

Beyond
YOUTH CUSTODY

LESSONS FROM
YOUTH IN FOCUS



LOTTERY FUNDED

Beyond Youth Custody (BYC) is one of three England-wide learning and awareness projects funded under the Big Lottery Fund's Youth in Focus (YIF) programme, which aims to support vulnerable young people through changes in their lives.

BYC has been designed to challenge, advance and promote better thinking in policy and practice for the effective resettlement of young people.

It brings together Nacro, the social justice charity, with three research and evaluation partners: ARCS (UK), and Salford and Bedfordshire universities.



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Cover based on a mural created by young people at the Reaching Your Potential project.

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Foreword

Lord Dholakia

During my long involvement with Nacro, I have seen the transformative impact on people's lives that is possible through a relentless focus on helping them identify and achieve their goals and move on from crime. The current focus on reforming the youth justice system provides an opportunity to tackle the destructive cycle of offending that some young people get caught up in and struggle to get out of. This report summarising five years of learning contributes greatly to understanding how young people can be effectively supported with their transition back into the community following custody. By conducting extensive research, identifying and sharing positive practice, championing the voices of young people and working collaboratively with voluntary and statutory sector partners, Beyond Youth Custody has made an invaluable contribution to the youth justice agenda.

What resonates for me is the crucial role that positive relationships play in helping young people to engage with services that are there to support them. Those working with young people often show tireless passion and determination to make a difference to their lives. Young people themselves have demonstrated that having someone believing in them and not giving up can be the catalyst for them to go on to achieve truly inspirational change.

I would like to thank the Big Lottery Fund for the Youth in Focus funding that has enabled the hard work described in this report to flourish and for its life-changing impact on many of the young people involved. By incorporating the learning into the future youth justice landscape, we have the opportunity to help many more young people in the future to move on from offending, achieve their aspirations and flourish in our communities.



Suraj Soroay

I had just turned 18 when I was sentenced to five years and did half the time in prison. Growing up in a society full of criminal activity and gang culture, the younger generation just wanted to be like the older generation, if not worse. My parents tried their best to give me a positive upbringing. However, I was a hot-tempered kid living in a negative environment and one thing I lacked from the streets was positive role models.

Upon my release from custody I was determined to make a change and received help from an organisation which I can truly say transformed my life. They made me feel at home, provided comfort and support which I had never experienced when dealing with other authorities. They spoke to me on my level and provided help by understanding my needs and not overpowering me with demands. They had an empathetic approach and put me first which motivated me even more to succeed.

It has been three years since I was released from prison. I'm now in my second year at University, have a part-time job and I'm enjoying life. My past is behind me but I use my experience to bring change in today's generation by sharing my journey and relating to young people so they can see a positive way and possible path to victory.

Every young person has the potential to change, they just need role models who they can trust, relate to and be heard by.



About Youth in Focus

Youth in Focus (YIF) is a Big Lottery Fund initiative aimed at supporting vulnerable young people through difficult changes in their lives.

Beyond Youth Custody (BYC) is one of three England-wide learning and awareness projects funded under the Big Lottery Fund's YIF programme. BYC has been designed to challenge, advance, and promote better thinking in policy and practice for the effective resettlement of young people after release from custody. BYC brings together Nacro, the social justice charity, with three research and evaluation partners: ARCS (UK), and Salford and Bedfordshire universities, all of which have exceptional track records in action-based research focusing on youth offending and resettlement.

The programme was initially funded for a five-year period ending in April 2017. During that period, the partnership delivered a multi-faceted programme of research, networking, publicity and awareness-raising activities. The BYC team produced a wide range of publications and resources for practitioners, policy-makers and researchers.

The YIF programme also funded service delivery projects across the country to work with three different client groups: young care-leavers, young carers and young custody-leavers. There were 15 individual YIF projects that worked with young custody-leavers, although some of these projects also worked with care-leavers and young carers.

The BYC work focused specifically on young people leaving custody, working alongside these projects and supporting them to evaluate and monitor their own service and compare and contrast different models of resettlement, facilitating young people's participation and providing ongoing feedback about effective practice and lessons learnt through the research. A key part of BYC's work involved close and regular involvement with individual YIF projects that worked with young custody-leavers, focusing on issues concerning data collection and evaluation but also on wider practice and policy issues. That involvement with YIF projects generated a substantial set of evidence concerning the implementation and effectiveness of resettlement practice and informed the team's critical understanding of key resettlement issues.

About Beyond Youth Custody

BYC's aim is to help young people turn around their lives by ensuring the right resettlement services are in place for them in custody through to the community. Our five-year programme works to establish an evidence base of effective practice that can be used to support a clear strategy for resettlement services.

We focus on the following areas of work



1. Producing robust evidence about what works

We analyse existing and emerging research and explore under-researched issues to identify best practice that can be applied across diverse settings.

We do this by:

- publishing regular updates that bring together the latest lessons from research, policy and practice in the resettlement of young people
- publishing thematic reports that provide an analysis of resettlement through different lenses (such as engagement, gender-specific approaches, coping with release and the impact of gang involvement)
- consulting widely with young people, practitioners and other stakeholders by conducting interviews, focus groups and developing an archive of case studies
- helping YIF project practitioners to evaluate and monitor their own service by collecting additional primary data

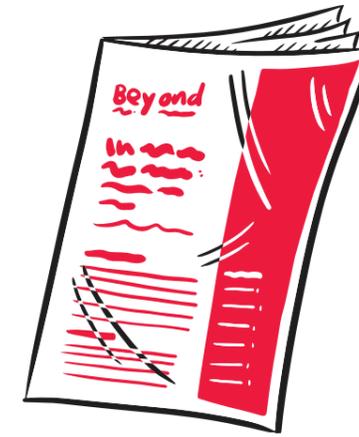


2. Giving young people a voice

We actively encourage young people who've been in custody to voice their opinion about resettlement services – because nobody understands the challenges better.

We do this by:

- consulting with young people before and after their release about their needs, expectations and experiences of resettlement services
- asking young people to help shape future policy and raise awareness of the issues affecting people leaving custody through participation in events and consultation responses
- involving young people in innovative communication projects about effective resettlement – like blogs and short films
- extending the scope of BYC up to the age of 25, to capture insights from young adults who also require a distinct approach



3. Developing and promoting good practice

We work with practitioners to improve resettlement practice and help them deliver effective services for young people leaving custody. We use our evidence base to steer future policy and encourage change that improves outcomes for young people leaving custody.

We do this by:

- identifying the practice implications of our research and providing ongoing feedback to practitioners about what works
- developing sustainable delivery models that can be replicated and adopted on a national scale
- feeding examples of what's working in practice into research, creating forums to test emerging findings, and helping practitioners to put BYC's learning into practice
- publishing a series of practitioners' guides that focus on key areas of resettlement practice



4. Identifying and communicating what needs to change

We continue to build a network of stakeholders so that we can test findings, share best practice and communicate the lessons we learn.

We do this by:

- engaging with policy and decision makers through events, party conferences, all party groups and responses to consultations
- initiating and contributing to discussions that explore the challenges related to policy and practice
- running on and offline campaigns and an online hub to share findings and raise national awareness of the issues affecting young people leaving custody
- working with partners including the Youth Justice Board's Resettlement Steering Group, Transition to Adulthood Alliance (T2A), the Standing Committee for Youth Justice (SCYJ) to implement the agenda for young people

Youth in Focus projects



ADAPT

is an intensive mentoring, support and advocacy project supporting young men and women leaving custody to resettle into their communities. It is delivered by Salford Foundation Ltd.



CREATING POSITIVE FUTURES

supports young people to achieve independence through one-to-one support, drop-in services and group work sessions. It is delivered by New Horizon Youth Centre.



DIG IN: STAY OUT

is a supported employment programme for young male custody leavers. It is delivered by Groundwork Greater Nottingham.



FIXED 4 YOUR FUTURE

delivers personalised life coaching to young people leaving custody and care to develop their skills and resilience. The service is delivered by Prospects.



FUTURE 4 ME

provides specialist one-to-one support to vulnerable young people with challenging needs by supporting them through key transitions in their lives. It is delivered by 1625 Independent People.



INSIDE OUT

works with young custody-leavers to develop their personal and social skills and enable a positive transition from custody to the community. It is delivered by Endeavour Training Ltd.



MOVING ON

is a mentoring project for young women who are leaving custody. It is delivered by Pecan.



NEXT STEPS

provides specialist one-to-one support to young people to help them overcome barriers and settle successfully into independent living. It is delivered by No Limits.



NO CRACKS

provides intensive support to young people when they leave young offender institutions or prison. It is delivered by Cambridgeshire and Peterborough YMCA.



REACHING YOUR POTENTIAL

provides a holistic package of support to young people making the transition back into the community from the secure estate. It is delivered by Sussex Central YMCA in partnership with Eastbourne & Wealden YMCA, Sussex Nightstop, Brighton & Hove Youth Offending Service, East Sussex Youth Offending Service and West Sussex Youth Offending Service.



SAFE CHOICES

delivers a gender-specific approach to support young women leaving care and custody. It is delivered by The Children's Society in partnership with the Nia project.



SAFE HANDS

helps young custody leavers integrate back into society using the power of sport as well as education, training and wider social support. It is delivered by Everton in the Community.



THE SISTERS PROJECT

is a mentoring programme for young women aged between 15-24 who are leaving or have just left prisons and young offender institutions. It is run by Spurgeons, a charity for marginalised young people.



Y-POD

provides wrap-around support to young offenders and young care-leavers to prevent them from falling between existing services. It is delivered by Leicester YMCA.



YOUTH TRANSITIONS NETWORK

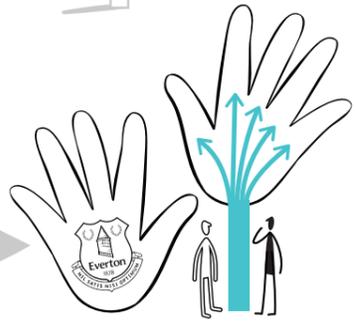
works with young custody-leavers and care-leavers to engage them in education, training and employment and enable a network of community support to be built. The project is led by Action Acton (now Action West London) in partnership with Pupil Parent Partnership and Platform 51.

YOUTH IN FOCUS

PROJECTS WORKING WITH
YOUNG CUSTODY-LEAVERS



ADAPT



SAFE HANDS



INSIDE OUT



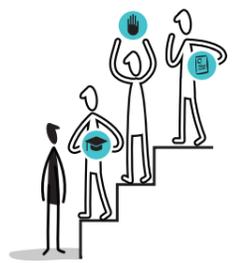
SISTERS PROJECT



Y-POD



DIG IN: STAY OUT



FIXED 4 YOUR FUTURE



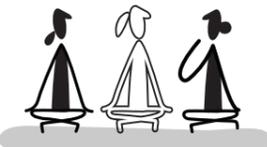
CREATING POSITIVE FUTURES



NO CRACKS



YOUTH TRANSITIONS NETWORK



SAFE CHOICES



MOVING ON



FUTURE 4 ME



NEXT STEPS



REACHING YOUR POTENTIAL

Beyond Youth Custody's involvement with Youth in Focus projects

BYC has been involved in a wide variety of research and dissemination activities with YIF projects including:

- site visits and liaison with YIF projects, monitoring local evaluation planning and assessing the need for current/ongoing assistance from the BYC team
- provision of assistance to projects in relation to data collection and record-keeping
- regular collection and analysis of YIF project documentation and key data sets
- interviews and focus groups with project staff, young people, agency representatives and other key stakeholders
- the design and delivery of online surveys
- observational research and shadowing work undertaken during on-site visits
- collection and analysis of offending data at key stages in the latter half of the programme
- the collection of financial and other information to underpin cost-benefit analyses
- the development of case studies (both of positive practice and individual project participants)
- regular feedback to YIF projects about research and evaluation work, and BYC's publications and briefings
- participation opportunities for young people
- delivering workshops and presentations with YIF staff and young people to share learning with wider audiences

Projects varied in terms of their level of involvement with the BYC team. In some cases the team helped to design a large part of a project's data collection instruments or contributed to the design of (or constructed) the project's client database. In other cases, where projects had external evaluators, the BYC team liaised with those researchers, adding value where possible and filling gaps in terms of data collection or analysis.

About this report

BYC research finds that effective resettlement is a process that supports a shift in a young person's personal narrative, which starts with an acceptance of offending behaviour and moves towards an eventual point where offending has ceased and the young person has a more future-oriented and positive sense of self. Evidence has identified the key characteristics that enable this process – that it should have engagement and participation as a primary focus, and that it should be individually-tailored, continuous and coordinated.

This report highlights key lessons from the YIF programme, using the characteristics identified by BYC as a framework for understanding and describing these lessons. These findings are also described in more detail in our main report *Lessons from Youth in Focus: Research Report*.

This report also refers to some of the wider material produced by BYC during its five-year funding period – all publications are available at www.beyondyouthcustody.net.



“ Going to the House of Lords was a great experience. It was really good to be able to tell people who have real power and make decisions what life is like when you've been involved with the police and prisons and what really makes a difference to you and helps you turn your life around.



Young people, offending and processes of change

For resettlement to be effective and sustainable, we need to look beyond criminal justice's short-term aim of preventing reoffending. There needs to be a longer-term understanding of resettlement as a process that promotes desistance, wellbeing and social inclusion. Crucially, we must acknowledge that this may involve episodes of relapse as well as progress.

“ Lots of lads identify themselves by their offence. They become their offence and don't allow themselves to step out into another identity.

Understanding desistance

Desistance is the process of abstaining from crime amongst those who previously had engaged in a sustained pattern of offending. The process of desistance is increasingly understood as being produced by an interplay between age and maturation, life transitions and social bonds, and personal and social identity. Consistent with other research, YIF evidence shows that processes of desistance are described and understood in a variety of ways by key staff and by young people.

Age and maturation

YIF participants often made reference to how their desistance from offending was related to them growing up. One participant described his transformation as follows:

“ I've matured a lot. I used to run around the streets, acting like an idiot. Now all I care about is my future. My life is only just beginning. I'm moving through every page of every chapter of my book. Without the project, I'd be doing nothing. Or I wouldn't be alive. I thank them all, all the time.

Another participant also described his own changes in terms of maturation, which he which he talked about in terms of a journey that was made possible by the YIF project he engaged with:

“ I've grown so much in myself, and I think they are a big part of that, they have helped me come on that journey a long way. Yes, I've grown up a lot in the last year, two years, since I came out. That was when it all changed, and since then a lot more has changed with their help, and now I'm in a position where I look at myself two years ago, that's not me.

In this case it would seem entirely appropriate to describe the change process as involving a very clear shift in the young person's sense of self.

Feedback from other YIF participants involves a similar narrative about how different their current situation is compared with that of their past self, with the journey from one to the other being described in some cases in quasi-redemptive terms – as in the case of one participant who claimed that before he joined the YIF project he was a “lost soul” who has now found purpose, direction and new meaning.

Turning points

YIF participants who spoke to us about desistance often gave descriptive accounts of particular events or incidents which led them to examine their life and its trajectory in a new manner, and to begin a commitment to different ways of living or behaving.

It is worth noting that, although the notion of turning points is of great value in helping us to understand many stories of desistance, it does not follow that they are an essential feature of such stories.

Imagined future selves

Feedback from YIF participants highlights how important the idea of imagined future selves can be to the process of change.

On the one hand, future selves can be highly negative and undesirable, such as winding up dead from an overdose or being a ‘lifer’. Such imagined outcomes can provide the participant with the motivation to move away from offending behaviour or lifestyles.

On the other hand, imagined future selves can also be highly positive and provide a participant with perceptions of possible realities that they might wish to move toward.

The maintenance of hope and support for development of agency

The value of external support and encouragement was consistently highlighted in feedback from YIF participants during the programme.

“ The guys at the project made me not give up at times where I thought there was no point in trying because it wasn't working out... you know when there's a bunch of people just as stubborn as you are when somebody rejects you... they are like an extra part of my spine really.

For a young person to commit to a desistance pathway, the development of confidence and agency over time is crucial. Project workers can provide vital hope and resilience when a young person is in short supply of these emotional resources, helping to underpin the resettlement process and keep them on track.

Impediments to change

Some YIF workers suggested that it is also a mistake to focus unduly on individual agency – it is crucial to consider the practical difficulties that can present obstacles to effective resettlement.

One YIF worker suggested that this context-free focus on individual behaviour and decision-making was actually an impediment to the delivery of effective resettlement:

“ There's still a lot of misunderstanding and misconception about the behaviours that young people are presenting with. So professionals don't see the risk because they're preoccupied with seeing the problematic behaviours. With the older teenagers they're seen as consenting adults who are making informed decisions. Young people who are gang-associated are seen as making an active, free choice rather than being at risk of harm. So perception of risk and the vulnerability of the young people is the barrier.

By focusing only on behaviours, a whole range of contextual factors which can complicate successful change move into the background.

“ But if you’re not in a position to get up in the morning and think about going to college because you don’t have a roof over your head or any money to get there, it doesn’t matter who you are – you can’t function.

The impact of periods in custody

The YIF evidence suggests that custody itself has impacts that are detrimental to longer-term desistance, and that an understanding of these impacts can aid the effectiveness of resettlement services. Some of those impacts concern practical issues, such as barriers to securing suitable housing. YIF participants have also described the ways imprisonment has affected their emotional wellbeing. Following a year in custody, one participant said:

“ Prison just changes you altogether. You don’t think the same, you don’t act the same any more. I just think it sends you a bit crazy really. Always stays with you. I think it’s the year missed.

Such descriptions make it clear that resettlement work needs to include a focus on rebuilding or strengthening resilience.

The role of resettlement workers

The most effective resettlement workers appear to have particular skills in relation to the recognition and monitoring of a young person’s change processes. They also appear to understand the often non-linear nature of those processes, and to be able to assess ‘where a young person is at’ in relation to their own circumstances and commitment to change.

More specifically, in relation to a young person’s willingness to change, the most effective resettlement workers also appear to understand that such willingness is a dynamic, not a static, factor. Although it may have a set of psychosocial prerequisites, willingness to change is also something that can be facilitated, nurtured and sustained over time.

It is usually necessary to design a creative mix of practical and emotional support, with these being seen to be mutually reinforcing.

YIF participants and processes of change

Discussion and examples drawn from YIF projects and participants suggest a number of overarching conclusions concerning processes of change:

- Like resettlement itself, desistance is a process rather than an event.
- The timescales for desistance processes may outstrip the timescales usually involved in the delivery of resettlement work.
- Desistance trajectories are highly individual in nature, reflecting very wide variations in the ways that personal characteristics and history, individual strengths and weaknesses, and opportunities and forms of support can combine and change for an individual over time.
- Desistance trajectories can be both linear and ‘zigzag’ in nature.
- Those who desist from offending often describe that change in terms of taking up a new identity, but others describe it in terms of continuity or maturation.

We asked YIF projects . . .

How would you describe the key changes that your work with young custody-leavers aims to generate?



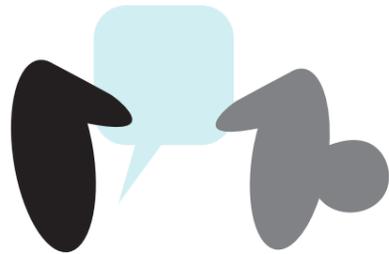
Facilitating and sustaining engagement

One of the hallmarks of effective YIF work with young custody-leavers is engaging young people in a consistent manner across the various stages of work. Many YIF projects have managed to work with young people who have not engaged successfully with any other services; the BYC team has focused on such practice over the years in order to learn lessons from those projects. The evidence makes it clear that a young person will not commit to and sustain their involvement in a change process if they do not engage with the provision and support structures that are designed to help them to make those choices.

Engagement as a process – BYC’s three-step model

In our published material we have described a three-step model of the engagement process. Individual cases will not always follow these steps in order, and in some cases individuals will remain longer than others at a particular stage, or will even move backward.

The three steps are outlined below:



Step 1:

The service engages with the young person.

The service makes contact, establishes a relationship with the young person and motivates them to become involved in activities provided by the service.



Step 2:

The young person engages with the service.

The relationship with the service and staff is further developed, with the young person adopting its objectives, and becoming involved in a meaningful way. This allows new roles to develop for the young person, and involves active support for their involvement in processes to change their lifestyle and their perception of themselves and their possibilities.



Step 3:

The young person engages with wider society.

The young person builds on or extends new roles established through the service engagement, to engage more widely with other agencies and wider society. The young person may exit the original intervention, but is able to move on and identify further opportunities and roles that will further their integration into society.

Initial engagement and establishing relationships

The comments offered both by YIF resettlement workers and by young custody-leavers highlight again and again how important relationships are both to engagement and to the facilitation of positive resettlement (and desistance) outcomes. It is also noted that the scope for establishing positive relationships with young custody-leavers is broadened if that process can be started while the young person is still in custody.

“ A young person’s willingness to engage with the project worker while in custody is critical for the success of any support intervention post-release, as is establishing a positive trusting working relationship.

“ You need just that one person who will really care.

Sustaining engagement over time – responding to change

Because resettlement is a process, engagement itself needs to be monitored and assessed over time, and providers need to respond to changes in individual circumstances.

“ A young person maintaining, though not necessarily initiating, repeated contact with the project is the main indicator of engagement. Many young people need constant motivation and caseworkers need to be tenacious and find ways to demonstrate their support over time.

Engagement and tailored individual support

There is a strong connection between successful engagement and the level of fit between a package of resettlement support and a young person’s needs and experiences.

“ I think understanding the lives these young people have led is key. Understanding they have rarely been given clear boundaries, they have often been neglected and may feel uncared for and that nobody listens to them. It is important to be persistent in our approach, give them ownership of the work and really show care and understanding. This will assist in making the young person feel worthwhile and will encourage them to engage.

Designing programme content – activities and interventions

The YIF evidence highlights the need for resettlement providers to design packages of support and activities which not only include ‘hooks’ for initial involvement but which involve a balance of some ‘quick wins’ (i.e. activities that will have some fairly immediate successes or rewards and will boost individual confidence) and longer-term plans which are designed to tackle more serious or difficult issues.

Involving young people

The evidence also indicates the importance of the young person's own authorship of this programme content. Although they need to be supported, they need to draw on their own agency to sustain commitment to that change process.

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

Participatory approaches can improve young people's outcomes, partly by helping to build trust and respect and developing young people's skills and confidence. Broadly, the experience of inclusion and empowerment fosters better engagement.

“ Involving young people in the design of a support package is key so that they own their own support and buy into it.

Services can benefit enormously from the improved communication and greater mutual understanding that develop between service users and staff when participatory approaches are adopted. These approaches can build personal responsibility, trust and self-esteem for service users, ensuring that they feel valued and have ownership of their service. On a more strategic level, participatory approaches ensure more effective and efficient long-term service development. Skilled service users provide organisations with a valuable resource to draw on and learn from to improve their practice.

“ It's got to be the right people listening and you have to have confidence that they will do something.



Youth Justice Convention 2017

We asked YIF projects . . .

Which ingredients do you think are essential for having an effective approach to facilitating and sustaining the engagement of young people in a project's work?





“

The project is a life saver, and a life changer, for me.

“ The only person that will stop you progressing is yourself, that’s what they showed me. . . I would never have thought I could see myself on a stage or trying to help young people. No one would have looked at me and given me that opportunity, I would just be looked over, but the project gave me something that I didn’t know I had. It’s bettered me as a person. I’m a completely different person. I don’t see jail as normality now.

“ I’ve given myself some options for the future, for me, my kid. It’s about looking in the long run and not thinking about what I’m going to have next week but in the long run I’m going to be more than better off than I was when I was out running around with the boys and getting involved with everyone. I don’t look over my shoulder any more. I don’t see a police officer and think, “Oh shit here we go.” I think, “Yeah stop me if you like mate, you’re wasting your time.”

“ I needed someone to believe in me and think to themselves, “He’s not that kind of person, he’s not going all the way back.” She’s just like my aunt. This is the person I will come to as my centrepiece. I don’t want to let her down.

“ The biggest thing they’ve changed is my mentality. I’m less impatient now and if I get knocked back I’m more determined to go for something else. Before, on my own, I would have been in a mood for two weeks and not applied for many jobs. If I find out I haven’t got a job, I come in here, tell them and they’re like: “OK – next one!”

Individually tailored support

Members of the YIF teams regularly commented on the importance of holistic assessment and provision for young people leaving custody. It was pointed out that young people come from a very wide range of backgrounds and that they also have needs, challenges and interests that vary widely. Analysis of YIF project data also made this very clear.

Tailoring resettlement provision to individual needs can increase the scope for engagement, as it is more likely that young people will perceive them to be relevant to their needs and interests.

“Target individual needs, then you’re going to focus people’s minds and make them more engaged.”

Assessing individual needs and circumstances

YIF evidence confirms that proper initial assessment is crucial to the design of tailored packages of support. Without proper assessment there is a risk that the service fit will not be appropriate, which can have a detrimental effect on engagement. Also, individual needs are often interrelated and mutually reinforcing, so ignoring some of them can blunt the scope for effectiveness overall.

“Everyone wants to better themselves in a different way. Throwing people through the same route doesn’t work.”

Addressing diversity issues

Assessments of individual needs and circumstances also need to incorporate careful consideration of issues concerning diversity; factors such as gender, race and ethnicity are a key part of what each young person ‘brings to the table’ when they begin resettlement work.

How diverse characteristics intersect will have implications for the content of resettlement packages, methods and timescales required for effective engagement.

Understanding previous experience

Young people also start a project with a variety of previous experiences – an understanding of this previous experience can be crucial to the success of any resettlement work undertaken. For example, a young person’s history might include:

- non-engagement with other services – possibly reducing their trust in resettlement workers and the scope for engagement
- previous trauma, which can have a negative effect on a young person’s resilience and scope for compliance
- a particularly negative prison experience (e.g. involving bullying, serious drug use, depression, suicidal behaviour), in which case they could need more structured emotional/psychological support as part of the resettlement package
- a particularly negative experience immediately after release (for example, mental health difficulties can be prevalent in this time)

We asked YIF projects . . .

What does it mean for resettlement support to be individually tailored?

“Priorities change – need to be flexible”



“ID NEEDS TO BE SORTED STRAIGHT AWAY (BARRIER)”

“Through staff skills, qualities and understanding”



“Listening to how they want to tackle it – make their own action plan”

“ADAPTING TO WHAT YOUNG PEOPLE RATE AS IMPORTANT”

“Establishing priorities by listening to young people”



“Fitting services to young people and not the other way around”

“CASE BY CASE” “Owning their own goals”

“Listening/reviewing/involving”



“FLEXIBLE FUNDING”

“TACKLING THE SAME ISSUES WITH DIFFERENT APPROACHES”

“Tailored interventions” “ALLOWING YOUNG PEOPLE TO OWN PROCESS PLAN, ACTIONS AND PACE”

Continuous support

Maintaining continuity

Previous research has illustrated again and again how resettlement support for an individual young person can be quite truncated in practice. For example, the custody/community divide is often not bridged by services in a coordinated manner. Service provision also changes its form as the young person passes through key age bands – with services for those under 19 having quite a different statutory and practice framework than services for those 19 and older.

The YIF experience has shown how some of these issues can be addressed effectively, so that the young person can be provided with a more continuous and interconnected set of provision.

Beginning resettlement work prior to release

The YIF feedback underlines findings from previous resettlement research which suggests that beginning work while young people are still in custody broadens the scope for successful engagement after release.

“ A young person’s willingness to engage with the project worker while in custody is critical for the success of any support intervention post-release, as is establishing a positive trusting working relationship.

Through the gate support

The YIF experience has again illustrated how important through the gate support can be to a young person’s progress. BYC’s research suggests how vulnerable a young custody-leaver can be during the first few weeks after release, and feedback from both YIF practitioners and project participants illustrates how through the gate support can provide a kind of safety net for the custody-leaver. It also provides much needed continuity of relationship between the young person and a key resettlement worker.

Maintaining continuity of relationships

Quality relationships between young custody-leavers and key workers are the most referred to success factor during our research with YIF projects. The importance of focusing on that quality and on the continuity of those relationships over time is clear.

Planning for disengagement, managing dependence risks

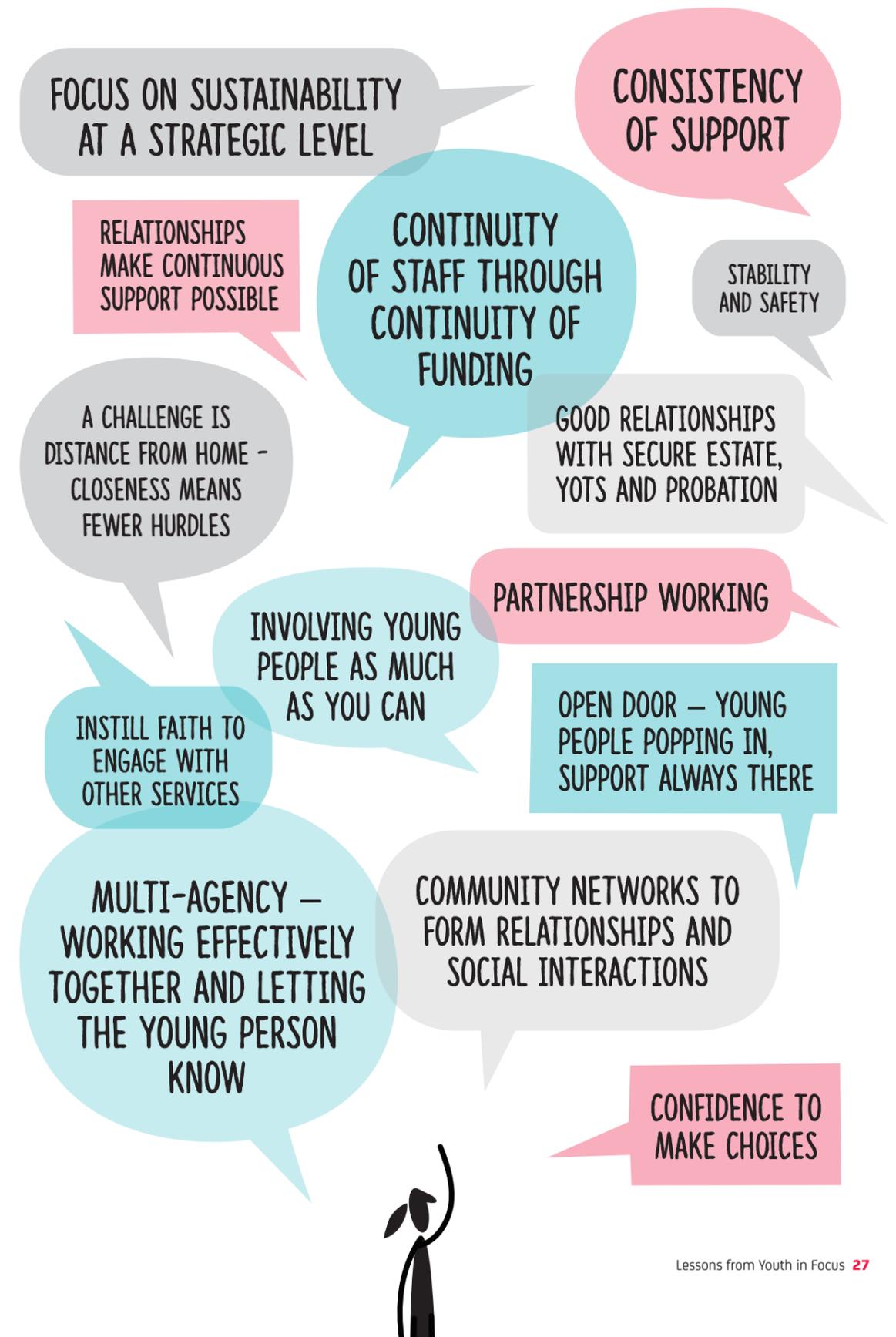
Particularly for those YIF projects that worked fairly intensively with young people, issues were raised about the risk of allowing a young person to become dependent on a project (or project worker), particularly in cases where the young person appeared not to have experienced any ‘continuity of interest’ in the past. Some young people can react very badly when a particular worker left a project, for example, and their progress can be affected. YIF staff have pointed out that this risk cannot be eliminated entirely but have also described ways in which they have sought to manage developments of that kind.

“ The project focuses on working with the young person to identify and strengthen their own support networks, so that they can build on this and be sustained by it increasingly over time.

For example, some of the YIF projects also had a very strong team focus, which allowed them to plan for staff changes well in advance and to come up with strategies in individual cases to reduce the stress on young people in a particular worker’s case load.

We asked YIF projects ...

How can a resettlement project take steps to ensure continuity of support to an individual young person?



Coordinating resettlement service provision

The importance of coordination to effective resettlement has been underlined by previous research and findings from our assessment of the YIF experience have reiterated this.

The importance of brokerage

Evidence from YIF projects suggests that an element of brokerage facilitated by resettlement workers can result in a more streamlined and focused resettlement practice, and an understanding across partners of roles and responsibilities for delivery. Those individuals who work directly with young people can help to join up the dots for individual clients, by liaising regularly as required with workers from other agencies. Young people often shared with us that they had to “tell the same story” on multiple occasions to different people.

YIF project fit with wider service delivery landscape

Where project teams liaised most effectively with other providers and agencies, they managed not only to identify overlaps in provision and to avoid duplication but also to enhance the value of the range of existing provision, by ensuring that services talked to one another.

Maintaining a consensus about roles and responsibilities

Feedback from YIF teams highlighted the need for clarifying the roles and responsibilities across key partners. Some also noted that even where there was clarity about those roles, it did not always follow that partners would perform them. Perhaps related to resourcing issues, some YIF project staff said that other agencies sometimes leave resettlement projects to deliver work that is actually the responsibility of those other agencies.

Information sharing

YIF projects usually had arrangements in place with partners for the sharing of information about individual participants, but sometimes these were highly informal rather than being anchored in actual, signed protocols. Some respondents commented to us that partners’ interpretation of data protection rules can be a barrier to the delivery of holistic resettlement provision.

Partnerships and staff turnover

While most projects had established networks of contacts which allowed them to undertake the kind of brokerage work referred to above, these were often interrupted by staff changes in partner organisations, especially where these relationships had been forged by workers organically and without the benefit of a formal agreement between partners at strategic level.

Resources

Feedback also suggested that resource issues can have a negative impact on efforts to coordinate resettlement work; where budgets are under considerable strain, agency workers can react by focusing only on their perceived highest priority (and specifically mandated) service requirements.

Monitoring partnerships over time

Given that resettlement and desistance are processes rather than events, the issues concerning coordination will not necessarily be the same at all points in the process. It is more likely that liaison with accommodation providers or substance misuse services will be required at early stages of resettlement work. At later stages, it may be more important to ensure that there is appropriate liaison with, and involvement from, other partners such as key people in the young person’s support network.

“ There needs to be a better degree of communication and connection between the different groups involved in the varying phases of the release process.

We asked YIF projects . . .

What are the key features of effectively coordinated resettlement provision?



Delivering and assessing resettlement outcomes

The BYC team has explored with YIF projects the different ways 'effectiveness' is understood and measured by outcomes for young custody-leavers. Specifically, how these outcomes shape the priorities for resettlement services and provide evidence of the value and impact of the work that they undertake for commissioners and policy makers, as well as society more generally.

Understanding and assessing effectiveness

There was a consensus among the YIF project teams about the kinds of changes that are most important for resettlement work with young people and how to define 'effective resettlement', even though projects did differ widely in terms of their focus.

“What is success – how do we define it? For some young people just turning up is success.

In particular, projects tended to single out areas of change that would be regarded as intermediate outcomes or measures of distance travelled – such as positive changes in levels of self-confidence or in individual resilience or self-efficacy – as being fundamental to other changes such as employability, or desistance from offending more generally. The key point here is that the focus of any measure should be one of progress towards achieving goals that takes account of the context, with each young person being supported through a highly individualised change process with their own personal set of aims and barriers to achieving them. Fundamental to this is keeping the young person at the centre of the process of setting goals and measuring progress against them.

“The focus should be on achieving goals, whatever they may be. They are different for each individual.

“Outcomes need to show the changes to offending behaviour. Like the distance travelled, it's much more subtle than reoffending, like a gradient. Has their offending become less frequent, maybe less risky or serious?”

Challenges in measuring progress

There is an important distinction to be made between outcomes that a project has achieved and what can actually be demonstrated.

“Lots of times you hit the outcomes, but you're also hitting lots of other outcomes that aren't measured. No project has the scope to have enough individual outcomes that would measure the whole range of outcomes achieved. You're trying to think about what outcomes fit into each measure.

A key lesson is that there remains a strong need for similar programmes to encourage the use of distance travelled measures that are both as robust as they can be and capable to some extent of generating data which could allow both for measurement of impact over time in individual cases, and for cross-project impact comparisons which could enhance our knowledge of such impact across different kinds of cases. Given that some of these intermediate outcomes are singled out both by providers and young people as being of major importance to positive change processes, it would be of great value if researchers and practitioners could learn more about them and how they are linked to wider outcomes such as employability, substance misuse reduction, reductions in offending, and so on. Related to this is the importance of using case studies, where projects felt they were better able to capture the impact of their work.

We asked YIF projects . . .

In your view, what are the most important outcomes that providers of resettlement services should be keeping track of?

“Building self-esteem and inner belief”

“Measuring social inclusion”

“CASE STUDIES ARE VERY VALUABLE WAY OF SHOWING WORK”



“LIFESTYLE CHANGE”

“Turning up, engagement”

“Self-awareness and self-care”

“SHOULD BE PERSON-CENTRED”



“Balance activity and recording”

“Softer outcomes can lead to greater outcomes”

“Take account of the context”



“Emotional wellbeing”

“Improving stability”



“IT'S ABOUT PROGRESS”

“BUILDING POSITIVE RELATIONSHIPS”

Conclusions on measuring impact

The YIF experience demonstrated that in measuring impact in resettlement, standardised measures do not always consider the complexities of the lives of the young people they support. There are, of course, variations in the way that key stakeholders define 'success' in resettlement work – it is highly subjective. In order to maintain the diversity across the landscape of service providers, any kind of measure would need to retain a flexibility that can reflect the range of interventions on offer. In short, it is about demonstrating and measuring the right things, not necessarily everything.

Being able to demonstrate clear, attributable outcomes is not straightforward. Qualitative information, case studies and stories all help to build up a picture of impact and, if the evidence is presented through the use of creative methods, can convey a powerful message. Proximal outcomes, such as sustaining a tenancy and maintaining engagement in employment or education, may be easier to demonstrate and can be strongly indicative that the process of desistance is underway.

So, does measuring effectiveness in resettlement work with young people matter? Yes, it does. Huge amounts of resources go into assisting organisations to measure their impact through generating relevant evidence. However, we must remember that evidence is never an absolute truth, it is often contingent for a number of reasons and therefore assessment must take into account the necessary caveat of 'context'. As a result, it would be appropriate to consider a more nuanced approach which encompasses the best of what we know and looks to develop our understanding of the interventions we make through practice-based evidence.

Projects want to demonstrate the difference their interventions make to the lives of the young people they work with. As different stakeholders will have different interests, in addition to measuring 'what works' there are a number of broader questions to be considered, for example:

- Is the need for the service established?
- Is the project reaching those it was intended to support?
- Are the young people fully engaged with the service and do they contribute to service development?
- Is it being delivered to an appropriate quality or standard?
- Is there existing evidence to support the view that by doing X, Y is likely to occur?
- How much does it cost and is it offering value for money?

The YIF experience has highlighted the need to ensure that the appropriate evidence is being taken into account, and that this is predicated on the young person being central to the debate. Such a discussion will inevitably consider what 'effective resettlement' looks like, and how that understanding can become embedded across policy reforms, contract specifications, supply chains, collaborative working relationships, evidence gathering, and in individually tailored and holistic resettlement plans. This should initiate a new, honest and critical debate about what professionals should be measuring and how they can evidence their impact in resettlement work with young people, which may also include the development of a range of tools that are fit for this purpose.

Conclusions

Careful assessment of evidence gathered from YIF projects during our work programme has illustrated a number of overarching conclusions about the delivery and impact of YIF work with young custody-leavers.

The YIF experience has underlined the importance of resettlement practice being:

- viewed as part of a wider process of change, which is about young people moving away from offending lifestyles and toward other choices that involve the identification and take-up of non-offending opportunities and skills
- focused on facilitating and sustaining engagement – without individual engagement, there can be no scope for positive impact
- designed to ensure that young custody-leavers play a key role in the identification and prioritisation of individual issues and action plans to address difficulties as this builds self-efficacy or autonomy
- holistic and individually tailored, increasing the scope for addressing resettlement need effectively, and broadening the scope for engagement and the development of individual commitment to change processes
- continuous over time and across key transition points
- coordinated across all relevant services, monitoring partnerships over time

The BYC team was impressed by the extent to which YIF projects were able to engage with young people who often had a multiplicity of difficulties, had a history of non-engagement, or who could be very hard to work with. Part of the reason for the success of YIF projects in terms of engagement is that projects were generally successful in attracting staff team members who:

- were extremely dedicated to working with young people, and were able both to establish good quality trust relationships and to monitor and manage those relationships thoughtfully and reflectively over time
- had professional and people skills that were well-suited to resettlement work with young people with multiple and diverse individual needs and experiences
- were appropriately inducted, trained, supported, and managed as part of a professional and collegiate team



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The word resettlement is a difficult concept – it implies that the aim is to help someone get back to where they once were. In reality this is very different – it’s about helping someone move on and make change from previous situations.

Youth in Focus advice to other projects

- “Recruit staff 3-6 months before operation.”
- “Use allocated mentors for clients.”
- “Give photo ID to every young person leaving custody.”
- “Set up relationships (SLA) with local groups.”
- “Make sure you have a good information sharing agreement.”
- “Don’t scrimp on good database and IT.”
- “Don’t underestimate the value of networking.”
- “Get marketing material ready before commencing projects.”
- “SMART outcomes.”
- “Identify job/training opportunities in custody that can then be continued into the community.”
- “Project funding needs to last for a significant period of time. To make lasting changes of lasting difference funding needs to be consistent.”
- “Inject fun into your work.”
- “Set your own boundaries and stick to them.”
- “Look after yourself – get clinical supervision.”

Youth in Focus messages to decision makers

- “Young people should not be separated from their support networks.”
- “Stop making it so difficult for the most vulnerable young people in society to build positive lives.”
- “Accommodation at point of release from custody is absolutely essential for any chance of positive outcomes.”
- “Young people in custody need support, care opportunity and help. It must not be punitive.”
- “Understand structural problems in order to make realistic objectives for projects in order to reach outcomes.”
- “There is a fantastic workforce out there doing fantastic work – they need resources, support, respect, stability and training.”
- “Ask decision makers to understand what happens on the ground level – get them involved!”
- “Link activities within custody to opportunities on release.”
- “Tailor the rehabilitation to the crime.”
- “Fund prisons and YOIs to the level that is needed for opportunities, staff, rehabilitation and therapy.”
- “Give front line organisations the autonomy to shape and build services.”
- “Give them the power to make policy decisions.”

Young people's messages

"Everyone deserves a second chance."

"If you've got nowhere to go, nowhere to live, and nobody there for you, then the only place there is for you is jail really."

"We all need to be accountable for our actions, but we also need the opportunity to learn from our behaviours and about life."

"Make it easier for young people, provide more ROTL and gear them up for what to expect when being released."

"The system should be supporting all individuals who go through different experiences in their lives."

"I would like young people to be released with something to keep them occupied – given by the system who help them focus their energy – whether this be voluntary, paid or community work. It would be very beneficial."

"Ultimately people need to know they have somewhere to live, then secondly they need help to become employed and find a way to support themselves, build their self-esteem and not feel that they have no other option than to profit from crime."

"Aren't looked after children supposed to be looked after?"

"In jail, you have to be shown aspirations, different options... they should think about personal development, what you've been through, and give people more control over what happens to them."

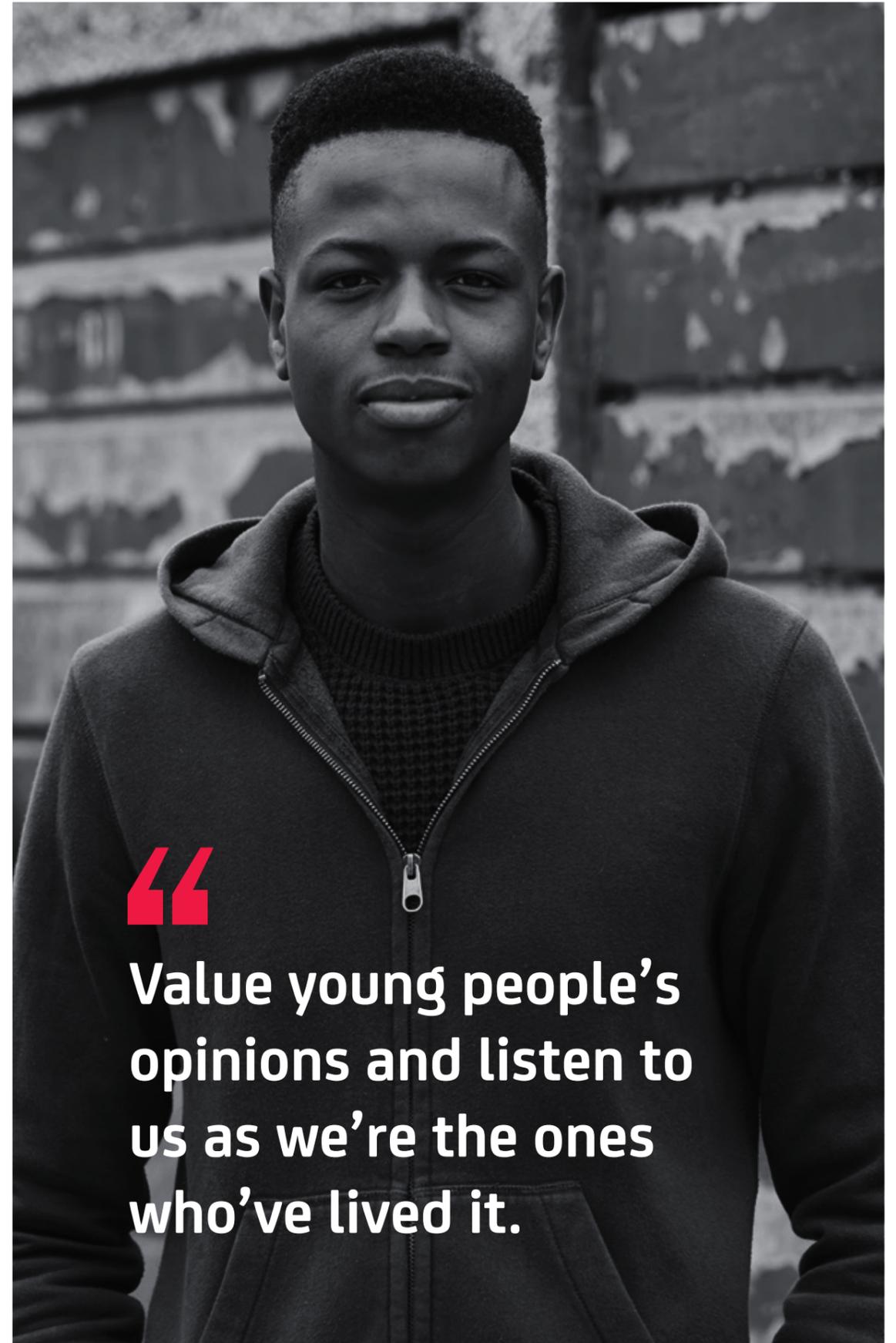
"There is usually a big story as to why someone is in prison – use the time to find out what is really going on."

"There's no point going to prison and being rehabilitated if you come out to nothing."

"Employ young people to consult, mentor, share their stories and make a difference."

"We need to listen to youth more."

"Make sure you get our voices heard and actually take them into account so that it makes a difference to people's lives."



“

Value young people's opinions and listen to us as we're the ones who've lived it.

What next?

From its inception, BYC has been committed to bringing about benefits and lasting change to young people leaving custody and the communities they return to. Working alongside young people, practitioners and policy makers, our next phase of work is to ensure our learning secures a lasting impact beyond the lifecycle of the programme.

In the context of future government reform we must explore how to support individuals and organisations to effectively work across boundaries, challenge competing priorities and provide the personalised care that is needed to help young people take the important steps required to change their path and build constructive links with their community.

A fundamental principle that will continue to underpin BYC's approach is the importance of giving young people with lived experience a voice – because nobody understands the challenges better. Capturing the views of young people and sharing decisions with them is vital if we are to have a truly distinct and child-centred youth justice sector. We will continue to ensure that young people's voices are at the heart of our work and we are keen to work with partners who are committed to this vision for the youth justice system of the future.

If you are interested in youth justice and would like to find out more about our ongoing work in this area, or to access resources for practitioners, please visit the Beyond Youth Custody website: www.beyondyouthcustody.net

Thank you

Our work relies heavily on the help, cooperation and experiences of individuals and organisations across the country. We act as a mouth piece to communicate what is happening and being felt by young people and staff working in resettlement and those involved in developing policies and programmes. We would like to thank all those people and projects who have helped us over the five years of the programme, whether that be arranging or taking part in interviews, helping us identify priorities for upcoming research, attending conferences or focus groups and helping us to engage with young people to make their voices heard.

Special thanks to all of the young people who have been involved in the programme and the YIF staff who contributed to this report.

We are most grateful for your help and enthusiasm in Beyond Youth Custody.



This document has been produced by the Beyond Youth Custody partnership, consisting of Nacro, ARCS (UK) Ltd, The Centre for Social Research at the University of Salford, and the Vauxhall Centre for the Study of Crime at the University of Bedfordshire.

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