, differences begin to emerge. The peak age of self-reported offending is 14 years for females compared to 18 for males, and as a consequence, by the age of 17 years, male self-reported offending outnumbers that of girls by three to one (Flood-Page et al, 2000). Girls accordingly grow out of crime more successfully and at an earlier age than boys. It is this pattern which largely explains the lower reoffending rates for girls noted earlier. Surveys conducted in Scotland also confirm differences in types of offending: while girls are more likely to steal from home and write graffiti, carrying a weapon, robbery, theft from cars and cruelty to animals are largely male activities (Smith and McAra, 2004).

The distinctive pattern of girls’ delinquency is, moreover, a manifestation of significant differences in the factors that contribute to an explanation of female offending. As noted

above, girls in trouble tend to be more vulnerable than their male counterparts, but the two populations diverge in other respects. Relational issues, within a variety of contexts, are pivotal to an understanding of much female anti-social behaviour (Zavlek and Maniglia, 2007). As one study has suggested:

'the centrality of relationships is a key theme in the research literature on women's pathways into offending' (Burman and Batchelor, 2009).

Family conflict is often an indicator of later law breaking. This can express itself in a variety of ways: girls who offend are frequently victims of violent victimisation within the home (Burman and Batchelor, 2009); poor relationships with mothers (Sharpe, 2012) or step-fathers (Williams, 2008) feature heavily in the backgrounds of young women who come to the attention of youth justice agencies; experience of bereavement, loss, abandonment, and separation is often a precursor to female delinquency (Sharpe, 2012; Burman and Batchelor, 2009); and girls who offend are significantly more likely to have a background of public care or adoption (Douglas and Plugge, 2004).

Nor is it just relationships within the home that matter. While entering a stable relationship is frequently cited as a factor that may favour desistance in boys, the opposite effect has been found in young women, many of whom become involved in offending following association with a delinquent male (Barry, 2006). While the peer group represents a point of reference for all young people during the teenage years, there is evidence that friendships assume a greater significance for girls (Griffiths, 1995), especially for those with disrupted family backgrounds where relationships with contemporaries are particularly important as a source of identity and status (Hey, 1997). Offences of personal violence are thus more likely to arise in the context of interactions between groups of friends that involve:

'disputes over boys, defending personal reputation, as a response to name calling, or being the subject of gossip' (Nacro, 2008: 4).

There is evidence too suggesting that verbal disagreements are particularly prone to escalate into physical altercations among girls who emanate from economically

disadvantaged backgrounds, where there may be a greater need to assert independence and conceal signs of weakness (Nacro, 2008; Batchelor, 2005).

Relational considerations also appear relevant to the increased likelihood that girls in trouble will manifest mental ill health. Girls are more susceptible to displaying symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder and other forms of internalising emotional disorders (Bateman, 2008). Williams (2008) has drawn attention to the high prevalence of maternal psychological distress and mental illness among young women who offend, which in turn impact on the daughters' own emotional state.

If relationships are a dominant feature of explanations of girls' offending – a part of the problem, as it were – they also appear as a necessary part of the solution (Batchelor and Burman, 2004). There is considerable agreement in the literature that effective practice with young women in trouble with the law requires a gender-sensitive approach that recognises the different pathways by which boys and girls come into, and exit from, crime (Bateman, 2008). The transition to adulthood, and the associated reduction in offending behaviour, comes earlier for most young women than for their male counterparts: attaining economic independence and taking responsibility for oneself and others appear to be important factors correlated with desistance for girls in particular (Graham and Bowling, 1995). Facilitating such milestones is accordingly regarded as one of the prime objectives of effective, gender sensitive, intervention. Practice ought also to have regard to the higher levels of victimisation typically experienced by girls and acknowledge that addressing such prior experiences is a prerequisite of achieving a sense of self and identity that supports the move to independence and away from delinquent behaviour.

It follows that there are two distinct, but complementary, senses in which relationship is fundamental to effective youth justice practice with girls. First, intervention should aim to provide opportunities for girls, whose previous experiences are predominantly negative, to explore alternative, less damaging, interpersonal relationships and promote a constructive use of networks of support (Worrall, 2001). In the process, space can be provided to enable

girls to explore how their behaviour has been influenced by their interactions with others (Cooney et al, 2008). Second, the nature of relationships between staff and the girls with whom they work is crucial. Interaction must avoid reinforcing previous negative experiences and attempt to model more appropriate relationships based on mutuality and empowerment, playing to girls' strengths rather than adopting a deficit reduction model (Nacro, 2008). Moreover, since relational issues are more fundamental to girls' concept of self than that of their male counterparts, the extent to which any rehabilitative input is successful will depend in large part on the establishment of a quality relationship between those delivering the intervention and those whom it is intended to help (Bateman, 2008). It is at this juncture that the literature on work with girls in trouble intersects with the evidence base for resettlement provision outlined earlier in the report, since good relationships between staff and young people they supervise, are considered a prerequisite of the level of engagement required for effective rehabilitation.

Young people and desistance from offending

The concept of relationship is also to found in the literature on desistance from offending. Despite the fact that growing out of crime is one the most consistently confirmed phenomena in criminology, '*the systematic investigation of desistance is a relatively recent development*' (Farrall, 2010: 9). Nonetheless, there is now an emerging body of evidence that explores effective interventions with young people in trouble by analysing the processes that promote a shift towards a law abiding lifestyle rather than focusing on the 'risk factors' that predict the onset of crime. Interest in this innovative approach stems from longitudinal studies – such as the Cambridge Study of Delinquent Development – that demonstrate that those young people who embark on criminal careers as they enter adolescence most commonly cease offending, or at least offend less frequently, as they approach the transition to adulthood. As one advocate of such an approach argues, it has the advantage of '*valuing people for what they **could become**, not who they **have been** or what they **have done***' (Farrall, 2010:12).

For Farrall and Bowling (1999: 261), desistance is a process that is produced through:

'an interplay between individual choices, and a range of wider social forces, institutional and societal practices which are beyond the control of the individual'.

The interface between structure and agency is important because it allows scope for explaining how, and why, the pathways of people who have similar histories of adversity, and might be viewed as embodying the same 'risk factors', can at various junctures diverge significantly. In the work of Maruna (2001; Maruna, Porter and Carvalho et al, 2004), the role of subjective elements is critical in explaining why some people successfully give up offending in spite of significant objective obstacles. 'Desisters', by contrast with 'persisters', develop '*narratives of redemption*' (Maruna, 2001) that allow them to explain, and in the process distance themselves, from their previous offending behaviour and lifestyles as not being indicative of who they '*really are*'. The adoption of a positive self-image is augmented by '*hope*' (Burnett and Maruna, 2004) and a sense of purpose (Farrell and Calverley, 2006) which ensure that individuals will be more inclined to take advantage of the opportunities for rehabilitation that present themselves (or are presented).

Such accounts suggest a distinction between primary and secondary desistance. A full understanding of the process of moving out of crime ought to look beyond the objective factors of whether individuals are in stable accommodation, are constructively engaged in legitimate activities, and whether or not their offending has actually declined (primary desistance), to an exploration of the subjective factors that enable such achievements (secondary desistance) (Maruna, Immarigeon and LeBel, 2004). Significantly there is also evidence that the subjective states which promote desistance in girls and young women may be different in certain respects from those of their male peers: while boys who successfully give up offending tend to cite utilitarian explanations, such as the adverse effects of involvement in the criminal justice system or the negative impact on opportunities for future advancement, girls are more likely to offer moral, emotional or relational motivations, such as the damage that criminal behaviour causes, the impact on others, and their responsibilities for family, friends or broader acquaintances (McIvor et al, 2004). It is for such reasons that the perceptions of girls themselves, the focus of the current study, can

make an important contribution to knowledge of what might constitute effective resettlement.

Highlighting the importance of identity and cognition in the processes that determine which pathway young people in trouble will take, has evident implications for youth justice practice. It suggests, for instance, that effective service provision must go beyond attempting to deliver programmes that 'work' which tend to treat young people as: *'needy and beset by problems perhaps corresponds too closely with some of their own rationales and justification for offending'*. Practice ought instead to foster a sense that young people are *'able to take charge of their lives and overcome obstacles [that] could promote a sense of responsibility and self-efficacy'* (Raynor, 2004: 212). Interventions to address 'criminogenic' factors should accordingly be balanced by a focus on positive strengths. Dwelling on past mistakes, in the name of making the young person accept responsibility for his or her past offending behaviour, should give way to an emphasis on future opportunities (Nacro, 2005). Such an approach may be particularly important in the case of girls, who are more likely to internalise blame for previous negative experiences (Williams, 2008; Sharpe, 2012).

The role of practitioners, on this account, is to help children in trouble to develop their own narratives that will allow them to construct their identities as 'non-offenders' and to provide them with strategies that offer hope and instil a sense of self-belief that change is possible (Nacro, 2005). Such strategies must start from an acknowledgement of the centrality of listening to what girls have to say about themselves, their fears and aspirations, and reinforcing an awareness of the potential they have to offer (Bateman, 2008).

Equally important is a recognition that how a young person experiences the provision of services is critical to whether they will have a positive impact on his or her subjective outlook, and, as a consequence, future behaviour. Resettlement support will only be effective to the extent that those at whom they are aimed engage with the relevant activities (Mason and Prior, 2008; Prior and Mason, 2010). Traditionally, the youth justice system has

tended to rely on the compulsory nature of provision to promote compliance since failure to cooperate leads to breach action and the possibility of recall to custody. Productive changes to self-image, and the development 'hope', are much more likely however, where engagement is based on intrinsic motivation, relying less on external constraints than on the young person recognising the benefits of the programme for herself (Williams and Streat, 2002).

The development of such forms of motivation is not an automatic process but depends, in large part, on the quality of relationship between young people and staff delivering the intervention (McNeil, 2006). Young people are more likely to respond positively to supervision if they regard the authority of the supervisor as being exercised legitimately (Tyler, 1990; Robinson and McNeill, 2008). This has a number of implications for professional practice.

First, it involves staff conveying a sense to young people of unconditional support, a refusal to give up faith in their capacity to change (Lobley et al, 2001). Young people with an established history of failure and persistent anti-social behaviour require persistence on the part of professionals attempting to engage with them. Second, professional perseverance needs to be grounded in empathy since a perception on the part of service users that advice given by staff emanates from an authentic interest in them as autonomous individuals is a prerequisite of that advice being heeded (McCulloch, 2005). Research has found that adult probationers who consider that the supervision process has helped to reduce their offending, attribute the change, in part, to a sense of loyalty to their probation officer, which in turn arises out of a relationship of mutual respect (Rex, 1999). A similar process appears to apply in work with children in trouble: a commitment on the part of a young person to give up crime is frequently a response to:

'a commitment on the part of workers whose reasonableness, fairness and encouragement is seen by young people to demonstrate and understanding of, and genuine concern for them as people' (Batchelor and McNeill, 2005: 166).

Finally, since many young people in conflict with the law are themselves victims in myriad ways, the establishment of a relationship based on trust, respect and empathy may require that professionals acknowledge the range of social injustices to which the individuals with whom they work have been subject. A perception on the part of children that those who provide resettlement services can be relied upon to advocate on their behalf may be a precondition of them accepting that such staff also have a legitimate role in criticising elements of their past behaviour and instilling hope that things can be different in the future (McNeill, 2009).

Having considered the evidence base relevant to the context of the current study, we now turn to an overview of the findings.

4. Vulnerable, disadvantaged, and deprived of their liberty

To the extent that vulnerability and disadvantage are defining characteristics of young women in prison, the sample of sixteen girls selected for the current study were broadly representative of the wider population across a range of indicators.

Home circumstances

Less than one third of the girls lived at home with either parent. Nonetheless, a small number of interviewees did report a happy childhood. One, for instance, noted that prior to incarceration she had been living with her family who were

'Great. They're supportive. All of them have been there every step of the way. 100% ... I've got aunties and everything...Yeah - and my grandparents - so I've got a lot of family' (Sasha).³

This idea that imprisonment was a temporary interruption to an otherwise trouble free home life was echoed by Ella:

'Yeah. I've got a good background. Everything was good before I came in here. And everything will be good when I get out so ...';

and Geraldine:

'I was living at my house, with my family, everything was alright'.

Others, though living at home, reported significant family conflict and differences with step fathers was a recurrent theme. Two girls had been staying with older siblings as a way to relieve the tension with parents or carers. One described living with a cousin after her mother was given a custodial sentence, though her answer implied that she received little support in the new setting:

*My life before I came in was a bit complicated cos my mum's still in jail, my sister wasn't really on a talking basis with me and my little brother had just got taken into care, so life was a bit hectic and then I went jail. [Interviewer: **And so what, you were kind of looking after yourself were you?**] Yeah. Pretty much ... well I did have people*

³ All names of interviewees have been changed to preserve anonymity. In addition, on a few occasions, instances, where a quotation, or description, would allow identification of a particular young woman, pseudonyms are withheld to prevent the attribution of other comments to particular individuals.

there, like a handful of them, like older cousins, like I stayed with my older cousin but she was at work and when she wasn't at work, she was out and about so ... I kinda just looked after myself pretty much' (Donna).

The majority of interviewees had been residing away from the parental or extended family home, however, and returning to live with parents on release was not an option. Most of these girls had been in local authority care and, in at least some cases, the care experience appeared to have compounded the trauma of family breakdown rather than mitigated it. Frequent changes of placement were common, with one respondent indicating that she had least ten placements since the age of nine. Indeed it was rare for girls to identify any positive aspect of the arrangements for looking after them. Felicity did remember one foster carer fondly, and regretted that the placement had broken down, an occurrence that she put down to her '*criminal activities*', a failure to abide by the terms of her curfew, and frequent visits in the middle of the night from the police. Her matter of fact description of what happened as a consequence – the carer '*didn't want me living there anymore*' – conveyed a strong sense of rejection, although she also thought that the decision was '*fair enough*'.

With the benefit of hindsight another girl thought that a therapeutic placement '*stood out*' from the other '*numerous placements*' as being good for her. At the time, however, she was not in the frame of mind to appreciate it. The therapeutic unit had been:

'in the middle of nowhere but for me it kind of made me realise certain things because I wasn't, in the city I wasn't, had my friends around me to not be listening or ... so yeah. [Interviewer: Did you like it at the time or is it only looking back ...?] No I didn't, I didn't like it at the time cos I'm a city girl and to live in the middle of nowhere was that, had no-one but when I look back at it, I just realise it actually done me good and I changed whilst I was there so ...' (Jo).

Perhaps not surprisingly, none of the girls explicitly attributed their offending behaviour to their home circumstances. Nonetheless, the links between their previous experiences and delinquency were apparent. One respondent, for instance, took care to point out that she

had got in trouble in spite of having a settled background, suggesting that this was the exception rather than the norm:

'I've got a strong family network and I'm, that's the thing, I let my family down, because all my family have been to university, they all got a good, they've all got a job, in a good field doing something, they all, they're not living in council flats. Everyone in my family has got a mortgage and everything so I feel like for me then to go to prison it's a bit like, do you get what I'm saying?' (Gemma).

Several girls reported that problems at home had revolved around disputes over their offending, and in some cases, it appeared that being 'beyond the control' of their parents was a trigger for them coming into care. Jo's removal from home, for instance, was a consequence of her:

'getting into trouble from a young, age from 12, started getting arrested and I got remanded into local authority, [inaudible] send me to secure because I was, I'd been in secure previously and it didn't help me so ... then from then I got put on an interim care order...'

Another young woman related that she had been placed in a hostel at the insistence of her social worker and youth offending team worker on the basis that '*my mum can't control me*' (Karen). As she understood it, although she had been removed from home, she did not as a consequence become a looked after child, and certainly appears to have been offered limited support.

A recurrent theme was that other family members had been in trouble. Paula was the first of her family to be sentenced to custody, but her father had had '*bit of policing issues*'. As noted above, Donna's mother was in jail. Another young woman described her background in the following terms:

'I've got seven brothers, I'm the only girl. My oldest brother, he's 26, he's got a good job in the music industry. But the others, they're into crazy stuff. [Interviewer:

***You mean they've been in trouble with the police?]** Yeah ... When my dad gets out of prison, we're going to live in Margate' (Kylie).*

The relationship between getting in trouble and family was especially transparent in the case of Amy who indicated that some of her offending was to obtain goods for her younger sister:

'I don't want her getting in trouble so she wants something and she ain't got money, I'll do it for her, I don't want her like ... like in here'.

A troubled population

Difficult home circumstances were in many instances compounded by other forms of vulnerability. Previous research has consistently found a correlation between disrupted education and contact with the youth justice system and the current study provides further evidence in that regard. Few of the girls had managed to complete mainstream schooling, a reality implicitly acknowledged by Geraldine's exclamation that she had '*managed to finish that!*' The majority of interviewees by contrast told stories of having been excluded, some on more than one occasion. Other girls simply stopped attending. Although many also mentioned that places had been found for them in alternative provision, in the form of a pupil referral unit (PRU), engagement was generally limited and attainment poor. Gemma's experience was not atypical:

'School wasn't good because I misbehaved most of my school life ... I could have done it but I just thought misbehaving was the way – but it wasn't ... Year 7, I got kicked out at year 7 and then I went to live in the Caribbean for six months, then I got kicked out of school there then I came back and I went to a school for kids who can't find school places' (Gemma).

Felicity appeared almost proud of having had difficulties with her schooling:

*'There's not much education for me. [Interviewer: **When were you last at school?**] [laughs] What, a proper mainstream school? A proper mainstream school? Couple of years ago, like when I was in ... like year, beginning of Year 9, ending of Year 8,*

*them times was the last time I was in a proper school. Yeah, that would be when I was in a proper school but then I got kicked out and then ... I went to a PRU and that and then I went back to school but I only made it three days, so I don't think that even counts. [Interviewer: **Why did they kick you out?**] What, from school? ...First they said it was cos of my fighting, cos I kept fighting everybody and then I was on a very, like thin line and they were on the verge of ex... like kicking me out properly but then I topped it off by beating up the teacher and then I got kicked out'.*

The prevalence of similar experiences was such that when one of the respondents, whose narrative included non-attendance at primary school and being temporarily excluded from secondary school for fighting, said that she had passed seven GCSEs, the interviewer was not clear whether she was being ironic. In response to the suggestion that this was quite an achievement, her nonchalant response was: *'Yeah - everyone was amazed'* (Kylie). A few other girls did report having achieved some educational qualifications but generally were not able to recall the detail of the subjects they had passed or what grades they had obtained. This reflected something of a paradox. On the one hand, it appeared indicative of a relatively low significance attached by respondents to educational outcomes, as in Ella's off hand acknowledgement that: *'Yeah I got GCSEs but I can't remember which ones [laughs]... I can't remember what I got'*. Conversely, some of young women expressed regret that, for them, education had been a wasted opportunity: *'now I really, like most of my friends have got GCSEs and that and I am struggling to like look for work and stuff like that, so yeah, I wish I would have stayed in school'* (Jo). The majority saw education and training as a precursor of changing their lifestyle and giving up offending. It seems likely that for some young women dismissing the importance of formal qualifications was a rationalisation for educational underperformance.

It was not uncommon for girls to have enrolled at college once they were beyond the statutory school leaving age. For some, this appeared to be a stopgap, for want of anything better to do. One young woman's attendance had been erratic and had stopped going. Another described being excluded when she and some friends discharged a firework in

class. Two of the interviewees, however, appeared to have regarded college more optimistically as a clear pathway to the world of work. Gemma had commenced an apprenticeship in business studies at the point of her imprisonment and was enthusiastic about a combination that would lead to a qualification while also providing some form of income. Sasha had obtained a diploma in floristry – as she pointed out, this particular qualification was '*Not much use in prison*'. She had subsequently proceeded to commence an apprenticeship in hotel hospitality and would be able to return to that course on release.

For most of the sample, a problematic educational background went hand in hand with other difficulties. In some cases, the latter made sustaining education more challenging; in others, the lack of structure that engagement in education would have provided seems to have encouraged participation in risky forms of behaviour.

The correlation between problematic substance misuse and contact with the youth justice system is well established (Beniart et al, 2002; Youth Justice Board, 2009; Green and Ross, 2010). The literature suggests that, for girls who offend, the influence of alcohol is particularly significant (Williams, 2008; Arnall and Eagle, 2009). The current sample provides confirmation of the relationship. This is not to say that all the young women in the cohort reported difficulties with alcohol or drugs. Indeed, a number of interviewees complained about the assumption on the part of the establishment, which they perceived to be reflected in the curriculum, that all of them had issues with substance misuse.

Nonetheless, there was clear evidence that some of those interviewed had a problematic relationship with drugs and/ or alcohol which was linked in various ways to their offending.

Amy attributed increasing rows within the family home, in the period before her custodial episode, to an escalation in her intake of cider, and she conceded that the conflict also led to her getting into trouble more frequently. When asked to rate her drinking on a scale of 1 to 10, where 1 was equivalent to having a shandy once a month, she placed herself at nine. Karen thought that most of her offending was related to her use of alcohol and cocaine. Jo

acknowledged that she had been drinking every day prior to incarceration, and reflecting on her usage indicated that: *'I wouldn't say I was an alcoholic but ...'*.

Two girls in particular conceded that they had serious problems with substance misuse. One described *'binge'* drinking at the weekends, when she would routinely consume a bottle of vodka in a night and was scheduled to go to a residential rehabilitation unit on her release as a condition of licence. Another girl told us that:

'Alcohol, weed and cocaine, they're the three that I've had problems with.'

[Interviewer: So you're describing it as a problem?] *Well, alcohol was a bit of a problem, weed wasn't a problem, cocaine was a problem. Cos like cocaine, I was like borderline of psychosis, whatever that crap, I don't know, that the drugs worker says I, I was on, going well like going a bit crazy on the cocaine. Alcohol, usually makes me angry, I could drink alcohol in a happy mood but it turns out very bad for me cos I just end up lashing out and going nuts. Yeah, it don't help me, alcohol just makes it worse for me and the cocaine but weed, whoa, I don't do anything when I'm on weed, man, I just sit there'.*

Difficulties with mental ill health are also prevalent across the secure estate for girls and the interactions between young women's emotional states, mental wellbeing, and offending are complex (Douglas and Plugge, 2006). As the above response indicates, one girl in the current sample acknowledged that she had suffered mental illness. She described having problems with controlling her temper from a young age, leading to frequent fighting which was one source of her trouble with the law. She had received input from mental health services prior to incarceration but things had deteriorated while she was in custody and she had been sectioned under the Mental Health Act 1983 and placed for period in a secure psychiatric hospital.

'When I was ... like last year , like I started ... going through like hearing voices and that, cos things got really low for me and then one thing just led to another and then I wrote to a CAMHS [Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services] worker and that whilst I was locked up and ... like they put me on medication but they started me off

on quite a little bit of a dose, yeah and then from there it didn't work for me so then it, like the voices and everything got worse for me and then when I went to the prison and ... from there they increased my dose and all that but it didn't work and then I literally was going crazy, so then they sectioned me'.

On her account, she was '*living proof*' that drugs misuse can contribute to mental ill health.

Jo, who with hindsight had appreciated her placement in a therapeutic unit, admitted that she had significant problems with anger management. As she described it, she had '*a lot of anger that ain't been let out, just from just emotions that have been built up that ain't let out from young*'. As a consequence, she was seeing a counsellor in the YOI. Gemma by contrast, had resisted a referral because she did not want to be labelled:

'Now I realise that it was only my stupidity that was making me behave like that because I don't behave like that anymore. So, I didn't go to counselling because I didn't want to be labelled, so....yea' (Gemma).

As noted in a previous section of the report, friendship groups take on a particular importance for girls and their offending often occurs in a relational context (Sharpe, 2012; Weerman and Hoeve, 2012). Most of the girls in the sample had previously got into trouble with friends. Amy considered that one of the prime reasons for her ending up in custody was hanging around '*with the wrong people. Just getting in trouble... My boyfriend's been in prison*'. Karen described her friends as '*the same people I got in trouble with me*', some of whom had also been in prison. Felicity's current sentence was imposed for assaulting a couple in a cinema when a fight developed after an argument about Felicity's friends making too much noise. However, she was also clear that she could not blame her friends for her behaviour and that she was more than capable of getting in trouble without their influence:

'When I'm not with them, I still do things, like when I was with them it was just a bit more like, we'd do it as a group but when I wasn't with them, it was 'I will do it myself, go do, go rob this house by myself and do that crime''.

In retrospect, Izzy accepted that her peers '*could have been bad friends but obviously I just couldn't see that they were bad friends*'.

A consistent theme to emerge from the interviews was that, when relationships were tested by circumstances of adversity, acquaintances whom the girls had assumed were good friends were no longer considered as such: friendship groups had fallen out when trouble occurred. Ella described her erstwhile friends as '*all idiots*' who '*all get each other into trouble*'. Jo reported that after she was stabbed in the leg, she realised that the people she was associating with '*were not gonna care for me*'. In common with other interviewees, she now distinguished between people she knew and those who were dependable:

'My friends, I don't, I don't have that many friends that I say that they're my friends, they're more my associates than ... I have about three people that I can actually trust as my friends' (Jo).

Sasha similarly indicated that receiving a custodial sentence had made her reflect on how she perceived her peer group:

'I've got a lot of friends. Well I know a lot of people but since I've been in here, it's made me realise who my friends are. I'd say like five true, honest, friends I've got' (Sasha).

Kylie, who described having been in a gang where there was a lot of internal conflict and interpersonal violence, indicated that she was '*not glad I'm in prison but it's a break from it [the violence]*'.

For many of the girls, breaking with their peer group was accordingly seen as a prerequisite of giving up offending. Some suggested that they would find that easier than others, but few thought that establishing a new set of friends would, in isolation, be enough to ensure that they did not continue to get into trouble when they were released.

A troublesome population

Given the personal circumstances, family backgrounds, and vulnerabilities of the group, it is not surprising that most of them had engaged in serious and persistent forms of criminal behaviour. In line with the literature that cautions against reinforcing girl's identities as offenders (McNeill, 2009; Bateman, 2008), there was no attempt made as part of the study to establish systematically the nature and prevalence of girls' previous convictions or delinquent activities. Nonetheless, in the course of interview, most girls alluded to the incidents that had led to incarceration and previous episodes that had brought them to the attention of the authorities.

Three girls had been arrested following offences committed during the civil disturbances of August 2011. All had stolen items – either from shops or by taking goods that were lying on the ground, having been removed from commercial premises by others involved in those events. None of these three had previous convictions (although one had clearly engaged in a range of criminal activities), and they might be regarded as victims of the government's determination to crack down on the 'rioters' through tough sentencing (Clarke, 2012; Bateman, 2012b). A further girl might also be counted as atypical having just one previous conviction for handling stolen goods prior to the offence – dangerous driving – that led to her imprisonment. The severity in the disposal was in part due to the fact that, as a consequence of a legal technicality, she was sentenced in Crown, rather than the youth, court.

The offending history of all the other girls was considerably more serious and long-standing. Two were serving long term sentences of detention for incidents involving loss of life. Another young woman had received her sentence for firearms related offences; and a further girl for grievous bodily harm with intent. Most of the interviewees had extensive previous records. Jo '*started robbing people from when like I was 12. ... Yeah, I just turned 12 and my first arrest, I got taken to secure unit*'. Gemma also had a history involving robbery:

'Umm, like every Friday robbing people. I didn't need to, cos, I'm not well off but I was very spoiled and I got what I needed and what I wanted. ... but like, cos of, I used to go to the estates and that and because those kids used to do it so I used to do it, rob people and beat people up I used to fight with girls my age all the time. Rob older people, not old people but older people, umm, steal from shops' (Gemma).

Felicity described her pattern of delinquency as being broader. She attributed violent incidents to problems with anger management, but put down other forms offending to boredom:

'Like my convictions yeah, are really random, they're like loads of different things, like it's not always one certain thing like cos it changes, I have a certain thing I'll be doing and then it changes to the next thing and it changes and ... Yeah, anger like, anger's for like, my violent offences are all like, is due to my anger like but the other offences I done was, I don't know you know, boredom ... Robberies, burglaries, weapons ... theft ... I even got done for shoplifting before' (Felicity).

Karen reported having been first arrested for arson at the age of 14, and from that point onward had been *'arrested like every other day'*. She had been recalled to custody for breaching the conditions of her licence and for committing a new offence, *'but that was only on common assault'*. One girl indicated that it was a shock for her to receive a custodial disposal in spite of her extensive previous record: *'It took 15 offences for them to send me to prison. The first time was when I was 13, for kidnap ... I wouldn't let this girl off the bus'* (Kylie).

The narratives of the girls set them apart from most females who come to the attention of the youth justice system for relatively minor offending and who have a modest antecedent history. While they shared some of the background characteristics and vulnerabilities of the wider offending population, it is clear that adverse personal circumstances were noticeably more concentrated within this custodial cohort. Against this background, resettlement of the sample group posed a substantial challenge and desisting from crime would require

considerable change. The girls' views of the nature of those changes, the support that they would need to make the necessary adjustments, and their assessments of the services that they had received to date, and anticipated receiving in future, are outlined in the following sections of the report.

5. Obstacles to resettlement

Given the extreme levels of vulnerability endured by girls in prison, and their entrenched patterns of offending behaviour, resettlement is inevitably a difficult exercise. The findings from this study however suggest that there are additional obstacles that make the task more demanding than might at first sight appear.

Interventions prior to the current custodial episode

One of the challenges faced by resettlement services is that where young people have had extensive contact with social care and youth justice services prior to their period of incarceration, as most of those in the sample had, previous interventions have – almost by definition – failed, since they did not prevent the behaviour that led to the custodial episode. Such histories of failure tend towards a certain level of pessimism on the part of the young women, an issue discussed further in due course. (It seems likely that that cynicism may also be shared by service providers, but this was not an issue explored in the current study.)

Overwhelmingly the girls' perceptions of their previous encounters with children's services and youth offending teams were negative. Paula confirmed that social services had been involved but considered that they were more concerned with safeguarding the younger children in the house than providing assistance to her:

'... it wasn't ever positive because they always wanted to rub it in about how bad it was me being around my siblings, ... and when I was sent down they [social services] didn't want to keep in contact anyway they just didn't like me full stop ... They didn't do nothing to support me.'

Sharon likewise maintained that '*nothing social services did helped*'.

Felicity had a similar view of the youth offending team. While recognising her own role in the events that had led her to be deprived of her liberty on several occasions, she also contended that the compulsory nature of the intervention caused her difficulties over and above those that she already had to deal with.

'Do you know why it didn't help me? Because with YOT, yeah, like, they always put me on these orders that I don't like so then when I don't like it, I won't comply with it and then that just leads me into more trouble because even though I'll go and offend, I'll have that as well against me so when I go court, I have two things at one go. Yeah, then breach is annoying, I don't like breach. Breach is always like, when I'm getting nicked, yeah and then I go court, they bring up 'oh yeah and she's on breach', 'she's in breach of her thing' and aaaargh...'

Amy complained that youth offending team intervention consisted of just talking about her offending rather than provision of practical assistance and advice.

According to Karen, both social workers and youth offending team staff had been a source of disappointment rather than support, since they were not willing, or able, to provide the services that she felt she needed, in the form that she could accept.

'[Interviewer: Were any of them any help?] Nope. [Interviewer: Why not?] Cos they just didn't listen, like I was telling them what I was interested in and what I needed, like I needed help and stuff and they wasn't listening at all.'

Many of the girls had previous experience of custodial units other than the one in which the research was conducted and they recognised differences between the various forms of institution. Views were mixed: some respondents reported that secure children's homes provided an environment that was significantly more conducive to engendering change, whereas another, with an extensive record of incarceration in different parts of the secure estate, described her experience in such a unit as being akin to a holiday camp – *'it was like Butlin's or something'* (Felicity) – without implying that its rehabilitative impact was any greater than that of the YOI.

The dominant perception, however, was that custody, from the point of view of those detained within it, was about doing your time, and from the perspective of the establishment, about containment. As Felicity put it:

'the whole concept don't faze me if you get what I mean. Like me being locked up, it don't matter, I don't mind, like it don't really bother me'.

The idea that custodial provision might be about resettlement did not appear to have occurred to her and it was clear that any deterrent effect that her first episode in custody may have had, had long since evaporated.

Significantly, however, these generally negative assessments tended to be directed at agencies and institutions rather than individual members of staff. As outlined, later in the report, girls clearly differentiated between institutions and individuals. They also distinguished between what they perceived to be different kinds of workers, an issue explored in greater depth in due course. Jo was representing a prevalent view when she cautioned against putting all professionals:

'in a category and say 'all YOT workers ...' cos it's not true, you're basically stereotyping and saying 'all criminals are this', but once you meet someone, you're, it changes like, your perception changes of them and you're like 'oh, they might have done this but I'm not gonna take it for that' ... Yeah ... it depends on the individual'.

The current custodial experience

There were elements too of the custodial experience itself that seemed to militate against the process of desistance. These included factors identified in previous literature, such as the disruptive impact on ties with family, accommodation and education and employment, all of which would need to be repaired (Bateman et al, 2013). Paula admitted that the thought of returning to the community '*scared*' her, '*because, when I do go out, I could feel, what's that word, institutionalised?*'; a presentiment of the trauma that many young people experience on release (Bateman et al, 2013). But she was also '*worried about getting a job*' and the stigma that would attach to her conviction. Ella considered that '*it's going to be harder because now I've been in prison that will definitely make it harder having a record*'. And Sasha, who was imprisoned for her first offence, regretted that she had just done '*one silly little thing ... Now I got to work with that for the rest of my life*'.

Echoing some of the findings of the literature on adult prisoners (Matthews, 2009), and showing considerable insight, Gemma pointed to the particular difficulties that girls serving longer sentences would have in adjusting to the outside world. In her own words:

'They're stuck in like time, because that's the time that they came into prison. I've noticed that with a lot girls, like their dress sense, it's just like little things but I can tell when someone has come into prison because they're still stuck in the time that they came in. Whereas I just come in and I'm more updated so I know about things like Blackberries but when they went in prison Blackberries wasn't out, so it's like, they've got different views on things and that because they're stuck in the time when they went in and so when they come out I think they're gonna need a lot of help because the world's developing all the time and they're stuck in that time....'

The recognition having been in custody was itself an obstacle to desistance, sometimes co-existed with the view, expressed by several girls, that the experience of imprisonment had provided a chastening example, and that they would not be coming back. This was particularly true for those serving their first custodial sentence. Geraldine, for instance, was adamant: *'Yeah, I certainly won't be offending again, that's for sure'*. Ella too maintained that being deprived of her liberty had taught her a lesson, and that, had she been imprisoned for her first offence, she would have stopped offending then: *'if they would have put me in prison for a week then, I would never have committed any other crime again'*. The experiences of girls with a more extensive custodial history, however, suggested that, in some cases at least, such confidence may have been misplaced.

The interviews also identified a potentially contradictory dynamic that reflects in part the tension inherent in how to refer to young people in the sample of the current study. It was noted earlier in the report (see footnote 1) that it is not obvious which of the expressions 'girl' and 'young women' is a more appropriate term for female prisoners aged 17 years. The former accurately denotes their status as a child, reflecting their entitlement to special measures of support and safeguarding, while also acknowledging their developmental state.

It recognises that, in responding to their behaviour, due allowance should be made for immaturity. Conversely, characterising them as young women highlights their capacity for agency and self-determination, and signifies that they are in a process of transition to independence and autonomy. (As indicated above, the authors elected to use both interchangeably, partly in recognition of the dilemma.) A similar tension was evident in the girls' perceptions of the approach adopted towards them within the YOI. On the one hand, there were complaints of a lack of support. Sasha, for instance, pointed to the fact that not being able to have telephone contact with immediate family on the day of admission was an indication of a lack of the care that ought to be available to children of her age. Donna was not alone in reporting that there was an absence of a culture of understanding within the unit and that the manner in which culpability for past behaviour was attributed was more appropriate to an adult setting. From her perspective:

'so for you to tell me I shouldn't have done what I done, like you don't know the situations of my crime so that's really insensitive and you don't know what I'm going through and you don't know how much pain or what I'm living with for you to turn around and make them insensitive comments, it's unnecessary comments that doesn't need to be said but they still go out of their way to say it. Like this place is full of shit.'

At the same time, and paradoxically, almost all the interviewees protested that, for much of the time, they were treated in a manner that they considered would be suitable for a younger age range. *'They treat us like babies'* was a common refrain that clearly had considerable currency within the sample: *'I mean, we're not 18, but you're an adult at 16, right?'* (Carla). At one level the girls were giving expression to a sense of infantilisation which, for persons of all ages, frequently accompanies incapacitation in a *'total institution'* (Goffman, 1968: 11), where the capacity to make decisions for oneself is severely circumscribed. As one young woman put it:

'Just being away from home. You can't do what you like ... and cos I wasn't used to it, it was just horrible getting locked in the room' (Ella).

And another:

'You can't just pick and choose when to see your family. You can't pick or choose when to write to them or ... how you can phone them ... it means you can't see no-one when you want to' (Sasha).

But the descriptions appeared to go further than this, highlighting features that are specific to young offender institutions. For example, while most of the girls acknowledged the importance of education for their long term future, the fact that it was a compulsory element of activities was a source of considerable annoyance. The particular grievance was that compulsory schooling for young people in the community finished at age 16. As Sasha argued:

'We're not kids anymore. We shouldn't have to be forced to go to education. Cos on the out when you're 17 or 18 don't, you don't get forced to do education, so I don't think we should get forced in here to do it'.

Izzy who was approaching her 18th birthday was due to be moved to the adult female prison, and while this was a source of some anxiety, she recognised that there may be some advantages for her and she was not sorry to leave behind compulsory education:

'Well I think time will go faster then because every day you got a job and yeah, you got a job and you've got more, like more of your independence than over here so yeah.... like we should get treated like an adult not like a baby'.

The sense of frustration with the focus on education was exacerbated by what appeared to a standard curriculum rather than one adapted to the ability and previous attainment of the individuals. This meant that some girls were working towards qualifications that they already had achieved at school, while those serving longer sentences reported that the input was repeated periodically. Paula, for instance, noted that education was:

'alright but not the best, like two years of stupid work I call it because they didn't give me anything for my age group it was all like repeated after every six months and I'd been there for two years and it repeated itself'.

There were other issues which led to a perception on the part of the sample that their treatment was not appropriate to their level of development. The requirement that potential recipients of letters had to be checked before girls could communicate with them was a cause of resentment. This was particularly poignant for Donna since many of her relatives had criminal convictions:

'... because we're juveniles... fair enough with for visits. It's understandable but for letters, I think that's just like ... a bit extra. ... [T]hey read our letters ...and if you find it inappropriate then you can take away from us and stop it from getting to us, but other than that I don't see why they should stop friends or family from chatting to me because I'm in a predicament where I don't have much family so friends are writing to me but if they're not approved because they're got a criminal record, I can't have that letter and ... me not having much people, one letter will make a big difference to me if you understand what I mean? ... So I think it's a bit silly.'

Sasha similarly attributed some of the specific rules that were a source of resentment to the girls' status as juveniles.

'We can't swear, can't go in each other's' cell - I understand that from bullying or whatever - but it's completely different to the other prison - like to the main prison so staff tell us. ... That's it. I dunno ... they should just not babify us so much. Because were under 18, they still think were babies.'

In the eyes of some young women at least, this perceived tendency to 'babify' was associated with what they interpreted as being a lack of respect shown by staff towards them. Donna made the link explicit: *'Here they belittle you and treat you like a child'*, but her view was echoed by the majority of respondents. Carla put it slightly differently: *'Like for adults, in adult prisons, they don't always have staff, on their backs, like we do... They just try and play us, so...'*. The use of the word 'play' in this context is particularly telling. On the other hand, a lack of respect was also sometimes cited, by the young women, as a failure to appreciate that those detained within the establishment were not yet adults. Kylie expressed this well when she described her view of how staff related to the young people: *'...they treat you like you're a murderer'*.

As with the girls' assessment of previous interventions, the complaint was not, for the most part, levelled at particular individuals. Respondents were able to recognise that it would be unfair to characterise all of those who worked in the unit indiscriminately. While there may have been different views about the number of staff in each category, Karen's comment that: '*there's about two of them that do respect you but the rest of them don't, like they wind you up to get a reaction*', was otherwise representative of what many of the girls' told us.

To summarise, the young women reported two tendencies in tension. First, they perceived a lack of support appropriate to girls of their age; what might be described as a process of 'adulteration' (Muncie and Goldson, 2006). Second, and simultaneously, they saw their treatment as indicative of their being cast, by the establishment, as more immature than their stage of development warranted. From their perspective, this 'infantilisation' was not designed to safeguard them, or meet their welfare needs. Conversely, the denial of their childhood status, where that was evident, tended to disempower them further rather than promote a sense of agency, autonomy, and independence.

6. A seamless sentence?

It is generally accepted that the purpose of a period of statutory supervision, as an integral part of a custodial sentence, is to facilitate rehabilitation post-release. More recently, policy and guidance in relation to young people has made it clear that the intention is that resettlement services should seek to complement, and build upon, work carried out in the secure estate (Bateman et al, 2013). In the case of the detention and training order, there an explicit commitment that the transition from one setting to the other should be as seamless as possible (Home Office, 1997).

As noted above, the literature confirms that effective resettlement requires integrated sentence planning to ensure that community based provision is consistent with interventions delivered in the custodial estate, and vice versa (Bateman et al, 2013). Moreover, services should be focused on overcoming the obstacles faced by young people that are likely to interfere with desistance from crime (Hazel and Liddle, 2012).

Interventions within the custodial institution

The general dissatisfaction with education provision in the unit has been outlined above. In most cases, however, this was not a reflection of the girls' failure to appreciate the importance of qualifications for their longer term future. As one young woman acknowledged:

'I need it so I can come out and have my qualifications and I won't be like behind'
(Izzy).

Nor, for the most part, were criticisms directed at the standard of teaching itself. Amy in particular acknowledged that some of the lessons were '*alright*'. The negative perception of education was rather a comment on the constraints of the curriculum and how, in the view of the young women interviewed, it did little to help prepare them for the return to the community. Ella described how she had initially worked hard in the Information and Communications Technology (ICT) class, when she thought that she was progressing towards a qualification that would be of benefit to her on release. Her attitude changed as it

became apparent that was not an option because she would not be in the unit long enough to complete the course.

'... I was racing through it and doing it all and everything. But then once he told me that [I wouldn't finish in time to get a certificate], it just put me off straightaway. I was like well there's no point me doing it. So I thought I was going to come out of here with a certificate in ICT yeah, but as soon as he said that'

Her experience, of a tension between sentence length and what could be achieved, was confirmed by Sasha. On her account, this systemic difficulty was compounded by the repetitive nature of what was available:

'I'm learning in English but Like ICT you can't get a qualification here. It's basic stuff that everybody knows. Cookery, you don't get a level 1 now. And ... um ... that's it. I don't want to be here any longer obviously but cos I'm here for a short period of time it's harder to get any qualification. Like I wanted to get my level 2 but yet I'm finding myself still doing the same thing as when I first come in. What's that about? I've been in here for nearly 2 months'.

The repeated nature of educational input was a common theme raised by interviewees. For example:

'... so I've probably done this piece of paper or this sheet maybe five times ... I said 'I'm not gonna do it because I've done it five times and there's no need for me to do it because I've already done it and I'm not learning anything'' (Donna).

And again:

'It's just rubbish. ... Cos they don't, like you're learning things that you already know... I've learned one or two things but the stuff that we're learning downstairs, I learned when I was in like Year 7/8' (Karen).

There was some recognition on the part of the girls, that there were logistical problems associated with catering for the range of individual needs of a group who had such a diverse previous educational experiences. As Donna put it:

'... like obviously, a lot of the girls here, who come in and out of this place, they haven't been at school for a very long time so they don't know what they're doing and they don't have the knowledge of a lot of things. Fair enough, you're encouraging them but there's other people in the group that have done education or has been in education for a long time or know what they're doing, so you're only catering for one mindset and not the rest. So I don't think that's fair.'

Her conclusion, that education in custody was a waste of time precisely because it would not help with her resettlement, was echoed by a number of respondents.

'[O]n the outside world, you go to education to learn, if you're not learning anything then there's no point you going education and I've said that here, I said 'you're making me do the same things that I already know and I'm coming to school to learn something new and if you're not teaching me nothing here, then I'm not learning, so what am I doing here?'' (Donna).

Opinions on other forms of provision were much more mixed, but it was apparent that at least some of the girls had benefited from the interventions on offer. In most instances, input was well regarded to the extent that it either helped to change the way that the girls thought about themselves and others, or provided information, or other benefits, that would be useful to them on release. In relation to the former, for instance, Jo was enthusiastic about art – clearly a new experience for her. She implied that her view was shared by some of her peers:

'... I'm not gonna lie, I've benefited in it so much, like it's brought my talent out and I've realised what I'm good at, same with other girls, they didn't know that they can draw and they're like 'oh my God'.

She was complimentary too about a drama session facilitated by an outside theatre group, though, since some property had gone missing while the group was there, she understood that the opportunity was unlikely to be repeated.

Some of the young women had been referred for counselling and where they had opted to take advantage of it, they were mostly positive. Gemma thought that it helped her to get things '*off her chest*', but saw this as a short term need associated with the trauma of being in custody and doubted that she would require such input on release. Jo considered that it had helped her significantly with anger management and credited the sessions with enabling her to achieve the highest level of privileges of the three available under the YOI system of rewards and sanctions, as she was no longer getting into trouble on the unit. By contrast, Donna was dismissive of the possibility that such sessions might assist her but she had had considerable experience of counselling and therapy prior to coming into custody and did not think that would be any different now:

'talking about my issues doesn't do anything because ... no matter how much you talk, the memories and the feelings are still gonna remain there.'

More broadly, offending behaviour sessions, run by youth offending team (YOT) staff seconded into the YOI, were regarded as valuable. Jade described the sessions as '*good*', providing an opportunity to '*learn about different stuff like. And we watch films, and we have conversations*'. Carla rated the YOT input as being the '*most helpful*' of the interventions because they helped to put things into a wider context.

'They tell you about life, they tell us things we should know...like bullying. There's lots of little things that can be bullying. Like...someone might say something to someone about their weight, and that can be bullying, and the next time you see them they're anorexic.'

Jo liked the sessions because of the practical information that might be of benefit on release:

'They help us understand certain things like MAPPA [Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements], all of that, they help us understand it. Certain people are going onto MAPPA and they don't know what it is, like for me I'm on MAPPA and I didn't know what it really understood, they give me a clear understanding of what it is so now I know.'

She also acknowledged that the focus on offending behaviour had benefits, although as she explained it, these seemed to be largely for others in the group rather than herself.

'...certain people have held their offence in for like a couple of years until they open up and then they felt so much better, it was like 'oh, I actually got to discuss it, no-one's judging me now', 'they understand why I did it' or ... so yeah, it's good. They help, I like them anyway, that's one of my favourite sessions.'

Such perceptions were not universally accepted. Amy thought that the YOT sessions were 'alright' if a 'bit boring'. Ella maintained emphatically that 'just sit[ting] there for two hours' was 'just really boring'. Those young women who did not talk positively the offending behaviour programme tended to be those who did not see any relationship between the discussions within the YOI and their future in the community. Karen observed that although, in theory, the intention was to help with their rehabilitation, requiring the girls to talk about their offending in front of the whole group could actually make them upset: 'I don't think that helps at all cos we've all done it but it ain't helped us in any way'.

Sessions on drugs and alcohol were delivered by an external voluntary agency. Girls' perceptions of what was delivered depended to a large extent on how relevant they considered it to be to their future circumstances. One girl, who was destined to go into rehabilitation for excessive alcohol use on her release, reported that the intervention had been a considerable help to her and had enabled her to begin to come to terms with some of the reasons for her drinking. As a consequence, she thought that the intervention in the YOI would have been useful in preparing her for the subsequent residential treatment. There was some resentment on the part of other interviewees that sessions were a requirement for all the girls, whether or not they considered that they had an issue with substance misuse. In such circumstances, they struggled to see the relevance in terms of their resettlement. Karen was something of an exception to the general pattern: although she accepted that she had problems with both cocaine and alcohol, she nevertheless considered that the intervention was counterproductive: 'well for me anyway, it just makes me want to drink more'.

Planning for release

As the experience of the young woman for whom residential rehabilitation had been arranged attests, there were clear examples where the provision within custody prefigured resettlement services planned in the period after release. In her case, the intention was that the substance misuse worker from the YOI would escort her to the residential rehabilitation unit where she would be met by the professional who had worked with her on alcohol issues prior to her incarceration, thereby providing another element of continuity. The plans for her accommodation, on completion of the seven weeks residential programme, were also in place and she would return to the supported lodgings where she had resided prior to her period of incarceration. She described her 'landlady' as very supportive – '*she acts like me mum*' – and her allocated supported lodgings worker had been visiting her in prison.

Such good practice was the exception rather than the norm however, and although the research team did find other examples, they were relatively few. There was little evidence of proactive forward planning or of provision in the YOI being tailored to the individual so as to prefigure what would be available on release. Planning for the transition back to the community did not appear to be central either to the custodial institution or community based agencies. In this sense, for most of the girls in the study, the custodial sentence could hardly be regarded as a seamless one.

Many of the young women had ambition. Gemma, for instance, intended to prioritise education over other issues on release:

'But, I'm just gonna, I know when I get out I'm just gonna be on my education; get my A levels, go University, I'm just gonna get on my education, nothing else, boys, nothing else, those things can wait. I just want to get my education so I'll have a future' (Gemma).

Izzy and Paula also professed an interest in attending university; though it was clear on the basis of their educational experiences to date that they would need considerable assistance and perseverance if that were to become a reality.

For others, employment was the key to keeping out of trouble. Felicity thought that if she had not found herself a job by the time she was 18 years of age, she would have '*screwed herself up*' since '*I don't wanna be, you know, living off benefits and that, I don't, no I don't see myself doing that, I see myself bringing in money*'. Her aim was to work in construction or on the railways and thought her prospects reasonably good since: '*come on, you don't really find a lot of women that want to do that sort of stuff*'. She also harboured ambitions to be a '*business woman ... have my own company*'. Amy thought that obtaining a job was the main contender as a potential solution to her difficulties, including poor relationships with her family, and a problematic use of drugs and alcohol.

But, as we have seen, the young women did not by and large consider that the interventions offered within custody – and particularly the educational provision – delivered the building blocks that would facilitate progress on their chosen pathways. Nor did the interviews suggest that those agencies with responsibility for resettlement in the community had invested heavily in planning for the point of transition. All the girls were aware that they would be subject to licence conditions when they were released and that this would involve compulsory supervision under the youth offending team or probation. But when Ella was asked whether there was anything that her YOT worker could do, or should be doing, to aid her resettlement, she responded in the negative. Nor could she think of any intervention that would be helpful. Geraldine, in response to a question of what she thought of her youth offending team worker, indicated that she had not '*met her new one yet*'. Sasha reported having met her supervising officer:

'once (laughs) ... since I've been here. And before I came here for writing the report and that was it. I saw her once for that. So I've only seen her twice. I can't remember her name'.

Karen complained that despite having written a list for her YOT worker, '*what jobs I'm interested in ... she just ... ain't doing nothing*'.

Kylie indicated that her YOT worker had visited the unit once to attend a sentence planning meeting, the function of which she described as being to '*just tell you about what's going*

on in here and how your behaviour is in here. That's it really.' When pressed on whether anyone had discussed with her resettlement planning and what would happen when she left custody, she hesitated and then responded, very quietly, in the negative.

Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Prisons has reported that the lack of forward planning for the resettlement of looked after children is particularly worrying (HM Inspectorate of Prisons, 2011). Many did not, for instance, know where they would be living on release and this caused considerable uncertainty and consternation. This was certainly true of some of the girls in this study. Izzy was upset because she had been told that it would be a condition of her licence that she could not return to her home local authority.

'[Interviewer: What about accommodation?] They're, I don't know, they're not, they want to move me completely out of my [home authority] to like the, they first said to Birmingham, I don't know why and then now they're saying Hackney and they're just saying all different areas but I don't want to go to a different area'.

Karen, whose siblings had been taken into care while she had effectively looked after herself, had come to the view that she might benefit from a period in residential rehabilitation. Nothing of that sort had been arranged for her and she did not anticipate that it would be. She was unclear where she would go on her release.

As the forward planning for one girl's residential rehabilitation, described above, demonstrates, this rather bleak picture was not a universal one. Izzy's account of the support that would be available to her, appears to represent a somewhat intermediate position between the extremes. Here there was a recognition of good intentions on the part of resettlement providers, if not in custody, at least on her return to the community. As she put it:

'Er, well ... kind of, they're kind of helpful. They ain't helped me do anything here but they seem like they want good things to happen'.

And the study did identify other examples where planning was well advanced. Donna felt reassured by what was in place for her, but also implied that she understood that not all her peers were so fortunate:

'My YOT worker's sorting it all out to be honest, she's already started the ball rolling from that, even though I'm getting out in eight months' time, she's already doing it'.

Jade also provided evidence that an absence of planning was not inevitable.

'I'm excited about leaving, I think about it every day. I'm thinking about going on a course, my YOT worker's arranged, it's a childcare and youth work course. I'm going to start it in here, and then finish outside.'

Significantly, the impact, on her state of mind, of knowing what arrangements were in place was palpable. Clarity brought with it a sense of optimism, an issue to which we return in the next section of the report.

7. Agency and fatalism

The evidence base in relation to desistance indicates that subjective considerations are central in determining the trajectory that young people follow in relation to their offending careers. In particular, a sense of hope may be a critical factor in facilitating a reduction in recidivism. In this study, it was possible to discern two rather different attitudes displayed by girls in the sample towards their future. Of course, the distinction was not absolute, and a number of the young women shifted position from one pole of the dichotomy to the other in the course of the interview. Nonetheless, some respondents conveyed a clear impression of optimism about what would happen when they left custody, and that optimism was bedded in a sense of agency; a belief in their own ability to take control of their lives, often in spite of considerable objective obstacles and adversity.

This was not simply a case of expressing good intentions about not getting into trouble in the future, since nearly all of the girls indicated that they did not want to come back to prison and accepted that, in order to avoid doing so, they would have to give up criminal activities. Felicity, for instance, said that she was *'tired of offending now; I can't be bothered.'* (This finding might be thought consistent with suggestions in the literature that, at the point of release, young people are reported by the supervisors to be more motivated to depart from an offending lifestyle (Hazel et al, 2002).) It was rather that some young women conveyed a powerful determination that they knew that they had what it takes to follow a different course that set them apart from that default position.

Gemma had previously been in trouble with her peer group, but in retrospect she concluded that others cannot be held responsible for making decisions on her behalf and that it had been her choice to take part in the offences. She was adamant that the same thing would not happen in the future.

'I wasn't doing it because someone was telling me, I just did it because I wanted to ... now I realise that just because everyone does that I don't need to be involved in it. ... I don't need to be involved in that side and that's it. I don't need to be involved in everything else ...'.

Jade too was eager to communicate how much she had changed from the person who had committed the offences that led to her incarceration: *'I've changed. I used to be lazy, but in here I'm persistent. I really want to get more qualifications'*.

Ella was determined that on release she would make finding work a priority as she did not want to be *'just sitting around doing nothing'*. Nor did she want to rely on others to find employment for her: *'I can do it for myself'*. Like Gemma, Sasha was clear that she could resist any potential negative influence of her friends:

'If they want to do their silliness that's up to them ... I'm not getting involved. ... if they're going to be on their little stupidity and the police are getting called, I'm not involved. I'm going home.'

She was focussed on staying out of trouble and making a *'success'* of her life. In describing how she would go about that, potentially difficult, task, Sasha summed up the attitude that girls who presented a strong sense of agency were able to convey: *'Nothing's really that hard, you can do it'*. The words were spoken with a fervour that was lacking in the more routine assertions by girls that they would *'go straight'* when they got out.

At the other end of the spectrum, some of the girls gave the impression of having a much reduced sense of agency by comparison. Any hopes about the future evinced by this group were quickly tempered by a *'reality check'* when they considered the obstacles in their way. Indeed the responses betrayed an underlying impression of fatalism. Josie was very reticent throughout her interview, appeared very fragile, and did not want her responses recorded. She was due to be transferred to the adult wing in several weeks' time, on her 18th birthday, and did not know where she would be living on release. While intimating that she hoped to return to college when she left custody, she imparted little confidence that she would pursue that option with any enthusiasm, and gave the impression that drifting from one thing to another was equally likely.

Amy was brutally honest about her prospects: *'It's hard for me cos I can't stay out of trouble'*. She explained this rather discouraging assessment of what the future held in terms

of her having a temper which was beyond her control and a problematic alcohol intake. Her pessimism extended to whether or not she would get the latter under control. While Amy explicitly recognised that drinking was likely to lead to further contact with the criminal justice system, she implied that it was not within her power to do anything about it.

'[Interviewer: What would it take to stop you drinking?] Er, nothing would stop me, I'd still drink ... Just like drinking, it gets me in a better mood as well. I wanna try and drink less so ... drink too much. Cos it gets me in trouble.'

Karen similarly thought that giving up drugs would be extremely difficult and perhaps beyond her capabilities: *'Very hard. Very hard...Because I'll be more tempted cos I can get hold of it'*.

Kylie was less pessimistic about the possibilities for her long term future and, in common with most of the interviewees, indicated she would give up crime. Nonetheless, she did not suggest that this would necessarily happen immediately on release:

'I'm a bit nervous. I'm not sure if I'm strong enough, I know I will change but it will be baby steps. These things will take time'.

While this assessment might legitimately be interpreted as her not wanting to have unrealistic expectations that she could not match, it takes on a different nuance in the light of her exasperated comment that: *'Nothing works! Nothing works!'*

Felicity acknowledged that whether she continued to get into trouble depended in part upon what she decided to do. As she put it: *'Unless I'm changing, nothing else is changing'*. However, this did not appear to be a profession of intent to give up crime as when she expanded on the point, it was clear that she was not confident that the necessary changes would occur.

'I don't think anything can help you unless I'm willing to help myself if you get what I mean, like if I'm in the frame of mind that I'm gonna go rob someone, nobody can help me not do it, do you know what I mean? Like nothing can stop me from doing what I want to do so ... with your, I think sometimes I just think it's pointless because they can't change me, they can't make me want to change either.'

Moreover, it was not hard to discern the origins of least some of her pessimistic outlook.

'I'm hoping I'm not but I had an assessment done ... and he's basically said that I'm high risk for reoffending.' (Felicity)

While the current study did not seek to explore outcomes, the research team were persuaded that those girls who displayed a clear sense of purpose, backed by an optimism in their own capacity to make any changes required, were considerably less likely to return to a prison environment than those young women who expressed a fatalistic perspective on their future prospects.

If that is an accurate assessment, Felicity's final comment illustrates that there may be an important relationship between the services provided to young women in trouble, and how they are delivered, and the likelihood that girls will develop an optimistic outlook, manifested in a confidence about the capacity to reduce their offending behaviour. More particularly, her case demonstrates that certain forms of intervention may have the potential to disempower young people, smothering any sensation of agency. Other girls provided counter examples, suggesting that input can make a considerable difference by engendering a belief that self-determination is possible. One interviewee described a range of previous interventions that had, from her perspective, had had little positive impact:

'I've tried all of them, I've tried therapists, I've tried counsellors, seen a psychologist, I've seen a psychiatrist, I've been put on medication, doesn't work, nothing works' (Donna).

Yet, as outlined earlier in the report, Donna was one of the few girls who had confidence that her youth offending team worker was being proactive in terms of finding her a college placement and stable accommodation and this confidence appeared to have extended to her believing that she could stay out of trouble. Significantly, perhaps, she also reported a good relationship with the supervisor in charge of the arrangements for her resettlement. As a general rule, she had a negative view of social workers: *'everyone builds up this image of social workers, the majority of them are shitheads! [laughs] So I was half expecting...'*. But she was pleasantly surprised by her new YOT officer who had visited her regularly in advance

of taking over her case and following formal allocation: '*so we built that relationship, she's just a lovely person*'.

The young women's perception of the professionals providing services to them is one of the issues explored in the next section of the report.

8. Relational issues

The interviews with young women confirmed the centrality of relational issues to their understanding of what had happened to them previously and how they saw their futures developing. Peer group dynamics have received some attention earlier in the report and that discussion will not be repeated here. The most commonly recurring theme in girls' testimonies was family dynamics, but relationships with professionals also featured highly.

Families as sources of support

One respondent indicated that being separated from relatives was the hardest thing about imprisonment: *'The worst thing? ... It's probably just being away from home and just not being able to be with your family and that'* (Ella). When asked what would happen on the day of release, her immediate thoughts were family focused: *'I dunno. It'll be the happiest day of my life (laughs). Definitely stay in ... with my mum'*. Sasha's expectations as to the arrangements for the transition back to the community were similar family focused:

'Yeah ... they are all coming [to meet me at the gate] – and my dad. They are coming to get me. Then I'll go to my house, have a bath, a shower or a bath. Eat food.'

Jo, although a looked after child, regarded herself as fortunate because of her continued contact with her family.

So I'm kinda grateful that I've still got set people in my life that actually are my real blood and I know my nan, I know people and I've had a good life, I can't sit and say 'oh I ain't had a good life' because I have, I've had clothes on my back, I've been fed so ... Yeah I've still got support, they've always supported me even though I've done the bad – the worst of things, they still supported me so ...'.

Her suggestion that blood relatives would stand by you in circumstances when others would not was echoed by other respondents.

For some young women, the family provided a reason for giving up crime, as well as a resource for facilitating resettlement. Gemma depicted her custodial sentence as having let her family down: *'They've worked so hard for me to have nice things, all my family, so I just*

want to better myself so I can be like them'. Similar views again extended to girls with a background in care. Felicity, for example, was characterised as one of the more fatalistic young women in the previous section of the report. Paradoxically, however, when discussing the impact of her behaviour on her family, a determination to avoid offending suddenly emerged:

'[My mum] says it hurts her when she sees me getting locked up all the time but I'm gonna change, when I get out this time, I'm staying out, got to stay out.'

But families did not always provide an inspiration for desistance and were not always seen as a source of support. Amy did not particularly relish the prospect of returning home but felt (no doubt accurately) that she had few other options available to her.

'I don't really get along with my mum. ... I argue with her all the time. [Interviewer: So why do you want to be there then?] It's the only place I've got to live'.

The young woman who was pregnant, observed that her baby was due on her father's birthday. That remark prompted another thought: *'God. Me and my dad don't really get on.'* Karen characterised her mum as having *'given up'* on her and this recognition seemed to reinforce a sense of pessimism about her capacity for self-determination:

'I don't blame her though, like she always tries to help me but I always like promise I'm gonna behave and then just let her down'.

Professionals who care

As outlined earlier in the report, the importance of relationship for girls in trouble extends beyond the family network to include the professionals responsible for their rehabilitation. Those young women unable to fall back on the resources of their family are particularly reliant on quality relationships with resettlement providers. Some evidence of the relatively low regard in which social work and criminal justice agencies were held by the sample group has already been considered. But the girls were careful to explain that their perceptions of organisations did not necessarily carry over to the individuals who worked within them.

A number of young women commented favourably on employees within the prison. Gemma thought that the staff were '*really nice*'. Similarly, Sasha indicated that, while there were problems as a consequence of short staffing, she related well with officers on the unit, who were:

'helpful... there's been times when I've been really upset and then they have always kind of been there. They tell you... they like to talk to you. They're really supportive in here. They're nice'.

Izzy was less positive but she did acknowledge that most of the staff would check up on the girls and try to ensure that they were '*safe*'.

A more common response, however, was that professionals could be characterised as falling into one of two basic moulds. The distinction moreover was thought to pertain across custodial institutions, youth offending teams, and children's social care, in more or less the same terms. Felicity argued that the difference was in '*the way they do the job*'. In essence, young women tended to characterise staff either as workers who '*care*' about the people to whom they provide services, or as those who do not. Jade put it bluntly:

'There are some officers here who are nice, who've got compassion and that, but there are some who aren't. They abuse their power.'

Felicity too indicated that she got on with '*quite a few staff ... and there's quite a few I don't*', a sentiment that was repeated almost verbatim by Amy.

The issue of compassion was one that clearly struck a chord with many of the girls. Jo, for example, remembered the staff from a previous stay in a secure children's home with affection because:

'they treated you like 'oh, you ain't had the support in your life', they felt, you felt do you know what I'm saying, 'I see a child and think let me try and help you, fix you back, let me try''.

Donna indicated that she had appreciated the support previously given by her YOT worker because of their:

'demeanour and personality ... it wasn't like they were being a certain way with me because they had to ... they actually cared.'

She contrasted this experience with that provided by other criminal justice and social care professionals, for whom she was: *'just another person in their system, like a little number in their system, that's pretty much how it was'.*

This latter comment found an echo in the way that many of the girls portrayed staff who they perceived as not caring. They described them as coming to work for instrumental reasons that were focused more on financial reward rather than the quality of service provision. Donna argued that some of the workers in the YOI did not see it as their role to care: *'they're just here to do their job and lock us in at whatever times and feed us at this time, like you know? But they don't care at all'.* She believed that sometimes staff would deliberately provoke the girls so that: *'they can lock us behind our doors, so that they don't have to deal with us'.*

In some cases the similarity of language adopted was striking. Jo described YOT workers as follows:

'Yeah, certain people go there to actually work, to help people, but certain people just see it 'it's a job, let me just get paid', do you know what I'm saying...?'

Her view was clearly shared by Ella, whose depiction of prison staff was expressed in remarkably similar terms:

'Some are alright and some are just ahhh ... sometimes I think they're just here to get paid and do their job. They're not here to help...'

Some interviewees considered that caring staff were in the minority and that girls were fortunate if they happened to be allocated such a worker. Paula for instance maintained that:

'I do believe that, out there, there are people that care and who do want to help and support but it's only the majority of them that are the bad ones and a minority are the good ones but it's very hard to find them'.

In large measure, this reflected her previous experience; it was clear that she felt she had been badly let down by a variety of agencies and had had little support either prior to her incarceration or since entering custody. This influenced her view of what it would mean for her parenting in the event that she had a child of her own in future:

'Not having no support has taught me that if, anytime in my life when I have kids or whatever, they're going to be supported in the right way unless something was done about it by then [improvements to social services and youth offending teams] because since I've been here I feel that things work against me rather than try to help me' (Paula).

However, quite a few of the young women had come across staff who they thought were exceptional and had gone out of their way to provide support out of genuine concern for their wellbeing. Jo, while recognising the criticisms that she and others made of some professionals, also reflected on how much worse things would be for her if she didn't enjoy a good relationship with her social worker:

'that's all I've ever wanted, is for people to help me and I can't really be dashing it back in their face because I know certain people that don't even get that, they ain't got social workers like mine and it's like 'oh my days'... I don't know what I would do, you know?'

It was not always obvious by what criteria girls determined whether their workers were of the 'caring' variety or otherwise, and they frequently found it difficult to articulate what qualities they thought professionals should have. As noted above, for some, it was the personality or demeanour of the worker. In other cases, it was apparent that what set caring staff apart was that they displayed characteristics which were the converse of those negative attributes which the girls tended to associate with state agencies (as described on pages 50–52 of the report). The importance of listening was emphasised by many of the respondents. On the one hand, this was considered indicative of the worker wanting to know and understand their concerns and worries. On the other, it was presented as a precursor to the provision of practical advice and assistance that would address the

individual's self-defined needs and take account of her perceptions of the problems rather than reflecting agency priorities or a standardised form of intervention.

Reliability and the provision of accurate information were also considered important indicators of a caring response. Donna gave an account of the impact on her when her social worker, as she saw it, failed to deliver against those criteria.

'[M]y social worker was a bit shit, don't remember her pretty much come to see me and when she did come and see me, she would lie to me and like ... say 'oh yeah, we're getting your brother to come up and see you, your visit's booked on Saturday'. And then Saturday comes, I'm getting told that my visit's been cancelled and she done this three times so ... I told her 'don't come see me again', and she didn't'.

This negative assessment contrasted sharply with her experience, noted earlier, of her YOT worker, who had come to see her regularly, delivered on what she indicated she would do, and had put in place a range of practical arrangements and support networks for Donna on release.

In many ways, a caring worker, from the girls' perspective, would exemplify the characteristics that Chris Trotter's (2006) research has identified as necessary traits of an effective youth justice practitioner. These include being: open and honest; non-judgemental and encouraging; empathetic, showing a genuine concern for the young person's wellbeing; a reliable, and stable, presence in the young person's life; friendly and able to use humour appropriately; and demonstrating a confidence in the young person's capacity to change, however inauspicious previous experience.

It was apparent from the girls' testimonies that they would respond more favourably to staff who were able to display such skills, and as a consequence would be more likely to engage in any planned intervention. Moreover, it seemed clear that the ensuing relationship would be more conducive to fostering a sense of empowerment and militating against a fatalistic outlook. Felicity expressed these dual dynamics powerfully:

'She's like the one YOT worker that I actually really like. Other YOT workers, I don't ever like them. Yeah cos I respect her so it's like ... when I have a order, like now when I have a order, I do try my hardest cos like sometimes I don't wanna disappoint her, like cos she, sometimes she thinks highly of me, like she thinks I can do it'.

From a resettlement perspective, the role of the practitioner is accordingly significant in two different, but complementary, ways. As we have noted, girls were encouraged to adopt a positive attitude towards desistance where there was early planning for their release and clear arrangements in place for their return to the community. At the same time, a quality relationship with a 'caring' professional was a further factor that helped to facilitate a sense of agency.

It was also apparent, however, that one of the indicators by which young women determined whether their worker cared, was the extent to which he or she was committed to the provision of practical support, in line with the girls' own expressed wishes, interests and concerns, which would ensure that the requisite preparations for release were made. It was possible in other words for a virtuous circle to develop, whereby caring professionals promoted a sense of agency and engaged in forward planning, in partnership with the girls, to facilitate the transition back into the community. The associated increased certainty about what the future holds in turn enhanced a sense of optimism in the young women that it was possible to overcome the obstacles which impeded their paths to desistance.

9. Knowledge by experience: on return to the community

The original design of the study involved a second interview with as many of the girls as possible once they had left custody and returned to the community. The intention was to ascertain how they understood the custodial experience in retrospect, to explore their experiences of the transition to the community, and establish whether their expectations of what resettlement services would be available on release had been borne out. For reasons described in the methodology section of the report, it became clear at an early stage that relatively few young women would be released early enough to be included in the second round of interviews, given the timeframe available for fieldwork. Half of the sixteen girls in the sample remained in custody at the point that the fieldwork came to a conclusion. Moreover, in spite of considerable efforts on the part of the research team, just two of the eight young women who had returned to the community were successfully interviewed. The reasons for this high rate of attrition were instructive.

One girl failed to turn up for interview at the agreed time and venue and subsequently indicated that she no longer wished to participate. In two cases, where the research team was reliant on youth offending team staff to facilitate arrangements, interviews were not organised within the girls' licence period, at which point, the team had no way to contact them. It was not clear whether the reluctance to set a date was on the part of the young women or the gatekeepers. The remaining three girls had all been breached for non-compliance with conditions of their licence: two had been recalled to adult prisons, which the team did not have permission to access; the third was missing, but likely to be returned to custody when her whereabouts were ascertained.

The two young women who were successfully interviewed in the community were atypical of the original custody sample in a variety of ways. Both were white. Neither of them had an entrenched offending history: one, who was imprisoned for involvement in the August 2011 riots, was of previous good character prior to that episode; the other had one previous conviction before the offence which led to her being incarcerated. Both girls lived at home with supportive families. One was able to return to an apprenticeship that had been

arranged prior to the custodial episode and the second had long term plans to apply to join the army once her licence period expired. Both had been very clear that they would not be getting into any further trouble and gave the impression that their confidence in this regard was well founded.

A traumatic transition

When interviewed in custody, both girls had anticipated that they would be met by their family, at the YOI, on the day of release, and these expectations were fulfilled. Ella was collected in a car by her mother. On arrival at home, they were greeted by a group of family and friends for, what she described as, a celebration of her birthday.

'Yeah, cos I had my birthday, my 18th birthday in prison so when I got out ... Yeah and then when I got out, they had a massive 18th birthday party for me at home.'

[Interviewer: So who was there?] *My brothers, my friends, my mum, my auntie and my uncles, my granddad, my nan, loads of people were there.'*

Sasha was greeted by her mother, father and friends who had travelled on public transport to meet her. She too returned to the family home.

The two girls were, by comparison with most of their peers, fortunate in knowing from the outset of their period of detention where they would live when they left custody, and how they would get home on the day of release. Nonetheless, both clearly found the transition back to the community disorientating and quite traumatic, confirming some of the more recent literature that has drawn attention to this, hitherto, largely ignored phenomenon (Bateman et al, 2013). Ella, described how:

'When my mum came and picked me up from the prison, when I came out and I was sitting in the car, I felt sick, I was shaking cos I didn't know what to do and that, like ... big thing innit, just getting let out? And then I felt weird for a bit. ... I couldn't speak. It was weird'

Clearly she was surprised at her reaction as she had anticipated that she would be *'happy and everything, but I didn't know it was going to feel like that'*.

Sasha also used the word 'weird' to describe her experience of leaving the institution.

'I dunno, I was shocked really, just ... happy to get out, yeah. ... Yeah, it felt weird, like seeing a bus and everything, it felt weird....'

Nor was this simply an immediate response to seeing her family. Her emotions intensified on the journey home.

'I couldn't handle it, like the first day I couldn't handle being out of prison, I dunno like, I just couldn't stop crying and just felt depressed all the time ... Cos everything was going too fast, like people, all my family were coming over, get all this birthday stuff and I dunno, like every time I see someone, it was like 'Oh how was prison?', 'How was this, how was that?' and yeah, it was just the same thing over and over again.'

Sasha too was surprised by the way she felt: *'I knew it was gonna be a bit weird but I didn't think, I dunno, I think reality just hit me to be honest, I dunno'*. She had taken a week off before starting her apprenticeship, but throughout this period, she had not felt like leaving the house: *'Just indoors with all my family and my friends, I didn't go out'*.

In Ella's case this feeling of strangeness was exacerbated by, what would seem to be, an irrational fear of being returned to custody. This had meant that she also did not leave home for a week and a half because:

'I just weren't ready to go out. It felt weird... And I was scared of getting in trouble and getting taken back ... Yeah.... As long as I was in a house, I wouldn't mind.
[Interviewer: So you didn't want to hang around on the streets?] *Yeah, I didn't want to go out on the streets cos I didn't want to like, if the police come up and blame me for something or I was walking down my street or up near the shops and I was in the wrong place at the wrong time, then I'll get taken back to prison, so I thought it would just be easier if I just stay in and then my mum can prove that I was in and I wasn't causing no trouble.'*

If this level of disorientation is experienced by girls with high levels of support, on their return to the community, it is perhaps unsurprising that young women who do not have the option of returning to the family home are likely to find the transition particularly difficult. From a resettlement perspective, the importance of clarity in relation to accommodation, and the provision of high levels of personal and emotional support, in the period around the transfer back to the community, is evident.

Looking back to custody

Both girls' recollection of custody was largely negative and, as neither had managed to obtain any qualifications during their period of detention, they regarded it as time wasted. When pressed to identify any benefits both agreed that the experience had reinforced their resolve to stay out of trouble. Ella said that she had learned a lesson, as '*it was, like it weren't exactly the nicest place to be was it?*'. But she was adamant that she had learned nothing else: '*No – education was crap there*'. Sasha thought that her sentence had made her appreciate more how fortunate she was:

'I dunno, I think prison taught me a big lesson really, you've just got to value like family. Yeah....

... Prison just makes you realise a lot, I don't know how to explain it but it just makes you think a hell of a lot and when you come out, like you've got all this time to think about things and I don't know ... it's weird.'

She maintained that, as a consequence, she was consuming less alcohol, was not hanging around with '*stupid people*' anymore, and was spending a lot more time at home. But it was the experience of confinement itself, rather than any support or intervention that she had received while in the establishment, to which she attributed the change. When asked whether any of the sessions had been useful, she responded negatively. She argued that for some girls, the offending behaviour sessions were actually counterproductive. From her own point of view, it was a case of '*[you] go to jail. That's it*'. Indeed, Sasha maintained that a stern reprimand at court would have had the same impact on her. She still clearly considered that her sentence had been unjust given her previous good character:

'I don't think that's fair because I knew I done wrong, like if the person knows they've done wrong and you can actually see it in them and the judge could see it in me, then why are you gonna send that person to jail? [Interviewer: Do you think that just going to court and getting a telling off from the judge would have been enough?] Yeah! I do to be honest ... He shouldn't have done what he done but he done it, nothing I can do now'.

When she turned 18 years of age, Ella had been transferred to the adult prison for the last few weeks of her sentence. Her reflections on the differences between that institution and the YOI echoed sentiments expressed by girls in earlier interviews, pointing to the paradox that they felt, at one and the same time, an insufficient level of care and support, and that the institution 'babyfied' them. Following a week's induction in the adult unit, Ella obtained a job within the prison. This had a number of advantages over the juvenile wing: she preferred working to the education provision that she had previously complained about; and it also meant that she had a '*lot more freedom*' during the day. She clearly considered that, in this respect, she was treated in a way that was more appropriate to her status as a teenager making the transition to adulthood. At the same time, she commented on the lack of support and care provided by staff: '*They were just boring, they just sat on their office, you didn't, I didn't even speak to 'em*'. While Ella did not consider that she personally needed the support, given her background and home circumstances, she recognised that many of the more vulnerable girls would have been adversely affected by this lack of concern with their welfare and emotional needs.

Both girls' recollection of the manner in which they were treated by staff while in custody mirrored closely the account given by the young women interviewed within the YOI. When asked what skills she thought were required of professionals working in a custodial environment, Ella reiterated her earlier view that good staff were: '*Ones that actually want to help people, not just come there to get money*'. Sasha contended that some of the staff had been '*rude*'. At the same time, she remembered that when she was first admitted to

custody, she had hit '*rock bottom*' and that one of seconded youth offending team workers in the unit had been there to listen:

'... like she's someone you can talk to and you know it's not gonna go any further, it's just between you and her'.

The young women's perception that there was a clear distinction between professionals who cared and those who did not, had evidently endured beyond the point of release.

Family dynamics and relationships with peers

As indicated above, both girls were fortunate enough to enjoy good relationships with their families prior to incarceration and to have familiar support throughout their sentence and subsequent to release. Both agreed, however, that things had changed as a consequence of the custodial episode. Ella commented on some of the physical differences. Her younger brother had grown considerably and his voice had broken. The house had been redecorated. But she also considered that the dynamics of the relationship between her and her mother had altered. Paradoxically, she perceived that her mother trusted her not to get into trouble more than previously.

'My mum trusts me more now, she knows that I'm not gonna get in trouble again. Yeah basically she just don't ask. When I used to go out and that, she used to ring me up asking me where I was and everything, now she don't, she don't bother, she just trusts me that I won't get in trouble again.'

For Sasha, the shift had been in the opposite direction. While her mother had always been concerned to know her whereabouts, Sasha considered that she was now more anxious than prior to her custodial episode.

'[S]he just worries about ..., cos if I say I'm going out with my friends, she's like 'don't get in trouble, have you got your licence on you? Put it in your bag' and she's just worrying about me going back to jail. That's all it is really cos she knows if I get in one bit of trouble, I go back to prison.'

She interpreted this level of concern as an indication of maternal caring. It was partly the strong bond between the two of them that ensured that Sasha was optimistic about her future. By implication, she highlighted how much more difficult desistance would be for girls who did not have family support on which to rely:

'I set myself goals with my mum. ... [Interviewer: Is your mum more helpful with those things than the YOT or the prison?] Yeah because my mum's my mum, I know she's not gonna let me down'.

Having a close family network also made it easier for the young women to distance themselves from friends with whom they had previously got into trouble. Both indicated that they no longer associated with same group peer group as prior to custody. Indeed, as noted above, both girls were now more likely to stay in at home than they had previously been.

Employment and future prospects

Sasha had obtained an apprenticeship in 'hotel hospitality' prior to her incarceration, and her employers had agreed to keep the place open for her until her release, an option she had taken up one week after returning home. At the time of interview, she was enjoying the work which involved her dividing her time between learning 'all the customer service' and a work placement in a hotel. She indicated that although her income was modest, she much preferred it to signing on. She also clearly recognised the importance of employment in helping to ensure that she would not get in trouble again.

'[Interviewer: You had a job to go straight back into, the apprenticeship, do you think that makes a big difference to you?] Yeah cos it ... when reality, when you come out of prison, the reality's too hard, like things go too fast and you don't want it to go too fast but it goes too fast for you. And then I think going there, meeting new people, I don't know, it just kind of levels it all out, it gives you something to do every day instead of being in the same place 24/7, it just gets you out and you get money.'

Ella, whose ambition was to join the army, had decided that it would be best to delay her application until her statutory supervision was over. She had completed the relevant paperwork prior to receiving custody, but had established that she would have to reapply, given her status as an ex prisoner. At the time of interview, her youth offending team worker had contacted the army on her behalf to ascertain whether Ella would be still be considered and she was waiting to hear back. Ella was relatively optimistic, however: while she was awaiting sentence, she had visited the Army Careers Office to discuss her circumstances, and had been assured that a custodial record would not preclude her application being accepted. She had been told: *'it doesn't, it's not really gonna affect you because most people that have been in trouble and that, have come in the army and turned their lives around'*.

In the interim period, Ella had been looking for temporary work but without success. She had attended an interview on the day prior to meeting with the research team, for a job in a warehouse, and thought it had gone well. She was unsure however whether she would be offered the position, since having recently left prison meant that: *'getting a job, that's hard.'* But it was clear that this genuine obstacle was not going to deter her from seeking employment and that, like Sasha, she considered that being occupied during the day was key to making sure that she stayed out of trouble.

Reoffending or desistance?

Neither Ella nor Sasha had been in trouble since being released: both laughed at the idea that they might have been and this was intended as an indication of their commitment not to reoffend. Ella felt that she was being targeted by some of the local police officers, who would follow her when they saw her in town, but this did not worry her unduly as she was adamant that they were wasting their time. As outlined above, she regarded the fact that her mother trusted her not to get into trouble as something that she needed to live up to.

Although Sasha argued that going to prison had had a deterrent effect on her, she acceded that such an impact was not inevitable and that recall to custody was equally as likely:

'Yeah, half of them have and gone back. ... When I was in there, I see like five girls come back ... No, I ain't going back to jail, I'd only go back to jail for my family, if somebody hurt my family, that's the only time I'd go to jail, not for another fucking riot anyway, no way!'

When asked why girls' pathways varied in the way she described, Sasha suggested that it was a sense of self-determination or agency that made the difference.

'I dunno, I think prison can either make you or it can break you. [Interviewer: So it can go either way and does that depend on the sort of person you are?] Attitude. It's just your attitude really.'

Perception of resettlement services

At the time of interview, Ella had completed her licence and was pleased to have done so: *'Yeah, definitely [laughs]. [Interviewer: Why's that?] Because I'm free now'*. Sasha had two sessions outstanding and was impatient for her period of statutory supervision to be over. Both considered that their respective youth offending team workers were *'alright'* and Ella contrasted her worker with those to whom she had previously been allocated, who were *'just all stressy and moody and horrible'*.

Yet neither believed that interventions, either in prison or since they had returned to the community, had been of any real value. Ella did accept that her worker had helped with her application to the army, and had continued to pursue this issue beyond the expiry of her statutory responsibility for the licence. For this Ella appeared grateful, and acknowledged it as a sign that her worker cared about what happened to her. At the same time, she clearly believed that she could, and would, easily have sorted it out for herself in any event. Other than that practical assistance, she was unable to identify any ways in which resettlement provision had been useful.

Sasha was rather more forthright in her negative appraisal and was particularly aggrieved at the compulsion involved:

'It's bullshit – sorry for swearing but it's just long, I had to come here and it was baking hot outside and I didn't wanna come but I had to come'.

Given her confidence that she would not engage in further criminal activity, she saw no value in offending behaviour sessions. Moreover, the practical assistance that she would have welcomed in finding long term alternative accommodation to the family home was not available, and she recognised that it was beyond the powers of her youth offending worker to do anything in that regard. As she put it:

'I'm trying to move out cos it's a bit overcrowded in there but I ain't getting no help with it. There's no-one that can help me and it's just a joke really. ... I'm 18 and I share a room with an 8 year old little girl'.

This tendency to dismiss the importance of resettlement provision was tempered in part by an understanding on the part of both interviewees that they were not representative of most of the girls with whom they had shared a custodial experience. While struggling to articulate in detail what forms of intervention might be of most benefit to young women who were significantly more vulnerable than they, both were able to suggest some things that might be helpful. Emotional support and compassion was identified as being something which was too often lacking and ought to be regarded as a priority. For Sasha, this was also associated with maintaining links with any support networks that girls might have in the community.

'Well one girl, she had a baby in there... She had a little girl and she only gets to see her daughter once a month on special visits and there's some days where she's just so depressed... And I dunno, they could offer her a lot more support in prison, I said like when you first go to prison, there should be a phone in your cell but you can only call certain numbers, ... just immediate family because then if I could phone my mum when I was in that cell... I think I would have been all right, just to let her know I'm safe and I miss her, I think it helps a lot.'

Prospects for work were regarded as critical and forward planning to facilitate girls moving into gainful employment was described as a priority. The implications for educational provision within custodial institutions were evident:

'Well they should ... give 'em the right qualifications in what they want to do while they're in prison, like getting the certificates and that and then when they get out, give them, get them like an apprenticeship or something. So when they get out, they've got a job to go to and that and they can learn more, innit?' (Ella).

But the girls also acknowledged that practical assistance, particularly the provision of a stable address, and the support to maintain it, was a prerequisite of young women being able to contemplate making the changes that would be necessary if they were to leave an entrenched pattern of offending behind them. Sasha characterised existing provision as failing badly against that basic measure:

'[Interviewer: And what other things do you think should be available for girls coming out of custody?] Support, money ... cos when I come out of prison, none of my clothes fit me, I had to go out and buy new clothes.... Support and a stable place to live, not even a hostel cos them hostels, they get you into more trouble, like prison hostels. Because what tends to happen is a lot of people coming out of prison don't have anywhere to live, so they put them all in the same places ... No, it's not good enough, they shouldn't do that'.

The provision of such services was not however regarded as an end in itself. Emotional and practical support might be necessary conditions of desistance but they were not sufficient. Rather they constituted building blocks that would enhance the prospects that young women in trouble would be able to shake off the damaging fatalism that defined many of their outlooks and develop a sense of agency and optimism in their ability to change. As Sasha argued:

'There's not a lot of advice you can give to someone to stay out of trouble because it's up to that person if they're gonna do it or not, like it was me, I can't blame nobody else, it was me, it's just ... I dunno really'.

10. Conclusion and recommendations

The outcomes following a custodial sentence are significantly worse than for any other form of youth justice disposal. In this context, while the numbers of children in custody constitute a relatively small proportion of those who are processed by the youth justice system, the provision of resettlement services ought to be considered a priority for policy and practice. Paradoxically, despite the fact that girls in prison appear to be more vulnerable, on a range of dimensions, than boys, recidivism on release is considerably lower. Rather than implying that resettlement provision is more effective with young women, this is a reflection of the fact that girls are less likely to engage in criminal activity: female reoffending is lower than that of their male counterparts following all types of disposal. Indeed such considerations might be thought to suggest that the aims of resettlement of girls from custody ought to focus on a broader range of outcomes than simply whether or not they come to the attention of criminal justice agencies again within a twelve month period, emphasising instead issues of welfare and vulnerability.

The female population of the secure estate for children and young people has fallen sharply in recent years, generating a number of potentially contradictory consequences. First, the reduced numbers might (in the absence of corresponding budgetary reductions) allow for a higher staff to child ratio within custody and a greater focus of resettlement resources on release. At the same time, the decline has ensured that, on average, girls in custody are more troubled and vulnerable than previously, have more entrenched patterns of offending, are subject to lengthier periods of detention, and as a consequence of decommissioning of custodial establishments, tend to be placed further from their home community. The extent of adversity experienced by the cohort of girls in the current study is a vivid illustration of the challenging nature of the resettlement of young women from custody.

Against that background, the present research points to marked differences in how young women in the sample envisage their future following release from custody, and in their assessments of their capacity to determine, or at least influence, what happens. Perspectives ranged from a resigned fatalism to an enthusiastic self-belief. In the context of the

desistance literature, considered earlier in the report, such subjective considerations may have a significant bearing on the manner in which girls respond to opportunities and challenges that arise during their period in custody and on transfer to the community. A sense of agency is, in other words, likely to enhance the prospects of desistance, while a fatalistic outlook, based in part on previous negative experiences and a realistic appraisal of objective obstacles to 'going straight', tends to be associated with continued offending. While some of the participants in the current research were relatively consistent in this regard, the dichotomy was far from being an absolute one: many of the girls displayed some ambiguity, articulating resignation as to their fate at one point and manifesting an impression of optimism about their potential for self-determination within the same interview.

This dynamic might be thought to be at the heart of effective resettlement for young women since other measures regarded as indicative of good practice are related to it in a variety of ways. Particular forms of input function both to enhance opportunities for rehabilitation while, simultaneously, helping to engender a sense of empowerment in girl prisoners that makes it more likely that they will take advantage of such opportunities. From this perspective, the importance of developing practice that promotes agency is the key lesson to be derived from this study. That professionals should consider how that might be achieved within the constraints of agency expectations and limitations of resources might accordingly be considered the principal recommendation.

Recommendation 1: Practitioners should consider how best to effect a sense of agency, or empowerment, in girls with whom they work.

It was apparent that most of the girls in the study had, what they considered to be, previous negative experiences of contact with social care, youth offending teams, and, in many cases, custodial institutions. Such experiences inevitably influenced their perceptions of current interventions and, in some cases, seemed to pose an obstacle to engagement. Demonstrating an awareness of how girls understand their previous relationships with

criminal justice and social care agencies, and acknowledging that they may previously have been let down by criminal and justice agencies, is thus likely to be a prerequisite of encouraging a positive response by the young women to current interventions. Such an approach might also help to engender a sense among the girls that outcomes can be different this time around.

Recommendation 2: Practitioners should be aware of, and attempt to compensate for, girls' previous negative experiences of professional intervention.

The manner in which the current custodial episode was experienced by young women was also significant. Many of the girls demonstrated an ambivalent attitude towards their treatment within the secure estate. First, there was a strong sense of resentment at being treated 'like babies' and, rather than this being seen as supportive or indicative of a caring environment, it was, for most girls, undermining of their autonomy and disempowering. At the same time, and paradoxically, the girls complained that their treatment did not embody a sufficient recognition that they were not yet fully adult. Many of the young women accordingly felt that they did not receive enough emotional and practical support, and, in some cases, this appeared to reinforce a sense of isolation, helplessness, and fatalism. No doubt given the diversity, and complexity, of the female custodial youth population, achieving a balance that avoids infantilising young women, while simultaneously providing a nurturing environment in which vulnerable girls can feel emotionally supported, poses a considerable challenge. But addressing that dilemma would seem to be an important element of delivering the building blocks of effective resettlement.

Recommendation 3: Custodial institutions should strive to provide an environment that recognises, and attempts to address, the tension between offering emotional and practical support to vulnerable girls while respecting, and promoting, their autonomy as young women.

Previous research on resettlement has highlighted the significance of integrating provision within custody with the proposed intervention in the community to deliver a 'seamless sentence'. The current study confirms that the role of the custodial episode in preparation from release is considered important by the girls themselves. It also suggests that successful integration may involve a number of different elements.

In interview, many of the young women exhibited high levels of anxiety about their future, at least part of which was related to the consequences of incarceration itself. Most recognised that a custodial sentence on their record would distinctly disadvantage them in the labour market, which would, in turn make earning a legitimate income a significant challenge. Some also expressed more subjective concerns about whether their ability to repair the range of ties broken by incapacitation had been undermined by their having become institutionalised or '*stuck in time*'. Others were worried that their problems were such as to make it very difficult for them to give up offending. At the same time, girls assessed interventions within the establishment in terms of the extent to which they perceived them to address such anxieties. For some, provision that helped them cope with the pressures of confinement was inherently valuable. Others indicated that intervention was beneficial if they could see that it helped to effect positive change in the way they saw themselves or others. The majority regarded favourably input which they recognised would be useful to them on release. In each case, it was the perceived relevance of the intervention to their own particular circumstances which determined whether the girls responded favourably to it. Conversely, they tended to resent provision which they perceived as formulaic, repetitive, undifferentiated according to individual need, and compulsory.

The issue of compulsion was particularly conspicuous in relation to education. Many of the girls felt a sense of grievance that they were required to undertake daily educational classes given that they were above the formal school leaving age. In principle, most of the young women acknowledged the importance of improving their educational attainment and obtaining qualifications. Their dissatisfaction with the programme in the unit was in large part to do with the fact that the curriculum was not tailored to their previous experience,

ability, and individual interests. That they were compelled to take part compounded the girls' perception that it was a waste of time, and risked undermining their interest in a potential route for improving their future prospects.

In the context of prior academic failure, the potential for education provision to lead to a recognised qualification assumed a particular significance for many of the girls. While in some cases, sentence length militated against course completion, girls subject to longer terms of detention also complained that classes were repetitive rather than being progressive and building on achievement to date. There was little evidence of planning to ensure that educational input within the institution was related to what it was anticipated the young women would be doing on release. The girls did not believe that arrangements were in place to ensure that programmes commenced within the establishment could be completed in the community.

Where interventions were perceived as directly relevant – either in terms of self-development, being of benefit on release, or meeting a particular interest – they were highly regarded. This in turn determined the extent to which the girls engaged with the services that were available. It was possible to discern a circular dynamic at play: girls who were optimistic about the future were more likely to be motivated to take advantage of the different elements that made up their programme; conversely, if sessions were seen as directly relevant to addressing girls' needs and interests, they were more likely to develop a belief in their own capacity for self-determination.

Recommendation 4: Efforts should be made to ensure that interventions within custody are relevant, and perceived by the girls to be relevant, to their particular circumstances, hopes and fears for the future, previous experiences, and stage of development.

Recommendation 5: Educational provision in particular should be based on an assessment of the individuals' prior experience and attainment and reflect their interests and ambitions.

Recommendation 6: The aims of particular interventions, and how it is anticipated they will be achieved, should be as transparent as possible and negotiated with the young women who undertake them. To the extent that it is compatible with public protection, participation in particular elements of the programme should be voluntary, based on the girls' understanding of the benefits for themselves.

Recommendation 7: Sentence planning should ensure that provision within custody is clearly integrated to that intended to be available on release. Where educational input has the potential to lead to qualification, care should be taken to ensure that girls are able to complete the course in the community if they are unable to do so within the secure estate.

Effective resettlement is centrally concerned with what happens to girls when they are released. If provision in custody should be designed in order to prepare young women for living in the community, it is equally true that arrangements for the transition should be in place at an early stage and build on provision within the secure estate. The current study suggests that there are a number of distinct, though interrelated, elements of such planning.

The links between having a secure, stable, place to live and desistance are well established. The importance of constructive activities that provide structure and a legitimate means of income is equally acknowledged. As might be expected, the centrality of having access to these basic resettlement services was echoed by the respondents in this study. But they were concerned not just with the provision itself, but also the quality of what was provided. Moreover, it was important to the girls that arrangements were negotiated with them and reflected their desires, interests, and needs as they perceived them.

In addition, while accommodation, and education or employment, were regarded as prerequisites of giving up crime, most young women did not consider them to be sufficient. In some cases, girls thought that support to promote emotional wellbeing would be required. Others clearly recognised that they would need help with problems such as mental ill health,

anger management, or addiction. In short, effective resettlement provision was understood to be an holistic response to the particular circumstances of the individual.

Ensuring that individually tailored arrangements are in place, and that they can commence at the point of transition to the community, is thus at the heart of resettlement planning. There are however four reasons for considering that preparation should start early in the sentence. First, provision within custody can only lay the groundwork for subsequent input in the community if there is clarity in relation to the latter to inform planning of the former. Second, it affords an opportunity to involve the girls in shaping the nature of their resettlement provision, ensuring that they acquire a genuine interest as active participants. Third, where arrangements are in place, an imaginative, and more extensive use, of release on temporary licence (a mechanism which none of the girls interviewed appeared to have benefited from) can allow a more graduated move from the institution to the community that helps to cement engagement prior to release. Finally, as the girls in this study attest, knowing what provision will be available on release provides a future oriented focus and goals to work towards. The resulting sense of enthusiasm and agency can make it more likely that the plans will ultimately succeed.

Recommendation 8: Planning to ensure that resettlement provision addresses the individual circumstances of the young women should commence as soon as possible after sentence, to allow thorough assessment, facilitate participation of the girls themselves in what will happen to them, and to ensure clarity as to what the future holds. Such planning can in turn promote a sense of optimism and agency. A greater use of release on temporary licence, to promote engagement with community based services, before the end of the custodial element of the sentence, should be encouraged.

Increased use of release on temporary licence would also help to mitigate the traumatic impact of returning to the community, which in most cases is experienced as an abrupt, disorientating, and disempowering occurrence. The current study suggests that even young women with extensive networks of support, suffer considerable distress at the point of

transition from custody. A more graduated exposure to life outside the institution might help to minimise the trauma. Girls whose personal circumstances are less favourable also require considerable input leading up to, at the point of, and in the aftermath of release. Given that the initial period following return to the community is critical in determining future pathways – it is a period of opportunity and risk – such support mechanisms are an essential constituent of effective resettlement.

Recommendation 9: Service providers should acknowledge and prepare for the traumatic nature of leaving custody. The use of release on temporary licence should be considered in all cases as a mechanism for making the experience of transition to the community a less abrupt one. High levels of emotional and practical support should be afforded in the period before and after return to the community. Arrangements should be in place to ensure that all girls are met at the gate by someone with whom they have a good relationship.

Consistent with the literature on girls who come to the attention of the criminal justice system, the young women in this study provided confirmation of the importance that relational issues played in their lives, the variety of ways that such issues contributed to their offending, and how they were likely to be influential in determining whether or not they would desist from crime on release.

Contact with family was of considerable significance to the majority of girls, including those for whom there was no prospect of residing in the parental home when they left custody. The extent to which such contact was maintained during the period of detention was variable and appeared to depend largely on the initiative of the girls and their family rather than being conceived of as an essential aspect of the resettlement process. The restrictions on contact, via telephone and letter, were a frequent source of complaint, particularly given that distance from home meant extensive travelling for some families if they were to visit. Promoting family contact, where it is compatible with safeguarding concerns, should be seen by practitioners within the secure estate and in the community as a priority in terms of resettlement activities. Release on temporary licence, particularly where girls are to return to

the familial home, could be used as a positive mechanism for preserving, or strengthening, family relationships. Considering how easier access to telephone communication with family members might be effected would go some way to compensate for the distress caused to young women by the separation from significant others that incarceration imposes.

Recommendation 10: Promoting family contact should be regarded, by both secure estate staff and professionals in the community, as a necessary element of resettlement provision for girls. Consideration should be given to how communication with family members might be improved and family visits to custody facilitated. Release on temporary licence should be recognised as a potential mechanism for maintaining familial relationships.

Previous research has found that relationships with professionals are also key to enhancing the prospects for desistance. There are constraints on those employed in the youth justice system – associated with imitated resources, agency policy, and concerns with public protection – which preclude staff from always responding positively to what young women prisoners consider would be in their best interests. Problems of high staff turnover impact on the consistency of allocated worker, undermining the potential for positive relationships to develop between professionals and those with whom they work. Nonetheless, girls in the current study made a clear distinction between staff who they thought genuinely cared about them and those whose motivations for working with young people in trouble were more instrumental.

Characteristics described by the girls, as indicative of a caring attitude, included listening to their concerns, responding to them as autonomous individuals at the threshold of adulthood, allowing them to participate actively in planning for their own future, advocating on their behalf, and maintaining regular contact outside of statutory planning meetings. Early planning for release, and arranging provision that girls would be able to access in the community, was also regarded as a manifestation of a compassionate approach since it demonstrated an interest in what would happen to them.

Where staff were able to convey a sense of empathy, young women tended to have a more positive attitude towards engaging in resettlement activities and were more optimistic about taking advantage of opportunities that presented themselves. Moreover, girls were considerably more likely to develop a sense of personal loyalty towards professionals whom they perceived to have exhibited a concern for their welfare. Such loyalty was in turn manifested in a greater determination to give up criminal activities and tended to coincide with a more optimistic outlook on the prospects for desistance. 'Caring' professionals accordingly provided both the practical and emotional supports that could facilitate a shift from fatalism to empowerment. Where such a sense of agency was most fully developed, girls could, as Sasha put it, face the considerable challenges that confronted them with the conviction that '*nothing's really that hard*'.

Recommendation 11: Professionals should aim to embed resettlement work with girls in a relationship founded on empathy, caring and empowerment. Such an approach should be predicated on a commitment to service user participation, sympathetic listening, maintaining regular personal contact, acting as an advocate, early planning for release, and a belief in the capacity of girls to take control of their own rehabilitation.

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