

Measuring the social impact of Secure Training Centres in England and Wales

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Measuring the social impact of custody on young people is a nascent area, with attention focusing instead on the offending and re-offending rates of young people (Paterson-Young et al., 2017). Creating effective interventions that support young people involved in offending benefits from individual (micro), organisation (meso) and community (macro) level understanding. With processes for developing effective and sustainable interventions existing in a wider context of austerity measures, the availability of funding is scarce (UK Children's Commissioner, 2015). Adequately directing funding to effective and sustainable interventions is central to improving outcomes, particularly those interventions supporting young people. Over the past decade, the number of young people receiving cautions or convictions, in England and Wales, reduced by 81% while the numbers sentenced to immediate custody reduced by 74% (YJB, 2018). Despite reductions in the numbers entering the criminal justice system, the reoffending rate increased by 4 percentage points (YJB, 2018). Current measures for establishing the effectiveness of interventions rely on output data with limited emphasis on understanding the social impact (e.g. relationships, education and independence). Social impact measurement allows organisations to explore the



intended and unintended consequences of interventions to help them understand whether interventions are effective and sustainable (Vanclay, 2003). The research project focused on exploring how social impact measurement can be used to measure the outcomes for young people in Secure Training Centres (STC). A sequential mixed-method design was adopted by combining quantitative and qualitative methods to explore the perceptions of children, young people and staff in STCs. The following section briefly explores key data relating to social impact using questionnaire and interview data.

Impact of custody on young people

Effective interventions and services for young people can only be developed if an organisation has clear strategic direction alongside relevant core principles and values.

The strategic direction of STCs was developed twenty years ago, with limited revision since this date. This issue was highlighted by staff members participating in the research:

“They are appropriate for the centre but not for our clientele, in terms of the young people ... We are still running around with the same rules [from 1998] but we are not the same we were 20 years ago. Things have moved forward but unfortunately they haven’t moved it and changed enough to deal with the young people we are dealing with now” (S12)

The challenges presented by the static organisational purpose and rules; increases in the age profile of the young people accommodated; the limited engagement with community partners; the limited support and supervision of staff; the inadequacy of training; and the available provisions for young people all impact on the delivery of effective and sustainable services for young people. Analysing the data resulted in emerging themes and the creation of the rehabilitative environment model (Figure 1). This environment promotes positive outcomes for young people in custody by addressing factors such as health and wellbeing, relationships, education, independence and resettlement.

Positioning this rehabilitative environment within a social impact measurement framework benefits individuals (supporting positive outcomes), communities (supporting communities to empower young people and victims of crime) and on institutions, government and funders (supporting the development

effective and sustainable approaches to reduce the financial burden). This framework offers a clear pathway for measuring the social impact of interventions, with interval measurement. For example, measuring young people’s understanding of the impact of offending on victims at arrival (short-term and intermediate-term outcomes), release (intermediate-term and long-term outcomes) and at post-release follow-up (long-term outcomes and impact) would allow professionals to identify changes in restorative attitudes which are key for desistance (Nevill and Lumley, 2011). By introducing this approach, the organisation has the opportunity to identify the resources and activities required for supporting young people and the outputs, outcomes and impact achieved from such interventions. Rather than focusing on the social impact measurement framework, this article briefly explores some of the factors that influenced the development of the rehabilitative environment model.

Health and wellbeing

Research showed that a significant number of young people had been exposed to parental separation (68%), pro-criminal family members (68%), domestic abuse (51%), bereavement (25%) and/or experiences in the care system (43%). The trauma resulting from experiencing child abuse, domestic abuse and bereavement can hinder the development of young people (Cohen, Mannarino and Deblinger, 2017). So, what support do young people receive in custody? During the induction to the centre, young people engage in a Comprehensive Health Assessment Tool (CHAT)

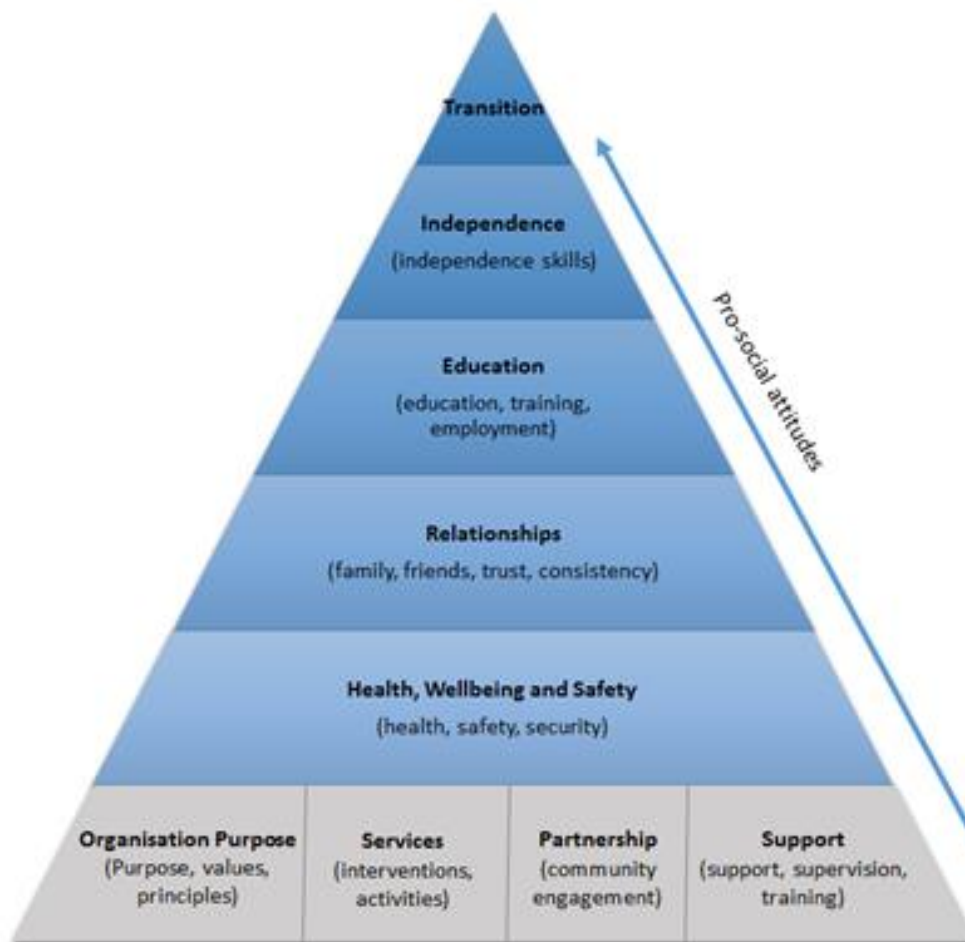


Figure 1 – Rehabilitative Environment

which covers physical health, mental health, neuro-disability and substance misuse. Staff also arrange initial appointments with the General Practitioner (GP) and dentist for young people. During the research period, the centre employed two part-time assistant psychologists and one locum psychiatrist, which appeared inadequate for addressing the needs of young people entering custody. A recent Ofsted (2017) report commented on the delays young people experienced in accessing psychology services with four young people on the waiting list during Ofsted's visit.

Given concerns over the mental ill-health of young people in custody and the impact of mental ill-health on life satisfaction and desistance, providing adequate service provision is critical (Lader, Singleton and Meltzer, 1997; Hughes et al., 2012).

Relationships

Strong and supportive relationships aid desistance from offending, with offending behaviour influenced by poor family relationships, negative school experiences and delinquent influences (Farrington, 2005; Farrington and Ttofi, 2014). Despite the central role family play in supporting young people in custody and transitioning from custody,

some young people have fractured relationships with family members:

“Well my mum and dad don’t talk to me anymore because of the offending and other stuff. Mum just wanted to disown me anyway, she hated me. It’s difficult at times cause my family hate me. I was in Foster care for 2 years (or nearly 2 years) before I came here” (P03)

Custodial environments play a crucial role in helping young people develop positive and trusting relationships which promote positive attitudes and outcomes (Maguire and Raynor, 2006). So do STCs help foster positive and trusting relationships with young people? Research showed a significant correlation between feelings of optimism and receiving regular visits from family and friends. Despite this correlation, 45.6% of young people did not experience regular visits from family and friends. Relationships with staff members were also explored, with data analysis suggesting that a significant number of young people (96%) have positive relationships with staff. The STC has a multitude of departments for supporting young people, with staff offering support in different areas (for example, substance misuse). Despite questionnaire responses regarding positive relationships, interview responses varied in terms of these relationships with young people’s views influenced by staff management of situations:

“... if they restrain me then I will hold a grudge ... The staff are alright but you hurt me and I won’t forgive you like, that’s how it goes.” (P01)

Despite the positive relationships reported by young people, analysis showed that young people have

case management and intervention from an average of 4.1 members of staff (excluding unit staff members¹). Case Managers are assigned to beds rather than young people. In the event young people are relocated to another unit in the STC, a new Case Manager is assigned. This change results in young people having to build significant relationships with a revolving door of professionals, which, unsurprisingly, serves to disrupt the continuity of trust between young people and staff.

Education

Findings showed that a high proportion of young people participating in the research had stopped attending education prior to arriving in custody (84%), with 37% ceasing education over 12 months before arriving in custody. National statistics on the proportion of young people ‘not in education employment or training’ (NEET) ranges from 15-19 years-old, with national averages varying across counties. For young people under 15 years-old, 34% were categorised as NEET which is significantly higher than the national statistics (9%) for NEET young people in England and Wales in 2015 (Mirza-Davies and Brown, 2016). So what support do young people receive to access education in custody? Education was placed at the heart of STCs, with a key aim to “provide a positive regime offering high standards of education and training”. On entering STCs, young people are enrolled in education (core curriculum and vocational subjects) for 25 hours per week, with the ratio weighted in favour of core curriculum subjects during the data

¹ Numbers on units are variable.

collection period. Young people's views of education varied in interviews, with 46% of young people reporting negative views of education, 27% reporting positive and negative views, and 27% reporting positive views of education. The positive views of education primarily related to feelings of achievement, with interviewees expressing the following views:

"Some of the teachers are good, they give us proper education work to do. Like they give us sheets of paper with ... with ... I don't know what they are called really... but they have things on it that help me learn" (P02)

Providing young people with the means to complete qualifications increases the availability of meaningful opportunities on release (Merton, 1938, Farrington, 2005). Despite some positive commentary, the negative views expressed by young people overshadowed the positive:

"... the education here isn't very good. Because it's just, I wouldn't even count it as education really, it's like, you go to a lesson and the teacher will turn up like 20 minutes late and you're just there colouring. I am expecting to go into A-levels now and I'm sitting here colouring in, I'm not even revising" (P13)

This illustrates young people's frustration with the education provisions available, with young people expressing dissatisfaction with the use of "colouring", "cross search words" and "worksheets" in education. During the research period, a high proportion of young people accommodated were aged between 15 and 17 years-old (89%); however, the educational provision, which have remained relatively unchanged since the

creation of STCs, are primarily for young people aged 12-14 years-old. With STCs now accommodating 12-18 year-olds, the effectiveness of current educational activities (particularly for the older age groups) requires consideration.

Independence

Young people in custody experience isolation from society, impacting on the development of the independence skills crucial for release. Supporting young people to develop personal and social skills promotes safety, security and resilience which are central to promoting positive transitions. Masten (2001) explored the notion of resilience, focusing on the importance of the environment in fostering or hindering the individual's ability to thrive. The removal of adequate connected arrangements of support upon release creates a dislocation for young people at a time when they enter a difficult period compounded by a greater risk of involvement in criminal behaviour. This reduces the available protective factors for young people are critical for promoting positive outcomes and desistance (Farrington and Ttofi, 2014). Developing independence skills is equally important for promoting resilience in young people transitioning from custody, with young people receiving support to complete daily activities (e.g. cleaning, cooking), support that ceases upon release. Data analysis showed that over 59% of young people believed that no support was provided in learning independence skills. The results show that a high proportion of young people report having no opportunity to learn independence skills at home or in the STC.

Research found that young people learn limited independence skills in custody, with 69.1% reporting limited knowledge of applying for education and/or employment opportunities and 73.5% reporting limited knowledge of filling out forms. Given the expectation of early-transition for young people leaving custody, support is required to improve independence skill and reduce the barriers to positive outcomes (Montgomery, Donkoh and Underhill, 2006).

Attitudes to offending

Personal narrative plays a crucial role in understanding desistance and recidivist behaviour. Individuals sentenced to custody face several obstacles on release (for example, finding secure accommodation, reconnecting with friends and family, and securing education or employment); supporting the development of pro-social attitudes is critical. Zamble and Quinsey (1997) explored the impact of such obstacles, finding that recidivists tended to respond with anger and despair, resulting in a decrease in motivation. One of the young people participating in the interview phase was informed his hostel placement was closed which resulted in feelings of anger and despair. The loss of secure accommodation and distance from family and friends resulted in a decreased motivation for desistance, as expressed in the statement “... *I will end up back here in a few weeks anyway, no point in being good, you get fucked anyway*” (P11). In exploring attitudes to offending for participants in this research, 62% expressed no remorse for the crimes they had committed. Furthermore, findings show that young people expressing no

remorse were significantly less likely to express a desire to apologise or make amends. Research by Jolliffe and Farrington (2004) explored the importance of empathy in understanding recidivism and desistance, finding a strong relationship between low cognitive empathy and offending. By supporting young people to understand the impact on victims and the value of restorative thinking, there is an opportunity to increase levels of empathy. Several young people participating in the interview expressed no remorse for the victim of offences, expressing views that the victim was ‘deserving’ or expressing a lack of empathy – ‘I don’t care’. This idea of the ‘deserving’ victim was rooted in young people’s perception of the victim’s behaviour. Hosser, Windzio and Greves (2008) longitudinal analysis of event-history found that expressing guilt and remorse was associated with lower rates of recidivism. Results from this research reinforce the fact that custodial environments have a crucial role in supporting young people to understand develop restorative values and pro-social attitudes. Despite this, young people rarely participate in meaningful restorative interventions, with existing ‘restorative practices’ offered by untrained staff.

Summary

Findings from the research study have wider national and international relevance for the youth justice system, specifically in addressing the lack of effective measurement frameworks. This research has contributed to knowledge in relation to the methodology, theoretical approach and social impact measurement

framework. It demonstrates the validity of a sequential mixed-method approach for measuring the social impact of custody on young people, as well as allowing for the measurement of inter-organisational outcome performance. The position of the rehabilitative environment within a social impact measurement framework offers organisation, funders and policy makers an opportunity to measure impact on the micro and meso level which contributes to macro level understanding. This model demonstrates an environment that promotes positive outcomes for young people in custody by addressing factors such as health and wellbeing, relationships, education, independence and resettlement. By monitoring and reviewing each step in this rehabilitative environment, STCs and the YJB have the opportunity to measure the outcomes at each stage. Empowering young people, as well as staff creates an environment that promotes the development of young people which, in turn, supports the development of effective interventions and services. Overall, the research shows that the current STC model lacks direction, purpose and overall social impact. This results in confusions for the staff members employed in the STC environment that, in turn, impacts on the outcomes for young people. Overhauling the STC requires acknowledgement of the issues previously explored with emphasis on refocusing the purpose and vision, retraining and developing staff members, introducing support and supervision and focus on addressing the factors contributing to positive outcomes for young

people as explored in the rehabilitative environment. The research findings show that the current STC model fails to empower young people by offering inadequate and/or limited service provisions and also fails to empower staff by providing inadequate direction, support and training.

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About the author

Claire Paterson-Young is a post-graduate researcher at the University of Northampton. This article draws on her research: 'Inspiring Futures' through positive transitions: How social impact measurement as a form of organisational performance management can enhance outcomes for young offenders.

After completing an undergraduate and masters degree in criminology and criminal justice, Claire was employed by a voluntary organisation as its Youth and Restorative Justice Team Leader in Aberdeen. She was then employed by a local authority in the West Midlands as its Child Sexual Exploitation Coordinator. Claire's research interests include youth justice, human rights, child sexual exploitation, trafficking, restorative practices, and social impact measurement.