YOUTH JUSTICE IMPROVEMENT BOARD

Improving the life chances of children who offend:

A summary of common factors

September 2019

"I'd probably be in jail if it wasn't for services. They showed me an alternative. They showed me another life" (Andrew)

At the time Andrew became involved with services he was not attending school and had been placed on a part time timetable due to his behaviour. He was about to attend a Children's Hearing following a number of assault charges. He was often with a group of peers who encouraged each other to take part in risk taking and offending behaviour. While at home he would often smoke cannabis and drink alcohol, with his usage increasing.

After several months of support, Andrew was doing well at school and his attendance was almost 100%. He had developed positive relationships with his teachers and had made good friends. Andrew was spending more time with his family and respected his parent's views and boundaries. He was open and honest with his parents and felt that they had a strong relationship as a result of this. Andrew was no longer drinking alcohol and he had also reduced his cannabis intake. He was no longer becoming involved in any antisocial behaviour or violent offending, had no further police charges and he was considering which colleges he could attend after completing his 6th year of school.

Andrew's story shows how with the right opportunities and support over the right periods of time he could move away from his offending behaviour and live a good life within his community. This paper seeks to identify factors which can support children towards that goal.

The document has been produced by the Improving Life Chances Implementation Group on behalf of the Youth Justice Improvement Board. The Improving Life Chances Implementation Group is responsible for supporting the Scottish Government's youth justice strategy Preventing Offending: Getting it right for children and young people, focussing on six themes:

- School inclusion
- Strengthening relationships and engagement
- Victims and community confidence
- Improving health and wellbeing
- Opportunities for all
- Transitions

During its work, the group has identified a number of factors which consistently emerge as being central to improving the life chances and outcomes of children and young people involved in, or at risk of involvement in, offending behaviour. This paper aims to capture these factors, drawing on practical experience, research and feedback from policy and practice. The purpose of the paper is to support practitioners, managers and policy makers in all sectors who are involved in improving the life chances of children. The paper might be used to stimulate discussion, inform continuous professional development and training, as a reference point to affirm practice, and to support reflection on how services and practitioners are, or could be, contributing to improving life chances.

The paper begins with a brief summary of the factors which have emerged across the six themes above. Each of the themes is then considered in turn, with outcomes that can be achieved and

challenges. Each section should be read alongside relevant guidance, legislation and standards underpinning the area of practice.

Common factors that contribute to improving life chances: Summary

Research on children involved in or at risk of involvement in offending behaviour tells us (see, for example, Youth Justice Improvement Board, 2017):

- **The life trajectory for children involved in offending is by no means set**. Low level, short-term offending is a common feature of childhood but most do not continue into adulthood.
- **The number of reported offences committed by children has reduced substantially in recent years**, with the number of 16 and 17 year old young people in custody falling by 77% since 2008, although youth offending trends are often misunderstood. The offending behaviour of a small number of children causes serious harm.
- **Children who come into the justice system are often the most vulnerable, victimised and traumatised in society**, often having experienced multiple adversities and presenting with a range of complex needs. The distinction between a young person being a victim or a perpetrator is often a false one.

Common factors that can contribute to improved life chances and outcomes for these children include:

- Wherever possible **providing support without intervening as a 'justice' service**, since contact with the justice system is known to be one of the biggest factors in continued offending;
- Recognising that **strong, secure, consistent and trusting relationships, even just with one adult,** is critical to achieving sustainable, improved outcomes, and that such relationships take time, patience, persistence and perseverance to build and sustain;
- **Building services around the needs of children**, providing all children involved in the justice system with information, support and tailored responses during their journey through the justice system;
- **Taking an individualised approach**, recognising that children involved in offending are not a homogenous group and that other factors may increase vulnerability and require additional support - for example being a young parent or carer, gender, sexual identity, care status, and health needs;
- Recognising that **all services, particularly the universal services of health and education, have a critical role in supporting all children to be included** and in building relationships, strengths, protective factors, and skills;
- Using **approaches which are rights-based** and first and foremost recognise these children as children, with the same rights as other children;
- Using **approaches which are developmentally-appropriate, trauma and communication informed** and build hope and resilience;
- Providing the **right opportunities and support at the right time**, meaning that a range of services and supports are available and are accessible, responsive, flexible and sustainable, and that services and those who are supporting the child work together, in partnership, including with the children, their families and communities;
- Having a **focus on progress and outcomes** rather than outputs: often there will be no 'quick fix' or linear pathway to address the complex needs and circumstances of the child - this often requires creative, flexible and responsive approaches, and progress should be recognised step by step;

- **Planning for endings** from an early stage, helping children and their families to move from dependence on specialist services to universal services, interdependence and independence.

The above reflect the approaches we should be adopting for all children under Getting it Right for Every Child. **No child is ever beyond help.**

1. School inclusion

School exclusion has been shown to have significant negative consequences for children and their life chances in both the short and longer term. The Edinburgh Study of Youth Transitions and Crime (McAra and McVie, 2010) has highlighted that exclusion from school by S3 is one of the most important predictors of gaining a criminal record in adult life, with exclusion by the age of 12 increasing the odds of imprisonment by age 22 by a factor of four. Children who are at risk of exclusion from school often face a range of other support needs and social issues. Those excluded are more likely to live in areas of higher deprivation, have additional support needs or be looked after by the local authority, and have often experienced (Scottish Government, 2017):

- Inconsistent and poor parenting and growing up in households with parental addiction, domestic violence, trauma, bereavement and mental illness, often leading to insecure attachment and a lack of ability to regulate their behaviour;
- Developmental delay or a range of conditions such as ADHD, fetal alcohol spectrum disorder, autism spectrum disorder and other learning difficulties;
- Parental negative experience of education which can reduce the likelihood that they will engage with education professionals and encourage their children, which may make it more likely that the child will disengage from school (Youth Justice Improvement Board, 2016).

"After I got excluded from school, I started robbing houses, stealing cars, drinking every day, smashing stuff up. Then I got secured and now I'm here" (Steve, Polmont)

How can we better support these children?

Factors that can contribute to improved life chances:

- Providing a **stable, trusted adult relationship**;
- **Working with the whole family**, providing non-judgemental emotional and practical support which takes account of all the factors affecting the child, not solely non-engagement with education;
- **Looking beyond the child's behaviour to their needs**, taking a trauma and gender informed approach which seeks to understand the distress they may be experiencing on a daily basis;
- **Taking a youth work approach** and focussing on developing solutions and resilience; building on strengths and aiming to pre-empt difficulties before they occur by empowering children and young people to become active participants in their learning and their lives;
- **Providing professional support to teaching staff** to aid their understanding of the needs of young people; using the full range of resources available including pupil support teams, school nurses and third sector organisations within school and in the wider community;
- Being **creative, flexible and responsive in creating learning experiences** for children who find it difficult to engage with traditional school provision and ways of working;
- **Persevering in the face of setbacks** and recognising that addressing multi-faceted, long-standing difficulties takes time and that progress needs to be recognised step by step;
- **Making children who are at risk of exclusion from school a priority** and including them in strategic plans (such as Children's Services Plans), and discussions such as within Community Planning partnerships.

What outcomes can be achieved?

Identified educational benefits include:

- increased attendance and engagement leading in turn to increased attainment;
- enhanced social and communication skills;
- improved relationships with peers and teachers;
- improved motivation and attitude.

There is evidence of wider benefits including:

- reduced substance use;
- increased self-confidence and self-esteem;
- motivation to change and hope for the future;
- improved family relationships and growing social networks;
- increased well-being;
- access to wider support.

Challenges

Transitions can be a very difficult time for some children, especially the move from primary to secondary school. Some vulnerable children can be particularly at risk of exclusion during their initial period in secondary school.

Successfully returning to school after a period of exclusion can be very difficult, with some children in the justice system reporting that they never returned to school after having been excluded. Return requires significant planning and support, which may include restorative approaches;

Peers can have a powerful effect on children who are excluded from school. In particular, the influence of older young people during periods of exclusion can lead to rapid escalation of challenging and damaging behaviours, including substance abuse and violence.

Once connections with school and the wider community have been broken, for example through exclusion from school, they can be very difficult to repair and protective factors including access to strong role models and participation in pro-social pastimes can be lost.

2. Strengthening relationships and engagement

The most consistently cited factor in improving the life chances of a child who is at risk of, or involved in, offending behaviour is a positive relationship. For these children, the importance of relationships within their families and with professionals working with them cannot be overestimated.

For many children, the relationships they experience can have a significant negative impact on outcomes for them and also their families. Achieving sustainable outcomes for the most vulnerable children relies heavily on strong, secure relationships, and support that is focussed on building such relationships (where possible) can help to improve outcomes. For a family, the impact of the trust, care and role modelling implicit in a good relationship is a transformational narrative, and especially for children with histories of loss, trauma and abuse.

Of course many responses and interventions are employed to improve outcomes for vulnerable children, but for any of these to be effective - even those identified as 'what works' - the professional who works with the child must first and foremost be able to build positive relationships with them. So how can these relationships be achieved?

Factors that can contribute to improved life chances

- Workers demonstrating **genuine care for, empathy with, and belief in**, the individuals they are working with. The promotion of hope is crucial
- **Time, space and the prioritisation of relationships** when working with children and parents who have often experienced trauma, abuse, loss, and negative experiences of relationships and professional involvement. The child and family members have often experienced insecure attachments, so it takes time, persistence, patience and perseverance to develop relationships.
- Recognising that **every relationship is different** and there is no blueprint for what makes a good relationship. One significant adult can make all the difference
- The need for relationships work to **start early and then evolve and change** as the child/family situation does, and ensure **endings are planned for** and take into account the views of the child and their family. Unnecessary changes in personnel should be avoided and where required should take place on a planned, well-explained basis, that involves a well thought out and thorough handover.
- Getting alongside people to **do with, rather than 'do to'**. Good recruitment is key to this since it is questionable whether the personal and professional ethos which makes a truly relational staff member can be taught.
- Having available services and supports which are **accessible, flexible enough to respond to changing needs and able to provide crisis support**. This will involve a full breadth of agencies from all sectors pulling in the same direction.
- **Encouraging creativity of** approaches and thinking outside the box to develop and maintain relationships. This means having a range of supports, interventions and services available for the worker to draw on as part of their toolkit. Flexible, well planned individualised programmes of support which are based on expressed need are more likely to be effective than a "one size fits all" approach.
- **Respectful and hopeful models of support** which:
    - aid families to move from dependence on specialist services to interdependence and independence, as citizens in their communities;
    - recognise the family as a whole system (whatever that family comprises) and have the flexibility to focus on working with whichever members individually or collectively are most significant to support sustainable outcomes for children;

- Support to **enable the child to develop the skills, self-worth and confidence to build pro-social networks**, with support from non-professionals with whom children can establish friendship relationships being very important;
- Encouraging awareness of, and joining in with**, local activities that provide children with things to do and places to go which are not "service-based"**. Community development and youth work services can have a strong role in this, with corporate parenting duties a possible lever to access such services.
- Adopting an assertive outreach approach and **maintaining an open door** to allow the child or young person to return to services as required (this may be the only positive relationship the individual has);
- Workers with the **ability to get things done**, to be focused, honest and clear about tasks, responsibilities and communication;
- **Giving attention to the nature of professional relationships within the organisation** that is providing support, recognising that workers will often replicate the relationships and experiences they have with their supervisor and managers in those that they have with the children and families they are working with;
- Establishing and maintaining **an organisational ethos and culture and delivery models which enable all of the above**.

"The big thing for me is that they came to my door. I suffer from depression and anxiety so sometimes leaving the house for me is really hard. When I was bad with my addiction they came out to see me all the time. They were the only people who did. I was really thin and I remember X saying he was worried about me. They were persistent. I think what really made a difference to me is that they came and chapped my door and I think that showed how much they care" (Peter)

What outcomes can be achieved?

There is evidence that strong relational work can have a measurable impact on:

- wellbeing;
- engagement and re-engagement in positive activities;
- prevention and diversion;
- the development of increased resilience.

Challenges

Sound relational work with children and families can mistakenly be seen as 'soft', and so can lose out when decisions about the most effective intervention are being made. Relationships and their impact can be robustly measured and services held to account for outcomes and the quality of their practice.

Continued effort is still needed to develop approaches that measure the impact of relational work and ensure that commissioning and funding cycles support the kind of relational work that is known to be successful.

There is no quick fix to relationship building and without the investment of time and resources to do so, the likelihood of making and sustaining change to improve outcomes is low. Commissioning arrangements that focus on outputs (such as how many people have completed programmes or cases that have been closed), rather than the needs of, and outcomes for, children and families are

unlikely to serve the best needs of the children and their communities. This can also perpetuate short-term funding.

Children can benefit from access to local community-based pro-social activities, but financial pressures have often resulted in the loss of such services.

Recognising the power of culture over strategy within organisations, there is a challenge to ensure that organisations consistently establish and maintain a culture that enables workers to be effective and families to feel respected and supported to move forward. True strengths-based work requires an organisational culture which genuinely believes in the value of this work and is willing to plan for and provide the necessary time to deliver it well.

3. Victims and Community Confidence: Young Victims of Crime and Victims of Youth Crime

The link between having been a victim of harm and crime and subsequent involvement in offending is well established, and the fallacy of the victim/perpetrator divide has increasingly been highlighted (McAra and McVie, 2010; Henderson, Kurlus and McNiven, 2016). The Scottish Government (2015, p. 13) has concluded "Today's 'offending' child is often a victim of yesterday's harm - the cycle needs to be broken". Moreover, a child who is a victim of crime may present other concerns which could result in the child being placed at risk (Scottish Government, 2015). How can this situation be improved?

Factors that can contribute to improved life chances

- **Providing victims of crime, including young victims and victims of youth crime, with information and support tailored to their needs and circumstances** at every stage of their journey through the justice system, including generic information on the criminal justice system and the support available and, more specifically, how their own case is progressing. This can include information and support via the Victim Information Service if the offence is dealt with via the Children's Hearings System and Victim Information and Advice Service if the case is dealt with in court;
- Providing information that is **accessible and understandable** and available at an early stage and at appropriate points in the investigation or proceedings;
- Enabling the child to **participate effectively in the investigation and proceedings**, so far as it is appropriate to do so. This may involve the use of special measures;
- **Ensuring the safety of the victim or witness** during and after the investigation and proceedings;
- **Providing fair and equal access to services for victims** following an offence and treating them with dignity and respect at all times. Where required, additional support is provided and any reasonable adjustments made to ensure that victims have access to information and support services;
- **Universal services offering activities that aim to reduce the likelihood of offending and therefore potential victims**. This includes Love Learning Scotland, Mentors in Violence Prevention, No Knives Better Lives and Medics Against Violence. In addition, children should be able to access support if they have been victims in the widest sense (loss, bereavement, trauma, bullying, or of crime) for example through accessing approaches that are restorative, nurturing or solution orientated e.g. seasons for growth and Place2Be;
- **Ensuring every child has access to at least one adult who can explain information and who they can talk to**;
- Since no single criminal justice agency has a remit that extends from the beginning to the end of a victim's journey through the justice system, **ensuring that all professionals working with young people have a good understanding of the youth and criminal justice system** and can provide accurate, up-to-date information.

What outcomes can be achieved?

- Reduced risk of young people who have been victims of crime going on to be involved in future offending;
- The potential trauma resulting from the experience of victimisation and a negative experience of the criminal justice system can be reduced;
- Young people who have had a more positive experience of and relationship with the criminal justice system may be more willing to engage in the future.

"I was verbally & physically attacked. I took part in in a Restorative Justice Conference so that I could work through and talk about what happened with the person responsible. It helped build my confidence to move on from what happened and I accepted an apology" (Hannah)

Challenges

The risk of being a victim of crime is highest amongst young people, according to the Scottish Crime and Justice Survey interviews, with males at greater risk than females and this being most notable in the 16-24 age group (CYCJ, 2017).

Children may not be aware they are a victim of crime and therefore may not report this. In this situation, no agency would be able to share information and the victim may not approach support organisations as they may not identify as requiring this service, know this is available or feel confident to proactively approach such services for support.

Information and the provision of support vary depending on whether the case is reported to Police, not reported, or how this is dealt with. This makes for a complex picture that can be confusing (Youth Justice Improvement Board, 2017).

4. Young People and Community Confidence

The Scottish Government is committed to a safer and stronger Scotland, supporting everyone's basic human right to feel safe in their homes and communities. To allow children to make a positive contribution to this, there is a commitment to promoting positive messages about children and young people, developing an evidence base around effective interventions, demonstrating the effectiveness of restorative practices and addressing issues around media perceptions of children and young people. However, we know children involved in offending can feel excluded from, and stigmatised by, their communities. Those in custody, in particular, can feel like a 'write-off generation' and may be worried that members of the community will not recognise the efforts they may have made to make positive changes in their lives. Moreover, children are identified as having the least understanding of community justice and what this involves, including how this benefits them and their community.

Factors that can contribute to improved life chances

- **Always applying GIRFEC principles when dealing with a young person under the age of 18**, including prioritising welfare alongside the benefits to victims and the community;
- **Providing communities with accurate and useful information about youth crime**, particularly in their area (CYCJ, 2015). Communities should be provided with regular, timely, proportionate and evidenced feedback on the extent of crime and antisocial behaviour and how they are being addressed.
- **Practitioners having local knowledge of community supports and facilities** to help maximise opportunities for children and prevent offending;
- **Making use of social and other media** to engage with children as this may be more effective than other means;
- Moving to the position where **community-based options to address offending become the default position**, and include support for change and social reintegration, not solely reparation;
- **Developing appropriate and effective reparative and restorative approaches** which provide children with a sense of personal control and offer direct benefit to victims and communities. Support to deliver high quality restorative justice interventions is provided by the Scottish Government (2017).

What outcomes can be achieved?

- Where a young person has a greater stake in their community and a sense of a positive future, the likelihood of further offending is reduced;
- Intergenerational practice which brings people of different generations together in purposeful, mutually beneficial activities, creating respect, builds more resilient communities.

Challenges

Many people misunderstand youth crime trends (CYCJ, 2017). In the CYCJ Stakeholder Survey (2015), only one in five respondents believed that youth crime had reduced across Scotland in the last five years, a period during which youth crime had almost halved. A large proportion of community councils were not confident in being able to answer the question. This finding is important because such misperceptions shape attitudes, and tolerance levels influence how crime and antisocial behaviour are tackled.

Perceptions and experiences of crime may differ from official statistics. Crime is not evenly dispersed throughout Scotland, with the risk of being a victim of crime higher in areas of greater deprivation (CYCJ, 2017). In particular, to someone who has been a victim of youth crime the fact that youth crime in general is falling is unlikely to resonate with their own experience.

Children and young people are still often stigmatised and discriminated against, and people with convictions are one of the few remaining groups in society who do not benefit from protection under anti-discrimination legislation (Weaver, 2018).

5. Health and wellbeing

Children involved in a pattern of offending, or who are involved in more serious offences, are almost always our most vulnerable, victimised and traumatised young people (CYCJ, 2016). The link between vulnerability, experiences of adversity and offending is retrospective not predictive, in that most children who experience adverse childhood experiences and trauma do not go on to seriously offend, but children who are involved in serious offending or frequent offending have almost always experienced trauma (CYCJ, 2016). The correlation between adversity, trauma and poor health outcomes has been well established. It is therefore unsurprising that children within the youth justice system have high levels of physical, mental and emotional health and wellbeing needs. Often individual young people will experience multiple, co-morbid, complex health needs, which may include mental health issues; post-traumatic stress disorder; alcohol and substance misuse issues; fetal alcohol spectrum disorder; speech, language and communication needs (SLCNs); learning difficulties/disability; head injury; and self-harming or suicidal behaviours. Often these health needs have gone unrecognised, undiagnosed and thus unsupported.

> *"(My) difficulties – (were) not diagnosed for me until secondary – how can that happen – if we don't do something about it will get worse and worse" (Paul, Polmont)*

So what can help to improve the health and wellbeing of young people?

Factors that can contribute to improved life chances

- **Reducing the factors that adversely impact on children's health** and make young people more likely to engage in risky and unhealthy behavior, such as the failure to meet basic needs, experiences of adversity and trauma, and hopelessness;
- **Providing opportunities for children to succeed in positive ways**, including through access to sports and community/leisure opportunities, supporting their developing self-esteem, helping them to feel valued, building hope for the future and supporting the development and/or maintenance of a positive network of support-factors which are all known to promote resilience;
- **Good communication** with, and practitioners actively listening to, children, to gain perspective on their wants, fears and needs and to ensure they understand information provided and the language used. Given that the majority of children in contact with justice services will have SLCNs, it is critical that we, as individuals and organisations, tailor our methods of communicating and promote communication inclusive environments CYCJ, 2018);
- Providing broad, inclusive, interactive, quality **health education** that includes mental and emotional wellbeing, physical activity, nutrition, cooking, dental health, sexual health, relationships, consent, medication, substances, relationships, feelings, sleep, confidence and stigma. This must also be available to children who are excluded from school, have poor attendance, or are educated outwith mainstream provision;
- The provision of **information and education to parents**;
- **A trusted adult** who can, for example, provide assistance to access and link in with health services, accompany the child to appointments, liaise with health professionals, advocating on the child's behalf, and help them to make sense of their life experiences and the impact of these experiences;

- **Providing a wide range of universal, targeted and specialist services that are publicised, available, accessible, local, responsive, flexible, sustainable, and that adopt an assertive outreach approach** to actively engage children, with any geographical or service-led barriers that get in the way of meeting needs addressed through joined-up and partnership working. Consistency and continuity of service is particularly crucial for our looked after children, those transitioning to/from secure care or custody, and from child to adult services.
- Recognising that service design matters and **building services around the needs of children** and driven by them, not the service, ensuring that organisations and their processes do not replicate previous negative experiences (e.g. trauma, adversity, stigma, or poor relational experiences);
- **Adopting individual and person centred approaches in all interactions**, that emphasise consistency and build on the strengths of the child, respect the child's rights and are relationship-based;
- **Recognising health and wellbeing as a part of holistic intervention for children** which all practitioners have a responsibility to promote and a role in providing and/or supporting access to the right support at the right time;
- **Ensuring the whole workforce has robust baseline and ongoing training** on trauma, adversity and mental health, attachment and resilience, child development and the impact on young people. In addition, there is a need to support the workforce in managing the often challenging work of supporting children with complex needs;
- **Understanding that involvement with the justice system itself can be a traumatic, frightening, and confusing experience**, which adversely impacts on the health and wellbeing of children. The provision of appropriate support at each stage of a child's journey through the justice system is critical, as is recognising and addressing any additional support needs they may have. While desistance is often a desired outcome, this too can bring pains and losses that must be addressed and filled if the commitment to desistance is to be sustained and wider positive outcomes are to be achieved;
- **Recognising no child is beyond help and adolescence provides a unique stage of development** and a period of rapid physical, psychological and social development which offers an important opportunity for positive interventions and influences. Moreover, adolescence is a period of greater exposure to health-influencing behaviours, including smoking and alcohol use, which although often negatively focused on, can also provide opportunities for behaviour to be positively shaped and so improve health outcomes in the longer-term (Pringle et al., 2016). It is crucial that this "second chance" is utilised, we invest in our adolescents and particularly our vulnerable young people, and that we take an optimistic approach.

What outcomes can be achieved?

- Improved physical, mental and emotional health and wellbeing;
- Increased knowledge and expectations of, access to, and engagement and satisfaction with services;
- Increased knowledge and understanding of health and wellbeing issues and understanding of information provided.

Challenges

Structural inequality, for example poverty, unstable accommodation and homelessness, has an impact on health and wellbeing and in constraining access to services.

Children can be reluctant to discuss health matters, often leading to information (that can be inaccurate) being accessed via peers or poorly informed adults, or online. They can be vulnerable to

peer pressure and may also have had negative previous experiences with services that shape their expectations and approaches towards services.

We still have a way to go to make services child-centred and needs-led. Referral and access criteria for, and availability of, services can be inconsistent across areas and children may be denied access to one service because of issues in another area of their life e.g. using substances or not meeting the referral criteria for services (e.g. CAMHS and addictions services). This can result in children who have multiple needs being unable to access support for any of these as none are deemed “severe” enough to meet referral criteria.

6. Opportunities for all - post-16 learning, training or work

Children at risk of, or involved in offending behaviour, have often been disengaged from education or have had difficult educational experiences. For these children and young people, participation in learning, education, training and employment is generally associated with reduced offending and desistance. "Opportunities for All" provides the framework to support all young people to participate in post-16 learning, training or work. A wide range of initiatives and programmes are available to help promote children's engagement in education, training and employment, with those involved in offending often a priority group for initiatives.

"They tried to help me with everything and they were still there when I told them I didn't want them" (Dean, who was supported to develop aspirations for the future and into work experience with a local construction group, resulting in him spending more time with a group of people from his work placement, rather than in areas where he was becoming involved in antisocial behaviour, improved family relationships and the hope of gaining gain full time employment).

Factors that can contribute to improved life chances

- Recognising that **children's previous experiences of learning and education may have been negative**, which may present barriers to future engagement;
- **Providing the right opportunity/course/job, at the right time**, with appropriate, ongoing, coordinated, flexible and wraparound support to sustain this;
- Support that is **tailored to individual need**, including being available outwith typical office hours and engagement with wider family members;
- Having the **time and space to engage with children and develop relationships with them**, which is critical to gain trust, get to know the child and their goals and hopes, support engagement and sustain participation in training and/or employment;
- Good **partnership working**, where all agencies are clear about what their role is and budgets can be used flexibly and smartly;
- Tangible **support to help children on their career path**, within which volunteering, entry level opportunities and jobs, work experience, mock interviews, qualifications, and support to build employability skills are often crucial, with it being vital the importance of such support is formally recognised;
- **Using Community Payback Orders (CPOs) flexibly and creatively**, particularly the Unpaid Work or Other Activity requirement, to balance the punitive, reparative and rehabilitative elements of the order. CPOs can be utilised to build skills, provide training and address wider issues impacting on the individual's life, to improve chances in the local labour market (Nolan, 2017);
- **Providing people with convictions with good quality information and support** regarding the disclosure of criminal records including the periods of disclosure, what requires to be disclosed, and how this can be managed (see for example Scotland Works for You), although it is recognised this knowledge and service provision is inconsistent;
- **Recognising the importance of exit planning**, to ensure that children are not left unsupported when their engagement with programmes, projects or orders ends. Facilitation of peer relationships is vital as children may have very limited support outwith professionals. Transitions should be planned and actively facilitated and links, including introductions to named contacts, made to other organisations where skills can continue to be developed and supports and structure provided.

What outcomes can be achieved?

- Reduced offending;
- Increased sustainability of transitions;
- Development of a support network of positive relationships and peers to support them in life;
- Although varying by individual, engagement in such activities can help to establish financial stability; reduce unstructured time by providing pro-social activities and a daily routine; positively impact on identity and goals; contribute to the accumulation of human and social capital; and promote self-esteem (CYCJ, 2018).

Challenges

The journey to "positive destinations" is often less linear and can be longer for children involved in offending. There is no one path and even when a "positive destination" is reached, this is often not the end of these children and young people's support needs.

Access to support services and programmes can still be constrained by age cut-offs and geographical boundaries, with good practice inconsistent across the country.

There is a risk that the needs of children and young people involved in offending are lost within the evolving landscape and the structures of the employability agenda, and there is a need to continue to champion these young people and opportunities for them.

The current system of disclosure of criminal convictions can detrimentally impact on people with convictions and opportunity providers.

There are difficulties in measuring success and obtaining data in this area, including on sustainability of opportunities.

Failure to meet basic needs, such as housing, correct benefits and having a bank account, can have a significant impact on a young person's ability to access education, training and employment. At the same time, participation in programmes to promote positive destinations may adversely impact on, for example, access to supported accommodation and benefits.

7. Transitions

By their very nature transitions can be times when relationships, routines and security are disrupted. For children and young people who are vulnerable, and have offended or are at risk of offending, transitions of any kind can be a stressful and risky time. Recognising this, we take a broad view of all transitions, encompassing those being made from the community to secure care or custody and vice versa; from secure care to custody; from Young Offenders Institutions to adult establishments (with the associated transitions each of these moves would bring); from child to adult services; and youth justice to adult justice (CYCJ, 2018).

Children in secure care and custody are some of our most vulnerable, disadvantaged and excluded in society, with transitions to and from these establishments being major life events, often experienced as traumatic (CYCJ, 2018). What can we do to minimise the stress of these transitions, which inevitably involve an ending and may involve multiple different transitions that affect each other (Murphy, 2018)?

"You're a teenager still and then you're pregnant and you're terrified and don't know what to do and what to expect and you've got to make it on your own and manage your bills and manage your door and all this stuff that you've never had to do. I don't know what I would have done without them [the throughcare team] I was just terrified" (Sally, young person with experience of secure care)

Factors that can contribute to improved life chances

- **Personal and also structural support**, such as for accommodation, education, training and employment, health and substance misuse, involvement of families and financial stability (Beyond Youth Custody, 2017);
- Support that is (Beyond Youth Custody, 2017):
    - **Constructive** - focused on the identity shift of the young person, future orientated, motivating, strengths-based and empowering
    - **Co-created** - inclusive of the young person and their supporters
    - **Customised** – involving individual and diverse wraparound support
    - **Consistent** - throughout the journey, seamless, enhanced at transitions, and based on stable relationships
    - **Coordinated** - managed across widespread partnerships across organisations

  These features are aligned with the Scottish Transitions Forum's Principles of Good Transitions, which include being person-centred, coordinated, starting early and being provided in the longer-term, with support and information that is accessible to young people and their families;
- **Providing a sense of purpose**, activities to fill time, having people who care and having a place and space for change, since a child's commitment to desistance can be undermined by not having anywhere to go or things to do;
- Ensuring that the transition is not the end in itself, by **having a focus on how re-integration into the community can be made a sustainable outcome** for children and what can sustain desistance at the same time as improving other aspects of their lives.

What outcomes can be achieved?

- Reduced likelihood of reoffending and ultimately supporting desistance;
- Reduced likelihood of returning to secure care or custody;
- Improved experiences of transition and reintegration to the community;
- Improved wellbeing and quality of life;
- Shifting the individual's perception of themselves from an identity that promotes offending to one that promotes positive contribution to society, with a new narrative for how they relate to others (Hazel et al., 2017).

Challenges

It is clear we need to have adequate strategies to support children and young people in coping with transitions, given the high levels of complex needs often presented and the challenges of supporting them in engaging with services/interventions, and with the subsequent move beyond these services to social networks, universal services and opportunities.

There may be a need to rethink how we frame desistance: ceasing offending is only one aspect and other outcomes (such as quality of life) are key both to sustaining desistance and improving outcomes for young people, their families and communities.

There are challenges in defining and finding appropriate measures of success following transitions.

Within the ever-changing landscape of support there is a need for continued recognition that children leaving custody have different throughcare needs to those of adults, and that gender needs differ.

Wider issues outwith the justice system, for example housing, benefits, poverty and socio-economic disadvantage, can have an impact on the outcomes of children and young people during and after transitions.

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