



Fife & Forth Valley  
**Community Justice**  
Authority



# Supporting Fife and Forth Valley:

**A report on the pathways into prison and supports available to young people from Fife and Forth Valley**

**Authors: Stephanie Smith, Fiona Dyer & Graham Connelly**

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## Executive Summary

### Background

This report presents the findings of a small-scale research project which examined the social work reports of 32 young men aged between 17 and 21 from the Fife and Forth Valley areas who were serving sentences in HM Young Offenders' Institution (HMYOI) Polmont.

Additionally, the research included semi-structured interviews with 12 of the young men who agreed to speak to researchers.

The fieldwork was carried out during December 2013 and January 2014. The population selected for inclusion comprised young men who entered Polmont during the year October 2012 to September 2013.

### Context

Young men who are in prison are there for a variety of reasons and present with multiple issues and needs. Many have been involved in offending over a considerable period of time, while others have committed a serious offence that resulted in custody. Many have difficulties with substance misuse, mental health, and are not in employment or training.

Research in this area highlights that many of the disadvantages that young people faced before custody are compounded on release (e.g. offending behaviour, homelessness, substance misuse, low educational attainment, unemployment, ill health and family breakdown) resulting in them being more vulnerable and susceptible to reoffending.

### Research questions

The research was guided by two research questions as follows:

- 1) What do the social work reports of young men in HMYOI Polmont reveal about their pathways into and out of custody?
- 2) What types of support were made available to young people before entering and while in HMYOI Polmont?

### Profile of the participants

The 32 young men included in the research sample were aged between 17 and 21 at the time of data collection. Sixteen (50%) of the young men had home locations in the Fife area. Sixteen were from localities in the Forth Valley geographical area.

A number of the young men were fathers. According to the reports, five of the young men had children, while it was explicitly stated that 17 did not have children. In the case of 10 young men, it was not reported whether they had children.

The young men were serving sentences ranging from a length of less than six months to life, with the majority serving sentences of less than two years. Three were serving less than six months, one was serving life and 22 were serving less than two years. Social work reports indicated that 18 had not been in custody previously, whereas five had previously experienced a custodial sentence, according to the reports. Several reports (9) did not make clear whether there had been a previous custodial experience.

## Key findings

- Court reports were not consistent in providing details which were pertinent in making decisions about the disposal. Nine of the 32 social work reports reviewed did not make clear whether there had been a previous custodial experience. In seven of the 32 reports whether or not there were prior offences was not reported. In 23 of the 32 reports, which noted that the young men had previous offences, the actual number of offences was not recorded and 14 of the 32 reports did not record any details about previous involvement with the Children's Hearings System.
- Twelve reports did not indicate whether alternatives to custody were appropriate. Overall, the social work reports provided limited details of the pathways that brought the young people to the court and custody, other than details of the index offence.
- Eleven of the 32 young men had a current social worker according to the reports. In 18 reports there was no mention of whether a social worker had been allocated.
- Among those interviewed, there was variation in the extent to which they felt they had clear information about what they could expect to happen at their court attendance, and the extent to which they received professional support on the day. Three out of the 12 interviewed said they did not have access to a social worker when attending court.
- Several of those interviewed expressed confusion about why they had got the sentence they received. Although most of the social work reports provided assessments of the alternatives to custody, most of the young people interviewed could not recall receiving explanations about different options and the appropriateness of each to their own situation.
- Thirteen of the 32 young men were noted to have health difficulties, but 19 of the reports neither gave indications of health problems nor made explicitly positive statements about their health.
- Seventeen of the 32 were reported to drink alcohol regularly, eight were described as heavy or "binge" drinkers, while seven were said not to take alcohol. Sixteen were noted to use illegal drugs regularly; only four were said to be daily users. The most commonly used drug was cannabis (in 13 out of 32 cases).

- More than half of the reports noted traumatic events in the lives of the young men: six had experienced the death of a parent; two had experienced the death of a close friend; six had experienced domestic violence.
- Sixteen of the 32 young men cited their parents as their main source of support; 13 had lived with a parent prior to sentence and 11 intended to return to live with a parent.
- Nine of the 12 young men interviewed said they received visits from family members while in prison. While some spoke about relationships with family improving while in prison, several clearly had stress in their relationships.
- Seven of the 12 young people interviewed said they received regular visits from social workers while in prison and could describe co-ordinated arrangements for accessing support with housing, employment training and education following release, while others did not appear to have access to the same amount of support.
- Eleven of the 12 young people interviewed had experienced exclusions from school and/or alternatives to mainstream education, and several described unsatisfactory prior educational experiences, but most expressed attitudes to education which were either positive or neutral, an optimistic finding in relation to the value of education in relation to transforming offending behaviour.
- Fourteen of the 32 had no previous experience of employment or employment-related training. Most of those interviewed said that getting employment was important to them following release, though few had specific ideas about what kind of employment they would like or what might be possible.
- The research clearly emphasises the importance of quality, stable relationships with family and with social workers.

## Recommendations

1. Social work reports would benefit from consistently recording details about the young men's history, including previous involvement with the Children's Hearings System, the number of previous offences, relationships with family, and proposals for continuing social work support following the disposal. Without knowledge of a young person's previous experiences, it is difficult to tailor an individualised plan for reintegration.
2. Where a young person is sentenced to custody, plans should be made for their release as soon after they are sentenced as possible. The young person and, where possible, their family and/or others they have a close relationship with, should be involved in creating these plans with their social worker and personal officer.
3. There is a need to ensure clear information is available for young people about court processes beforehand, and reasons should be given to explain sentencing after the court appearance.

This could be supported by the development of resources to explain court processes, such as the through-care process map.<sup>1</sup> Such resources could then be used as a prompt for discussions in supervision sessions.

4. Given that family members and friends are providing a considerable amount of information about court and custody processes and decisions, there is potential value in social workers looking at how they are engaging with the young person's wider circle of support, and sharing information with them where appropriate.
5. Continued relationships with community based social workers whilst in prison can help co-ordinate arrangements for accessing support with housing, employment/ training and education following release. This support is not currently available consistently and it would be beneficial to explore how to better achieve this. There may be benefits in ensuring all young people under 21 in custody have an allocated community based social worker whilst in custody and upon release.
6. All Court reports should on all occasions, with the exception of murder, offer alternatives to custody to the Court. They should all include the risk factors for the young person, so if they do receive a custodial sentence work can be undertaken to address all risk and needs.
7. The research revealed particular vulnerabilities for young people around transition times. More support, tailored to individual needs, is required at these times, and there would be benefits in exploring what such support could look like.
8. To undertake the above recommendations, all young people under 21 in custody should have an allocated community based social worker while in custody and upon release.

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<sup>1</sup> See: [http://content.iriss.org.uk/throughcare/sw\\_st\\_01.php](http://content.iriss.org.uk/throughcare/sw_st_01.php)

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 Background

In September 2013, the Centre for Youth & Criminal Justice (CYCJ) commenced a research project that aimed to explore the pathways young people (aged 16-17) follow into custody.

Subsequently the Fife and Forth Valley Community Justice Authority (FFVCJA) expressed an interest in the project and commissioned CYCJ to undertake a parallel piece of research that was focused exclusively on young people in HMYOI Polmont whose family homes are in the Fife and Forth Valley local authority areas (Clackmannanshire, Falkirk, Fife and Stirling).

This report draws together the findings of a review of social work reports for 32 young men from the Fife and Forth Valley areas who were serving sentences in HMYOI Polmont and semi-structured interviews carried out with 12 of them.

The parallel study, referred to above, had similar aims. It was also based on a file audit (N=125) and interviews with 11 young men. There are clearly connections between the two projects and readers of this report may also wish to [read the related report](#) available on the CYCJ website. While both reports share some conclusions and recommendations, these are introduced with the caveat that the populations differed (in sample size and ages of the young people), that the sources of the file audit data differed (the larger report made use of SPS psychologists' reports where social work reports were not available) and that the interview schedules were a little different.

### 1.2 Context

Young men who are in prison are there for a variety of reasons and present with multiple issues and needs. Many have been involved in offending over a considerable period of time, while others have committed a serious offence that resulted in custody. Many have difficulties with substance misuse, mental health, and are not in employment or training.

Research in this area highlights that many of the disadvantages that young people faced before custody are compounded on release (e.g. offending behaviour, homelessness, substance misuse, low educational attainment, unemployment, ill health and family breakdown) resulting in them being more vulnerable and susceptible to reoffending (Hollingsworth, 2013).

For many years, there has been literature highlighting the need for local authorities and partners to do more to support young people as they leave custodial establishments. When no support is offered, or factors which led young people entering into custody in the first place are not addressed, there should be little surprise when they return to custody.

The Youth Justice Board (2005) emphasise the five pathways that underpin effective reintegration as being: accommodation; education, training and employment; health and substance misuse; the involvement of families and financial stability. These are the risk factors for many young people who enter custody which need to be addressed to prevent them returning once released.

Research suggests that reintegration strategies that produce the most favourable results are 'holistic' in nature (Bateman, Hazel and Wright, 2013). That is, reintegration strategies should focus on the whole range of individuals' needs and should be integrated with support provided whilst in the prison and in the community. This support is necessary not only in the early weeks of readjustment on release but also in the long term (Hollingsworth, 2013; Gray, 2011; Peters and Steinberg, 2000). Problematically, evidence suggests that young people who leave custody with a lack of resources and support have a higher risk of returning to custody, particularly when there is limited co-ordination between agencies (Griffiths, Dandurand and Murdoch, 2007). Employment or training also needs to be in place prior to their release to reduce the risk of reoffending (HM Inspectorate of Prisons, 2011). Research also suggests that most young people return to their family of origin on leaving secure care and prison establishments regardless of suitability (Gray, 2011).

To support desistance and a reduction in the number of young people returning to custody, we need to focus on the future of young people and assess their strengths and needs, not just on their past behaviour. Interventions need to be dynamic and interactive in nature, focusing on the relationship between the worker and young person to ensure engagement (Prior and Mason, 2010). Individualised approaches are needed that build on strengths rather than needs and risks (Weaver and McNeill, 2007) and that respects and fosters self-determination (McNeill, Farrall, Lightowler and Maruna, 2012).

The amount and availability of support networks that each young person has is integral to their successful exit from custody. It is essential therefore that a social worker or support worker is allocated and that family and support networks are identified within the community and built upon for sustainability, with provision made for assessments and planning.

To examine if this research is typical of the sample of young people in HMYOI Polmont from Fife and Forth Valley and therefore implications for future practice, two research questions were considered.

### **1.3 Research Questions**

The research was guided by two research questions:

1. What do the social work reports of young men in HMYOI Polmont reveal about their pathways into and out of custody?
2. What types of support were made available to young people before entering and while in HMYOI Polmont?

The research focused on exploring key domains of support such as information provided to the young men and relationships with family, professionals and education, as well as considering the young peoples' perceptions of their future.

## 2. Research Methods

This project addressed the research questions through employing a mixed-method design comprising two separate phases. The first phase involved a detailed review of social work reports of 32 young men aged 17 to 21 from the Fife and Forth Valley areas who entered HMYOI Polmont during the year prior to data collection (October 2012 to September 2013). The second phase consisted of carrying out semi-structured interviews with 12 of the young men to explore key themes identified in the first phase.

### 2.1 Data collection and analysis

The data collection involved two elements: a review of social work reports; and interviews carried out with young men who were currently in HMYOI Polmont. The data were then analysed for consistent themes.

#### 2.1.1 Social work reports

A 55-item audit sheet was designed prior to data collection to capture the backgrounds of the young men from social work reports as well as assessing the extent to which young people in HMYOI Polmont had received or were receiving support across nine major themes. The themes were: social work; court report; previous offending; risk assessment(s); educational experience; employment; family; health; and an 'other' category that took in additional details. The review included assessing the presence or absence of a discussion on each of these themes across reports and took into consideration the level of detail where it was offered.

Data from social work reports were collected in-person by the research team within HMYOI Polmont during December 2013. The Scottish Prison Service (SPS) assisted the data collection process by locating the reports of young men from the Fife and Forth Valley areas and making them accessible to the research team within the prison. Data were collected through the completion of an audit sheet for each report. Data from four of the reports provided by SPS were not included in this report, as there was no definitive indication of the local authority area that the young men came from within the reports.

#### 2.1.2 Interviews with the young men

The second phase of the research required the creation of an interview protocol that consisted of questions around key themes, many of which were present in the audit sheet. The themes and questions also took into consideration the requests from the Fife and Forth Valley Community Justice Authority. The domains considered were: education; information; perceptions of circumstances; relationships; support; and the future.

Interviews were conducted by the research team within the prison with young men who had consented to be involved in this additional phase of the research. During each interview two researchers were present, one of whom conducted the interview while the other took detailed notes. A prepared set of questions guided each interview and with the consent of participants, all interviews were audio-recorded and later transcribed.

### 2.1.3 Data analysis

Data that derived from the review of social work reports were entered and cleaned before analysing in SPSS. Codes were assigned to the data across variables in order to capture as much detail as possible from the reports. Basic descriptors (e.g. age, local authority) were categorised according to natural delineations and other variables were categorised following a review of all data according to the level of detail present in the reports. For example, the types of support young men had received or were receiving were categorized into themes that were present across all 32 reports which could not have been anticipated from the outset. Where there was a lack of detail in any domain across reports, data were reported to reflect the presence or absence of inclusion across reports. Data were entered in this fashion in order to reveal basic statistics across variables.

Interview data were transcribed verbatim and analysed across all interviews to look for recurring themes. After constantly comparing and refining categories, four broad categories were fully developed which included: information; relationships; the future; and education. A series of sub-themes were developed across the categories which derived from language used across interviews by young people or were analytically imposed.

## 2.2 Ethical considerations

Prior to conducting the research, ethical approval was obtained from the University Ethics Committee which endeavours to protect the integrity, security and well-being of participants and researchers in sensitive research settings such as prisons. The research proposal was therefore subjected to an extended ethical review.

CYCJ, through its continuing relationship with the Scottish Prison Service (SPS), then obtained permission to conduct the research within the prison. Following this, CYCJ worked in partnership with Barnardo's 'Plan B', a voluntary organisation that provides young people with support within HMYOI Polmont. 'Plan B' assisted with the process of informing all young men from the Fife and Forth Valley areas that the research was taking place and extended the opportunity to participate.

In keeping with traditional ethical standards, young people were asked to formally indicate consent through signing a consent form. Consent extended to three items: to 1) participate; 2) give permission for the research team to review their report; and 3) engage in an interview. Young people were given the option to participate but decline an interview if they wished and it was noted that not all young people would be interviewed.

All young people were informed of their rights as a participant, including the option to refuse to participate at any time. It was assured that should a young person consent and later wish to withdraw they could do so without giving reason and without any consequence. It was also emphasised that all information obtained would remain anonymous; in no way would anyone outside of the research team be able to identify the young people's responses, and these would not be made in any way publically accessible.

It was considered advantageous to have a worker or workers independent from the research team speak to the young men as they would then have someone within the prison that they could

contact if they had questions or concerns. This approach meant that potential participants had the opportunity to talk over their involvement with 'Plan B' workers who requested and collected formal consent from participants. 'Plan B' workers passed consent forms to the researchers who also outlined participants' rights and also reaffirmed consent before each interview.

### 3. Findings

This section presents the findings from both the audit carried out on the 32 social work reports and the interviews conducted with 12 of the young men.

#### 3.1 Audit of social work reports

The audit of the social work reports allowed us to compile a profile of the young men in the sample, as well as highlighting specific details in respect of sentences, previous offences, health, alcohol and drug use, traumatic events, education and employment.

##### 3.1.1 Profile of the participants

The 32 young men included in the research sample were aged between 17 and 21 at the time of data collection. The mean age and precise age range were found to be as follows: 17.31-21.14; mean 19.36; SD=1.16. Sixteen (50%) of the young men had home locations in the Fife area. Sixteen were noted to be from localities in the Forth Valley geographical area as follows: Clackmannanshire (7 = 22%), Falkirk (6 = 19%) and Stirling (2 = 6%)<sup>2</sup>.

A number of the young men were fathers. According to the reports, five of the young men had children, while it was explicitly stated that 17 did not have children. In the case of 10 young men, it was not reported whether they had children.

##### 3.1.2 Length of sentence

The young men were serving sentences ranging from a length of less than six months to life, with the majority of young men serving sentences of less than two years. Three were serving less than six months, one was serving life and 22 were serving less than two years. Social work reports indicated that a majority of young men (18 = 56%) had not been in custody previously, whereas five (16%) had previously experienced a custodial sentence, according to the reports. Several reports, however, (9 = 28%) did not make clear whether there had been a previous custodial experience.

##### 3.1.3 Previous offences

Previous offences for which the young men had convictions noted in social work reports varied considerably. For example, where one previous conviction was noted, for three of the young men

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<sup>2</sup> One report did not identify the home area, indicating 'no fixed abode', though other contextual information indicated the young person originated from the Fife area.

this was assault, for three it was breach of the peace, for one it was a road traffic offence and for another it was theft.

In the case of three young men, it was explicitly stated that there were no prior offences. For almost a quarter (seven) of cases, however, whether or not there were prior offences was not reported.

Four of the young men had nine or more recorded previous offences, while in 23 cases of those noted to have previous offences the actual number was not recorded

In a quarter (seven) of cases, the principal prior offence was drug-related, i.e. involvement in using or dealing in drugs.

### **3.1.4 Alternatives to custody**

Twelve (35%) of the 32 social work reports reviewed did not indicate whether alternatives to custody were appropriate to the young men. In three of the reports the alternatives were considered not to be appropriate. In the remaining 17 (53%) cases alternative disposals were listed for consideration by the court. These alternatives included one or more (usually several) of the following: fines; community payback orders; unpaid work; supervision; restriction of liberty orders; and deferred sentences.

The reviewers noted that it was uncommon for reports' authors to come to a reasoned view about which of the range of possible alternative non-custodial disposals would be most appropriate in a particular case and actively advocate this to the court. It appeared more common to present potential alternative disposals in a more passive way. We understand why this is the case, since sheriffs have previously indicated that it is inappropriate for social workers to make recommendations that are regarded as the province of shrieval authority. Nevertheless, this observation perhaps indicates a point for consideration in practice: is it possible to indicate particular alternative disposals which would be more appropriate for individual clients without making a direct recommendation?

### **3.1.5 Health**

The majority of social work reports (19 = 59%) gave no indication of health problems among the young men or did not make explicitly positive statements in regard to health. The remaining (13 = 41%) referenced a variety of health difficulties such as: ADHD (n= 4); mental health issues (n=3); depression (n= 2); PTSD (n=1); and trouble with sleep (n= 1).

Additional details in relation to mental health difficulties revealed that the majority of reports did not indicate previous self-harm (in 21 out of 32 cases = 66%; seven out of 32 reports (22%) did indicate self-harm and for four (12%) there was no mention of self-harm in the report) or previous suicide risk (22 = 69%; four young people (12%) did previously attempt suicide and in six (19%) reports this was not mentioned) or current suicide risk (23 = 72% there was no risk, with four (12%) reporting a risk and in five reports (16%) there was no mention of suicide risk).

In four reports (13%) the young men were noted to be taking prescribed medication.

### 3.1.6 Alcohol and Drug Use

Across social work reports, the level of detail relating to alcohol and drug use varied. Over half (17 = 53%) of the reports indicated young men were regular drinkers, while a quarter (eight = 25%) were described as “heavy” or “binge” drinkers. Of the reports, nearly a quarter indicated no use of alcohol (seven = 22%).

Similarly, there was a range in reported use of drugs, with half of the reports (16 = 50%) indicating regular drug use. Very few reported daily use (in four cases = 13%). More than a third did not refer to any drug use (12 = 39%). The most commonly used drug, according to the reports, was cannabis (in 13 cases = 41.6%). Valium was the second most commonly used drug (four = 13%). A minority of young men were noted as using other illegal substances (e.g. heroin, cocaine, methadone, ecstasy).

### 3.1.7 Traumatic events

Details of significant trauma varied across reports. Whereas nearly half of the reports (15 = 47%) made no mention of past trauma, just over half of reports cited a variety of traumatic events. The death of a parent (in six cases = 19%) and experiencing domestic violence in families (six = 19%) were common experiences, followed by the death of a friend or peer (in two cases = 6%); desertion of a parent (in two cases = 6%) and the separation of parents (in one case = 3%) were cited as problematic experiences for the young men. What is noticeable is that a quarter (eight out of 32) of the young men experienced bereavement, whether it be as a result of the death of a parent or of a close friend.

### 3.1.8 Relationships

Data were collected on familial relations where available as well as with social workers across social work reports. The data revealed that 13 (41%) of the young men had previously lived with a parent and 11 (34%) intended to return to live with a parent. Further to this, half of young men (16) cited their parent(s) (e.g. mum; dad; or mum and dad) to be their main source of support as noted in their social work reports. However, in about a third of reports (11) it was indicated that the young men had a current social worker, while in three cases (9%) it was reported that no social worker was allocated. In 18 (56%) of the reports there was no specific reference as to whether a social worker had been allocated.

### 3.1.9 Employment

Nearly half of the reports (14 = 45%) indicated that the young men concerned had no previous experience in employment or employment-related training. In 12 (38%) cases the reports indicated that the young men had experiences in either employment or training but further details were not provided. One report did not include any information about whether the young men had any experience of either employment or training prior to coming to the attention of the court.

### 3.1.10 Education

The social work reports offered very little insight into the prior educational experiences of the young men. The majority of reports (20 out of 32 = 63%) did not indicate the age young people left school. Where this detail was recorded, the modal age for leaving school was 16, while one young man was reported to have left at 14, four at 15 and one at 17.

Only five reports (16%) noted additional supports provided at school and only about a third (10 out of 32 = 31%) provided details of any qualifications gained by the young men.

### 3.1.11 Additional observation

An important consideration that was largely unrecorded in the social work reports was details of the young men's previous involvement with the Children's Hearing System (in 14 out of 32 cases = 44%).

## 3.2 The interviews

As previously indicated, we invited all the young people in the sample who were still in custody to participate in interviews with researchers. In the end, 12 young men were either available, or were willing to take part in interviews on the days when the researchers were in Polmont.

All the interviews were conducted in the presence of two researchers (Connelly and Smith). The researchers alternated as interviewer or recorder. Interviews were recorded digitally and notes were also taken. Interviews typically lasted between 20 and 30 minutes.

### 3.2.1 Information the young men received about court and custody

During interviews, all the young men were asked questions about information they received when they went to court. The level of information young men received varied and came from different sources that were either formal or informal. Examples of formal sources are lawyers and social workers with family and friends serving as informal sources. Three of the 12 young people interviewed said they did not have access to a social worker in court. Also, the presence of a social worker was not necessarily a guarantee of support in relation to providing information about what would happen in court.

*"...my social worker came up and she waited for us and then, like I said, she says: 'You've got enough family with you so I'll just go home'"*

But more positive experiences of support from social worker were also described.

*"She came up and explained everything to me before I went to court. And the way she explained it, it was expected like when I went to court I expected everything to happen. So it helped a bit, more than the lawyer did anyway"*

Informal sources such as family members or friends also provided information. One young man noted:

*“My big brother’s been here before... He told me what would happen like I would go to court and this would happen and in there this is what’s going to happen and they’ll say this to you. I kind of expected what was going to happen but it was still a bit of a shock when I came in”*

Similarly, another young man reported not receiving any information from a social worker but was informed by siblings that had been through the process:

*“No I just heard stuff because my brothers were in here”*

Another noted receiving minimal information from his mother:

*“My mum was in prison before I came in and she said it’s not a nice place to be. But she said to me this is the life style she thought I was going to have...”*

Across interviews, experiences with support on the day varied; however, several men expressed confusion about how it was that they had received a custodial sentence.

### 3.2.2 Perceptions of sentence

In the interviews the young men typically expressed a lack of clarity or understanding about their sentence. Each young man seemed aware that some sort of sentence was inevitable; however several expressed *confusion* as to why they had got the sentence they received.

*“I was totally confused and I still am as to why I got sent here. I should have got a community order but that didn’t happen... they just said there was no alternative even though it said on the report I could get community payback”*

It was common for the young men to indicate they felt unclear about the explanations given to them and/or that they felt they had insufficient information. This view is exemplified by the young man who noted:

*“I didn’t expect to come here because I had already done a sentence I started a year ago and I didn’t expect it. I went up to court four times and they said if I had good behaviour I would get a community payback order. I went up on the fourth time and I was still on good behaviour but he said, no, 12 months”*

Bearing in mind that the audit showed that the majority of the young men had no previous custodial sentence, the court experience and sentencing options must have seemed confusing. A lack of understanding about why you are at court, or about the court process, is not a good foundation for desistance.

Embedded in each of these expressions are competing interpretations of the applicability of alternative sentences. The interpretations appear to originate from either informal information sources and/or their own observations. It would seem that these young men felt they were subsequently treated differently, a view evidenced by the young man who noted:

*“...I’ve never done community service and I ended up in here. Most people you meet in here have done community service. I’ve only been on a curfew and then I came off probation and then I got a sentence”*

Another young man, when asked whether he understood why he was in prison responded:

*“Not really. I’ve never done anything else really. I never had, like, any other sentence...”*

One can also infer from this response that this young man did not understand his progression from court to prison given his lack of previous sentences. It is likely that the lack of clarity is compounded by the competing interpretations, given that young people appear to be basing their views on the experiences of others (e.g. peers, family). In other words, the lack of clarity for some young people necessitates drawing on informal information sources, which, in the experiences of several young men, resulted in misconceptions.

While three young men indicated they were aware why they received the sentence they did, others expressed varying levels of awareness:

*“Maybe [it was] because I was high risk”*

This divergence in awareness suggests that there are barriers related to accessing information. How this variance relates to future desistance is unclear; however, exploring both awareness and access to information as it relates to young men’s structure of social support would be particularly advantageous.

### **3.2.3 Relationships and support from family**

The literature suggests that the social bonds that young people maintain can support or impede efforts toward desistance. For example, in a review of the implications of research on desistance for practitioners, McNeill, Farrall, Lightowler and Maruna (2012, p. 10) note that: “Ultimately, the pathways to desistance are through repaired relationships – within families, within communities, within the state – and not just through ‘correction’ of the individual.”

Familial support was explored in interviews with all of the young men. Nine of the 12 of the young men interviewed indicated that family members came to visit them in HMYOI Polmont. The *frequency/strength of familial relations* while in custody appeared to vary; for instance, one young man perceived his relationship with his family had grown stronger while in prison.

*“Well, my mum [visits] one week and my dad the next and then I’ll get my pals... We’re [my family] closer now”*

Another felt their relationship had become strained:

*“It’s hard being away from my family, I only get to see them two times a month”*

There were also particular issues arising, in part, from being in custody:

*“I’ve just not managed to sort things out with him [father] obviously because I’m in here I can’t get a letter to [father living abroad]. It’s just been a bit harder to sort things out”*

These issues relate to the quantity of contact, but there were also issues around the quality of familial relationships. Several young men indicated stressful and even burdensome relations with their families. This is exemplified by one young man who explained how his family support structure outside of prison was skeletal:

*“My brother’s in prison as well [as my mum]. My dad’s outside but he’s got back into drugs and that; he doesn’t support me at all... I phone him and talk to him but he treats me like a pal... I don’t like it but I can’t really do much about it”*

Similarly, another young man stated:

*“I’ll be basically supporting my mum [when I get out] but I get support from my sister and that. But that’s only if I stop drinking and that because she’s got a family as well and I don’t want to upset the kids and that”*

These quotations highlight how the young men reflected on the quality of relationships with their families, and how the quality of relations with their families influenced their future plans. Considering the audit showed that eight out of the 32 young men sampled had experienced bereavement as a result of the death of a parent or close friend, and the importance of family and friendship bonds in supporting desistance, this is an important issue for further consideration.

### **3.2.4 Contact with and support from social workers**

The young men interviewed reported having varying *levels of contact with social workers*. Nine of the 12 said that they had support from a social worker when attending court, but some indicated they had limited contact following their sentence. Seven of the 12 interviewed could describe contact with their social workers while in Polmont.

*“The first time I was sentenced, [a] social worker came and saw me and just told me to stay away from the wrong crowd and don’t take the drugs in here. That was it really”*

On the other hand, one young man said he met his social worker in prison monthly, while another said meetings happened at a frequency of twice a month. It appeared from the interviews that the young men typically understood their contact with social workers as occurring in distinct phases (prior to entering prison; while in custody; and following release), rather than being seen as a consistent and continuing relationship. All the young men interviewed reported the frequency of contact with social workers, or lack thereof, while in custody but could seldom elaborate on the *content of any such interactions*. Therefore, it is unclear how they may interpret the role a social worker can play. This may indicate an area for further work, particularly in the light of Farrall’s work on the role of supervision on desistance, which found that while probationers did not identify supervision as being helpful initially, nevertheless, as they reflected on the experience over a longer period they were more likely to think it had made a difference (see McNeill, Farrall, Lightowler and Maruna, 2012). One caution is that Farrall’s study was with an older client group and the findings may not transfer to a younger group.

One young man felt he had received all the support he required from his social worker.

*“I don’t need to see her anymore, like, I know everything I need to know”*

But a more common view expressed through the interviews was a lack of clarity about the level of support available to the young people.

*“Hopefully the social worker will be there [upon release]”*

There is a need to explore these issues further with young men in custody, as it was not clear whether there are attitudinal barriers to valuing available support or a lack of awareness of the support on offer. What is fairly clear from the research evidence is that the young people need to know that they will have professional support in the process of transitioning from prison to community, including developing personal resources, re-engaging with family and capitalising on “generative” opportunities for education, volunteering and employment (McNeill, 2009). McNeill and Burnett (2005) point out that the worker’s task is not just about helping an individual to build capacity and develop skills, but also to engage with his own “narrative”, i.e. how he constructs or might re-construct their self-stories.

### 3.2.5 Education

The interviews with the young men highlighted a range of previous experiences in education. Typical was a history of gaps in their education, exclusions from mainstream school and time spent in some specialist provision, including educational units in the community and residential schools. Several could identify something they enjoyed about education whether it was a specific class or a source of educational support (e.g. reduced timetable, residential school). Only two young men reported that they did not like school at all.

### 3.2.6 Previous experience of education

A recurring theme among the young men however was disruption from education. Many young men expressed that they felt that their education was interrupted in the past and two indicated disruption due to their present circumstances. Eight of the 12 young men interviewed could recall being excluded from school, and for some this was on several occasions. Three who had been excluded often gave very precise numbers for their exclusions: one young man claimed to have been excluded on 74 occasions in one school year; and another said he’d been excluded “about 36 times” in total; and the third recalled that it was about 30 times.

Mostly exclusions were from secondary school, when behavioural difficulties became problematic for schools, though one young man said his exclusion began at primary school. All experienced education provision alternative to mainstream school; for most this was at a residential school or secure care facility. Where alternative education was offered on these occasions, several young men still felt as though they had missed something. As one young man noted:

*“I got excluded a few times, then I got expelled and I went to a different school called New Directions... It was a reduced timetable, I went all the time. It wasn’t really a school like you*

*were doing maths and stuff, but you were out skiing as well. They were doing driving lessons and that... It was better, but thinking now I would probably go back to school"*

Another said:

*"I was papped out [of] school in first year and then I got kicked out in third year and sent to a behaviour school... it was ok, it wasn't education or that, it was more activities; they didn't really teach you"*

This young person went on to indicate he wished he had learned more in school. Another stated:

*"[School] was OK but I didn't get much out of it"*

Ten of the 12 young men indicated that they had completed or left school by the time they had entered HMYOI Polmont and therefore said entering Polmont had not disrupted their education, although two participants felt entering Polmont did disrupt their education. In the experience of one young man:

*"I was meant to be going to a thing called ERGO; it's like college but school, kind of. You can do that and then go to college but I ended up in here"*

A sense of missed opportunities was expressed by another young man:

*"[T]here's this thing called Triage in Stirling and they were going to put me on courses and they've been phoning my mum since I got put in saying there's courses on that I might be interested in and obviously I can't... If they're still on [when I get out], that's what I want to do"*

The disruption in going to Polmont left this young man unsure about whether the opportunity would still be available to him upon release.

### 3.2.7 Transitions

In considering disruptions, several seemed to originate, at least to some extent, during transitional periods. This is evidenced where young people associated disruptions in their education with *physical transitions* (e.g. relocating with family or to a new residential placement), *natural transitions* (e.g. moving from primary to high school) or *developmental transitions* (e.g. attitudinal changes). Not all young men attributed disruptions in their education to transitional periods, however, where the young men indicated that school was "okay", transitional periods are one factor young people identified with disruptions.

Where *physical transitions* were reported, they could be linked to attendance in some cases. For example, one young man noted:

*"I went to a couple of schools but it wasn't because I got booted out, we moved. I'm from [place name] but we moved to [place name]. I started bunking and ended up not going at all"*

Yet there were other participants who associated physical transitions with a change in experience. Another young man noted:

*"[School] was okay; I was quite happy there. I didn't really get into trouble or that. Before I came in here, it started to get a bit bad because folk were just annoying me... I was in one [school], then I went to another one. Then I went back to the first one"*

Another young man noted:

*"My social worker managed to get me out [of a residential school] because I wanted to go back to mainstream school... It was okay at the start but then it just got worse"*

It appears that the lack of stability associated with physical transitions exacerbated challenges the young men were experiencing at the time.

*Natural transitions*, such as the progression from primary school to high school, proved challenging for some young men. This was exemplified by the young man who stated:

*"Primary school was good, I enjoyed it... I liked high school as well but it just took more of an effect on me, like I was getting into trouble and that"*

The idea of educational support terminating was viewed as a natural progression by one young man and this transition was also associated with his present circumstances.

*"I went to school in secure... I liked the school in secure. [But], I got out of secure and got a job and that then I ended up getting recalled and in here"*

There may be benefits in providing additional support during natural transitions and of practitioners being mindful of the importance of stability for these young men.

Several young men (eight of the 12) described changes relating to *developmental transitions*. These changes were viewed to some extent as a by-product of *physical* and/or *natural transitions*. For example, one said:

*"School was okay. After a couple of years at high school it started to get boring doing the same things every day"*

Half of the young men interviewed said that they had enjoyed primary school or that it had been "okay"; difficulties with school tended to increase after the transition to secondary.

### **3.2.8 Young people's perceptions of "the future"**

During interviews we asked the young men to tell us about their hopes for their circumstances in "about five years' time". These hopes were typically expressed in relation to the desire to have relationships and employment. For some, hopes were also expressed in more individual terms, such as having a car and a nice place to stay. Eight of the 12 interviewed said that getting a job was important to them, with some suggesting that was important in helping them to stay out of prison in future. Few were clear about what kind of employment they would like or had prospects of gaining.

*"Get a job. Try and do that stuff. Cause if I go back out and it's probably the same things, and that, it's just not helping"*

*“To get a job and settle down a bit. And show my mum that I can do it - I’m not always going to be in and out of prison – just show her that I can do it for her and for myself”*

In talking about the future, the young men reported a range of attitudes toward having a “plan” for when they leave prison. Five young men reported that it was “very”, “really” or “quite” important, three felt it was “important”, two said it was “not really important” and two others were unsure. This range suggests that there are attitudinal barriers that need to be overcome in order to develop and support successful reintegration for several young men. It is therefore worthwhile to explore these attitudes.

### 3.2.9 Attitudes toward having a plan for leaving prison

Of the young men that assigned the most importance to holding a plan, there was a divergence of views held - between seeking a plan that offers *structured support* versus *independence* in moving forward. In the words of one young man:

*“[It is] really important because I have to stay in a routine. I get bored quite easily, like, if I’m not in a routine I’ll start doing stupid things”*

In assigning similar importance, another young man noted the need for autonomy in desisting from engaging in offending behaviour.

*“I think it’s very important to stop me from re-offending... [but] I don’t think the programmes really help. You need to sort it out yourself; no one else can really tell you. Because it goes in one ear and out the other, you need to do it yourself”*

Similarly, those that felt a plan was “important” felt they needed to know what they would be doing when they were released which is exemplified by the young man who noted:

*“It’s important. If I don’t have anything to look forward to I’ll end up just back in”*

Among those that assigned greater importance, the idea of structure and a routine were valued by many young men.

Two men assigned less value to holding a plan and their reasons appear complex. One young man stated:

*“It’s not really [important] because I know I want to do some stuff [but I] don’t know how to do it all”*

The other said:

*“It is important but it’s not that important just now because I’m still kind of young. But I’m better off getting sorted when I’m young so I’ve got years to chase it up”*

The two men who were unsure noted that they had “not really thought about a plan” and “never usually plan stuff”. For several of these young men their attitudes towards planning their future were linked to their aspirations and beliefs about the opportunities available to them following

release. Additionally, as these quotations indicate, more general attitudes towards planning were potentially also interfering with making active plans for their release.

### 3.2.10 Wishes for “five years’ time”

In the interviews we asked the young men what they hoped for themselves in, say, five years. All the young men articulated aspirations for the future and as we noted above, these tended to centre on relationships and employment. In other words, they felt the need for structural support and routine. Some expressed this as a wish to have a relationship with a girlfriend or to develop their relationships with their immediate family. A consistent theme in these expressions was the need for stability. For instance, one young man expressed it in this way:

*“[I’d like to have] a job, and that, a stable place to stay rather than go from place to place”*

The relationship between attitudes toward having a plan and articulating goals for the future is unclear. However, it is worth considering that the two young men who did not find value in having a plan also did not articulate goals that they wished to achieve in five years’ time. At the same time, some young men who assigned value to holding a plan expressed worries about the future. For example, one man noted:

*“I just worry about how easy it’s going to be to come back [to prison].” Further along this line is the young man who stated: “All of the other times [I was released] I’ve not really had any goals to achieve so I just go back to my ways”*

These statements suggest there is hesitancy among some young men in relation to the likely success of their re-integration and also that they will need support to develop confidence in their own capacity to succeed. This is important because of the research evidence which suggests that subjective states prior to release have a direct impact of recidivism (e.g. LeBel, Burnett, Maruna and Bushway, 2008).

## 4. Reflections on the Findings

### 4.1 Discussion

The young men whose experiences contributed to this study have had, for the most part, a childhood and adolescence marked by disadvantage, disruption and exclusion. Finding themselves serving a prison sentence makes them among the most marginalised youth in our society.

One of the key findings from the research was that many social work reports omitted important details about the young men’s history, including previous involvement with the Children’s Hearing system, the number of previous offences, relationships with family, and proposals for continuing social work support following the disposal. This lack of information poses implications for the successful reintegration of young people into society; more particularly, without knowledge of a young person’s previous experiences, it is difficult to tailor an individualised plan for reintegration.

We therefore recommend that this information is recorded more consistently, and thought is given about how best to facilitate this.

In order to ensure successful reintegration, young people and their families need to be involved and engaged throughout the reintegration process. Motivating young people and their families to take an active role in their plan, both in custody and on release, is crucial in preventing reoffending and for reintegration into the community (McNeill and Weaver, 2010). This research emphasised the importance of family, carers and relationships, and also the complexities involved in supporting those leaving custody. This leads us to recommend that plans should be made for release where a young person is sentenced to custody. The young person and, where possible, their family and supporters, should be involved in creating these plans.

Some of the young people we spoke to seemed genuinely confused about why they had ended up in custody. The lack of clarity expressed by the young men relates in part to barriers to accessing information. Although most social work reports provided assessments of the alternatives to custody, in interviews we found that most young people could not recall receiving explanations about different options and the appropriateness of each to their own situation. Confusion over the reasons they received a custodial sentence as opposed to an alternative also suggests the presence of weak social relations with adults in more powerful positions (e.g. lawyers and social workers). Not all young men reported confusion and it is important to note that it is unclear how and why this disconnectedness appears to have happened for some young men. Despite the reasons for this, we would recommend there is a need to ensure clear information is available for young people about court processes beforehand, and that reasons are given to explain sentencing after the court appearance.

The young men interviewed had different experiences of access to direct support from a social worker, both at court and during the period of sentence. For at least some young people, there was a lack of clarity in the explanations they received about what was happening to them and insufficient information provided. Some young people received regular visits from social workers during their sentence and could describe co-ordinated arrangements for accessing support with housing, employment/ training and education following release, while others did not appear to be receiving the same amount of support. The continuing relationships young men have with their social worker while in prison are enormously important. Social workers can provide clear information, emotional support and help to make preparations for life after prison.

The literature on desistance considers the strengthening of familial bonds as an essential element in ceasing offending behaviour. Where some familial relations were perhaps strengthened during custodial periods, others were reportedly strained or altogether weak. These relations pose a challenge to the successful re-integration of these young men into their communities and the overall desistance process. The variance in attitudes toward *having a plan* also presents challenges to eliciting behavioural change. Where the value of an overall plan was not assigned by all, many young men did however note the need for structure and routine.

The research also provided findings in relation to the young men's engagement with education and employment/training, both in the instrumental-vocational sense, and also in the wider sense of providing an inner world as the basis for developing resilience. Virtually all the young people had significant gaps in formal education and many had had unsatisfactory prior educational

experiences. Most of those interviewed had been excluded from school, some on many occasions. Several of the young men indicated that attending flexible education made them feel as though they had missed out on something. We found that their attitudes toward education were predominantly positive or neutral; only two young men out of 12 interviewed said they did not like education. Even during difficult transitional periods, most of the young men appeared not to be hostile toward education. These positive and even neutral attitudes toward education can be seen as necessary precursors to transforming offending behaviour. The evidence from the literature suggests that it is not educational opportunities themselves but attitudes toward education that relate to desistance (see: Maruna, 1999; Loeber, Stouthamer-Loeber, Van Kammen & Farrington, 1991).

As many of the young people in custody have a range of needs, several agencies may need to be involved and work in partnership to address these. Youth/ criminal justice teams or social work in general cannot address all issues presented by this group of young people. Nor can third sector providers be expected to do similar. Organisations need to take responsibility for the support they can offer and prioritise this group of young people, which in Scotland is considerably small. Many of these young people have multiple complex needs that if not addressed, will continue to manifest and develop and they will continue with their pattern of negative behaviour, costing society more in the long run.

In ending this report, we give the last word to one of the young men interviewed who was asked what in his view would be the three top things that would stop young people from reoffending.

*“Create jobs, more jobs for everybody to fight unemployment. More support for everyone outside and support for families and stuff like that. And the people in there – support for the families who are out there. The families get frustrated when they [young people] go back in and it’s hard for them. I don’t know what the third one would be.”*

## 4.2 Recommendations

1. Social work reports would benefit from consistently recording details about the young men’s history, including previous involvement with the Children’s Hearing System, the number of previous offences, relationships with family, and proposals for continuing social work support following the disposal. Without knowledge of a young person’s previous experiences, it is difficult to tailor an individualised plan for reintegration.
2. Where a young person is sentenced to custody, plans should be made for their release as soon after they are sentenced as possible. The young person and, where possible, their family and/or others they have a close relationship with, should be involved in creating these plans with their social worker and personal officer.
3. There is a need to ensure clear information is available for young people about Court processes beforehand, and reasons should be given to explain sentencing after the Court appearance. This could be supported by the development of resources to explain court

processes, such as the through-care process map.<sup>3</sup> Such resources could then be used as a prompt for discussions in supervision sessions.

4. Given that family members and friends are providing a considerable amount of information about court and custody processes and decisions, there is potential value in social workers looking at how they are engaging with the young person's wider circle of support, and sharing information with them where appropriate.
5. Continued relationships with community based social workers whilst in prison can help co-ordinate arrangements for accessing support with housing, employment/ training and education following release. This support is not currently available consistently and it would be beneficial to explore how to better achieve this. There may be benefits in ensuring all young people under 21 in custody have an allocated community based social worker whilst in custody and upon release.
6. All Court reports should on all occasions offer alternatives to custody to the Court. They should all include the risk factors for the young person, so if they do receive a custodial sentence work can be undertaken to address all risks and needs.
7. The research revealed particular vulnerabilities for some young people in relation to coping with transitions and also in dealing with bereavement, indicating requirements for individually tailored support in these circumstances.

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<sup>3</sup> See: [http://content.iriss.org.uk/throughcare/sw\\_st\\_01.php](http://content.iriss.org.uk/throughcare/sw_st_01.php)

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## 6. Appendix: Research Instruments

**Project title: Pathways into Polmont**

### Case File Audit Recording Sheet

Date:	
Audit completed by:	
Name/age/sex/ID: Research case code:	
Date data transferred to database:	
Local authority (currently): Previous (if any):	

Theme	Question	Response	Observation/Details
A. Social work support	(1) Has the young person ever had a social worker?	YES / NO	

	(2) Has the young person ever been looked after and accommodated?	YES / NO	
	(3) If yes – where and number of placements...		Location: _____ 1    2    3    4+
	(4) Do they currently have a social worker	YES / NO	If yes, Type: CJ   YJ   C&F   Other _____
	(5) Are they currently on S/R through CHS	YES / NO	
	(6) Other support/voluntary orgs etc?	YES / NO	If yes, name: _____
	(7) Current through care?	YES / NO	
B. Court report/GIRFEC plan	(1) Was Court report present in the young person's file	YES / NO	Level of detail:

	(2) Was GIRFEC plan present	YES / NO	
	(3) 72 hour review held	YES / NO	Details:
	(4) Family present/in contact at 71 hour review	YES / NO	
	(5) Social work support whilst in custody (number of visits, does young person feel supported etc)	YES / NO	
	(6) Alternative sentences offered to Court – what?/ When?	YES / NO	
	(7) Anything outstanding matters – what?	YES / NO	
C.Previous offending	(1)Has the young person previously been convicted of an offence/at the children’s hearing system	YES/NO	
	(2) Has the young person previous been in custody? If so how many times/status.		
	(3)Other disposals from Court/Children’s (1) Hearing	YES/NO	Details:

<p>D.Risk assessment</p>	<p>(2)Nature of index offence                  (3)Nature of previous offence(s)                  (4)Number of offences                    (5)Risk assessment present                  (6)Current level of risk                  (7)Level of seriousness                    (8)Protective factors</p>	<p>YES/NO</p>	<p>Details:                  Details:                  Number: ____                    If present, level of current risk</p>
<p>E. Education experience</p>	<p>(1)What age did they leave school/stop going                    (2)Were they ever excluded from school (including suspensions)                    (3)Were they supported at school/in a work placement/reduced time-table</p>	<p>Age: ____                    YES/NO                  YES/NO</p>	<p>Age: ____                    If yes, details:                    If yes, details:</p>

	(4)Any educational achievements/qualifications	YES/NO	If yes, details:
	(5)Any learning needs/disabilities identified?	YES/NO	If yes, details:
	(6)Any specialist resource /residential school attended?	YES/NO	If yes, details:
	(7)Number of schools/placements attended		Number: _____
F. Employment	(1)Has y/p ever been in employment/training	YES/NO	if yes, details:
	(2)has y/p attended college	YES/NO	if yes, details: Qualifications achieved:
G. Family	(1)Who was y/p living with prior to custody?	YES/NO	If yes, details:
	(2)Who are they planning to live with when released?	YES/NO	If yes, details:
	(3)Who are main supports in custody/in the community	YES/NO	If yes, details:
	(4)Do they have any children (details if yes)	YES/NO	If yes, details:
		YES/NO	If yes, details:

	(5)Are they in a relationship	YES/NO	If yes, details:
	(6)Any issues with family's involvement in crime/DV/drugs/alcohol (details)	YES/NO	Number: If yes, details:
	(7)Number of house moves/areas throughout life time	YES/NO	If yes, details:
	(8)Significant trauma (details/abuse/deaths etc)		
H. Health	(1)Any issues identified with drugs/alcohol	YES/NO	If yes, details:
	(2)Any health issues identified(including mental health) (diagnosed)	YES/NO	If yes, details:
	(3)Medication	YES/NO	If yes, details:
	(4)Ever self-harmed	YES/NO	If yes, details:
	(5)Suicide risk in custody (ever)	YES/NO	
	(6)Prior to custody	YES/NO	
	(7)Psychological assessment present	YES/NO	If yes, level of detail:

	(8)In seclusion in Polmont	YES/NO	If yes, details (reasons?)
	(9)Socially excluded?	YES/NO	If yes, details:
	(10)Attendance at clubs/hobbies?	YES/NO	If yes, details:
I.Other details	(1)Relationships in custody	YES/NO	If yes, details:
	(2) Peers – involved in offending (details)	YES/NO	If yes, details:
	(3)Easily led?	YES/NO	If yes, details:

## Pathways to Polmont Research Project: Interview Schedule

Interviewer: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Interviewee Code:

Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Digital recorder used: Yes No

Date transferred to NVivo: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

By:

**Aim:** To explore young people's pathways into HMYOI Polmont, and the options made available to them prior to entering and in assisting departure from custody.

### Research Questions:

- (1) What do the profiles of young people at Polmont reveal about their pathways into custody?
  
- (2) What types of support were made available to young people upon entering and to support their departure from HMYOI Polmont?

Interview questions will help answer the second research question and will centre on three key domains.

Interview domains:

1. Information (e.g. staff; social worker)
2. Opportunities (e.g. education)
3. Planning (e.g. departure)

## Explanation of interview to be given to interviewee

I'd like to know what information you were given about what to expect when you came to Polmont and what help you got when you arrived and if you feel that there is a plan to help you in Polmont. I would also like to ask you whether any alternatives to prison were discussed with you before getting your sentence.

Check Info sheet understood  Collect signed consent form  OK to use recorder?

The interview should not take very long. There are not right or wrong answers. We would really like to hear what you have to say. Remember that we will not use your name when we write our report, so what you tell us is confidential. Add the caution that if they tell us information that indicates harm to themselves or others, we are obliged to share that with another person.

## Interview Questions

Main question	Prompt or probe
[1] Before you came to Polmont, what was school like for you?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can you talk about any support you may have received from your school? (e.g. reduced schedule; alternative school)</li> <li>• Did you enjoy school? If not, why not?</li> <li>• How did your move to Polmont interrupt your education?</li> </ul>
[2] Have you ever been looked after or accommodated outside of how?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Where?</li> <li>• How many placements?</li> </ul>
[3] Have you ever been on a supervision requirement through the Children's Panel?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• If yes, has it been terminated?</li> <li>• If yes, was it before you came to Polmont?</li> </ul>
[4] Can you talk a little about the support you received when you were sent to court before entering Polmont?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Who provided you with support on the day?</li> <li>• What was their role? (e.g. social worker, solicitor, other professional; parent, carer, friend)</li> <li>• What did you think of the support?</li> </ul>
[5] What types of other sentences, instead of prison, were discussed with you?	<p><b>EXAMPLES:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➢ Supervised bail and remand schemes</li> <li>➢ Individualised intensive support packages as part of a Community Payback Order or structured deferred sentence</li> <li>➢ Intensive foster carers/Multisystemic Therapy (MST)</li> <li>➢ Intensive Support and Monitoring (ISMS) through the Children's Hearing System</li> </ul> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Who discussed the alternative sentence(s) with you?</li> <li>• Do you understand why you got prison and not another sentence?</li> <li>• Would you have preferred any of the alternatives? How might they have helped you?</li> <li>• What other experiences with alternatives have you had? (e.g. which? how many? perceptions?)</li> </ul>
[6] Thinking back to when you first came to Polmont, what information were you	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Who/what provided you with the information? (e.g. social worker(s); family; personal officer; psychologist; Plan B worker;</li> </ul>

given about being in prison?	<p>other- leaflets/websites)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Looking back, what type of information do you feel that you needed at that time? (e.g. different/more/etc)</li> <li>Did anything surprise you about any of the information you received? (e.g. was it different to what you expected / were told by other people?) If so, what surprised you?</li> </ul>
[7] Can you describe your relationship with your family since you have been in Polmont?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Has your family come to visit? If yes, how often?</li> <li>Who requests the visits? (e.g. you, family members)</li> <li>How do you find the visits? (e.g. helpful, supportive, etc)</li> <li>Has anything changed in your relationship since you came to Polmont?</li> <li>Who are your main supports while you are in Polmont?</li> <li>What other support do you feel would help you?</li> </ul>
[8] What do you do with your time while in Polmont?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What types of social activities do you participate in? (e.g. work parties; sport; gym; fitness)</li> <li>What about positions of responsibility in the prison?</li> <li>What about education or training? If not, why not?</li> <li>Do you ever read? [If yes, what do you like to read? If no, can I ask why not?]</li> <li>What about other programmes? (e.g. help / programmes for specific issues i.e. anger management; substance misuse; bereavement etc)</li> </ul>
[9] What would you like your life to be like when you leave prison?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>In five years' time, what would you like your life to be like?</li> <li>What could help you achieve that?</li> <li>What could get in the way?</li> <li>Do they have any worries about leaving prison?</li> </ul>
[10] What type of help do you think you may need for when you leave Polmont?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Who can/is providing that help?</li> <li>What type of support would you like to have from your family?</li> <li>How important is it to you that you have a plan for what happens when you get out?</li> <li>What other sources would prepare you for your departure?</li> <li>What about other support you wish you were getting?</li> </ul>
[11] Why do you think you are in prison?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Are you on a supervision order?</li> <li>Throughout your life, have you ever been in care?</li> <li>Have you been in prison before?</li> <li>What may have helped you to stay out of prison?</li> <li>Thinking back, was there a point in your life when ending up in prison seemed inevitable?</li> </ul>
[12] Is there anything else that you think I should have asked you or that you want to tell me?	

- Has anyone talked to you about voting in the Referendum in September 2014? Do you know how to vote?

**Interviewer's observations:**

## Follow-Up Questions (to be used as necessary)

### Elaborations:

Would you tell me more about that?

That's helpful. I'd like to hear a bit more about that.

I'm interested by what you're telling me, but I'm not sure I get the whole picture yet.

### Open-Ended Clarifications:

I want to be sure I understand. Could you go over that once again?

I think I see what you mean, but can you explain a little bit more.

Why do you suppose it happened that way?

### Detailed Elaborations:

Who else was involved?

When (when, how, etc.) did all this happen?

Can you describe the process in more detail?

What would be a good example of that?