



SUMMARY

**THE CONTRIBUTION OF CYCJ:
BOUNDARY-SPANNING &
SYSTEM DEVELOPMENT**



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Why commission an evaluation?

The Scottish Government and CYCJ commissioned this independent evaluation. The aim of the evaluation was to identify and document CYCJ's processes, stakeholder perceptions, impact on policy and practice as well as areas for change. As an organisation that sits in the midst of a complex and challenging world, at CYCJ we were conscious that we needed to reflect on what we do, how we do it and how we could do things better. CYCJ has existed for over six years and we were coming to the end of our organisational strategy as well as Scotland's strategy for children and young people involved in offending. The timing felt right to reflect on both where we want to go next as a youth justice sector, and as an organisation.

This evaluation wasn't driven by external partners wanting to know whether CYCJ was doing a good job or offered value for money. It was motivated by a desire across the CYCJ team to better understand our work and challenge ourselves about how we can build on what we do to deliver more impact. It was important to us to question and be honest with ourselves about whether we are doing the best we possibly can for children in conflict with the law, and those who support them. We were also conscious of the pressures of finances across Scotland, so we wanted to understand how we could improve our impact without requiring additional resource. We know we are not alone in grappling with these questions, as across the youth justice landscape (and beyond it) organisations, services, teams and individuals are reflecting on how they can keep doing the same, or how they can do more, for less.

We were also aware that we needed to really 'live' our values and ensure we were open to the type of evidence-based challenge that we so often pose others. If we did not undertake an exercise such as this, and openly, it would undermine our credibility as an organisation and we could not expect others to respond positively to the constructive challenge we are happy to give. We are human, we make mistakes, and don't always act as we should. In owning up to this we hope to enable others across the youth justice world to talk about these things too. After all, in order to improve we need to start by identifying the areas requiring improvement.



Claire Lightowler & Fiona Dyer
(CYCJ Director and Deputy Director)

This evaluation has been published in full, unedited by CYCJ and the Scottish Government, who jointly commissioned the work.

ABOUT CYCJ

CYCJ is primarily funded by the Scottish Government and hosted by the University of Strathclyde. Visit www.cycj.org.uk to find out more.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Catherine-Rose Stocks-Rankin is a researcher, knowledge mobiliser and evaluator. She has expertise in both the theory and practice of knowledge translation and evidence into action. She describes her methods as 'creating a bridge between policy, practice and community with a focus on generating evidence that leads to meaningful social change.' Find out more [@thisiscrsr](https://twitter.com/thisiscrsr).

Background:

Boundary-spanning organisations

CYCJ is not a service provider, though it has provided a therapeutic service. It is not an academic unit, though it is based in a University. It is not part of the Scottish Civil Service, though it is primarily funded by the Scottish Government. CYCJ is not a representative body for youth justice workers, though many in the team have that practice background. Nor is it a representative body for justice-experienced young people, though it funds and supports a group led by young people.

Given this list of ambiguities, what exactly is CYCJ?

CYCJ is a boundary-spanning intermediary organisation. Boundary spanners are capable of contributing to system change. Their work to redress the imbalances of information, to connect and share insight across groups, to coordinate people to collaborate on key issues as well as focused interventions on seemingly intractable issues can come together to create paradigm shifts in the system.

Paradigm shifts are substantial changes in the system at several levels: The space of ideas and language where what's possible is imagined and described, the space of governance where tools like the law, legislation and policy are used to give structure to these ideas and finally the space of culture and behaviour where we do the work of making real the world we've imagined.

Paradigm shifts are a normal part of a change process. If we apply a systems lens to the youth justice sector, then we see there is no way to achieve the ideal system. There is no stasis. Instead, development looks like iterative change processes where the system responds and adjusts to the interventions it receives.

One way of understanding the change process is the Satir model of change, which shows how a paradigm shift will lead to the creation of a new status quo (Satir, Banmen, Gerber, and Gomori (1991). In order for sustained development to be achieved, each new status quo will need to be challenged and a new paradigm shift created (see Christie-Seely 2017).

Intermediaries can offer the 'foreign element' through their intervention, i.e. new idea, research evidence or approach. But this foreign element is just as likely to be an event like a change in government or a crisis within the system. Intermediaries can also offer the 'transforming idea' and support the system to work through the chaos into a process of integration and stabilisation.

A marker of success for an intermediary is its ability to advance a paradigm shift in the way that issues are addressed at different levels of power and in different fields of practice. The greatest risk for an intermediary is the possibility that it may reproduce the status quo and fail to support system-wide development.

“Multi-dimensional problems require multi-dimensional solutions”
(Sturm 2010, p1119)

Findings: What is CYCJ's contribution?

In 2015, the Scottish Government began its Youth Justice Strategy with the following statement: "Our vision of Scotland as the best place to grow up extends to all of our children and young people" (Scottish Government 2015, p2).

Putting children and young people at the heart of the systems designed to support them has been an important feature of the Scottish approach to youth justice since Kilbrandon. But, as many of the people interviewed for this research suggest, there is still a gap between the vision and reality of youth justice system in Scotland. CYCJ, like many others in the field, are working to close that gap.

CYCJ's contribution to the youth justice sector in Scotland is three-fold. CYCJ produces information which is of use, and robust, for its audience. It offers boundary-spanning linkages to break down the silos between organisations, services, and kinds of practice and is trusted by its collaborators to work practically, with them, to find solutions. Finally, CYCJ maintains a focus on seemingly intractable issues in the sector, providing a multi-pronged approach to untangling and unsettling the barriers to change through research, development of guidance, and in-depth project work.

CYCJ's particular impacts can be observed in the case studies in the full report, which shows the detail of how change occurs, for whom and in what circumstances.

Examples of the kinds of impact CYCJ has achieved:

- Support to individual practitioners – CYCJ offers support for innovative approaches to custody and the argumentation to ensure that planning is successful and a young person's support is tailored to their capacity and need.
- Support for service development – CYCJ has supported the transformation of services through its research, training and project work.
- Support to develop the vision of youth justice in Scotland – it is the view of some stakeholders that CYCJ has expanded the discursive space of what's possible for children and young people in Scotland.
- At a resource level – CYCJ has created new information, new evidence and new ideas which have improved the knowledge and understanding amongst its collaborators.
- At a relationship level – CYCJ has facilitated groups, supported difficult conversations to occur, and linked people together in aid of the safe transition of young people into and out of custody.
- At a system development level – CYCJ has co-created the infrastructure for good practice and policy implementation, e.g. through its work on the Youth Justice Standards, the Secure Care Standards and the Guidance for Diversion from Prosecution.

CYCJ is more than these particular contributions. Taken in isolation, this work is impressive. But it's the combination of these activities – it's the ability to work at the highest echelons on policy making and governance and into the depth and detail of day-to-day practice that makes CYCJ effective.

These contributions are occurring within a climate where there is a strong values alignment amongst CYCJ's collaborators. Strategic leaders were consistent in their discussion of three touchstones: Kilbrandon, GIRFEC, UNCRC and practitioners were similarly consistent in their view that young people engaged in, or at risk of, offending behaviour were deserving and in need of support.

But there are still a range of challenges which are affecting progress in the sector. Practitioners, service managers, policy makers, academics and civil society leaders interviewed as part of this research described the following barriers for the sector:

1. Power differentials between adults and young people.
2. Loss of specialist identity and expertise amongst youth justice professionals.
3. A lack of financial resources in the sector.
4. Competition between different parts of the youth justice sector.
5. Instability of relationships in the sector.
6. Inconsistency of practice.
7. Short-term project funding as a core driver for innovation and the challenge of maintaining momentum when funding ends.
8. Barriers between different parts of the sector, e.g. different social work teams.
9. Balancing relational ways of working with transactional ways of working.

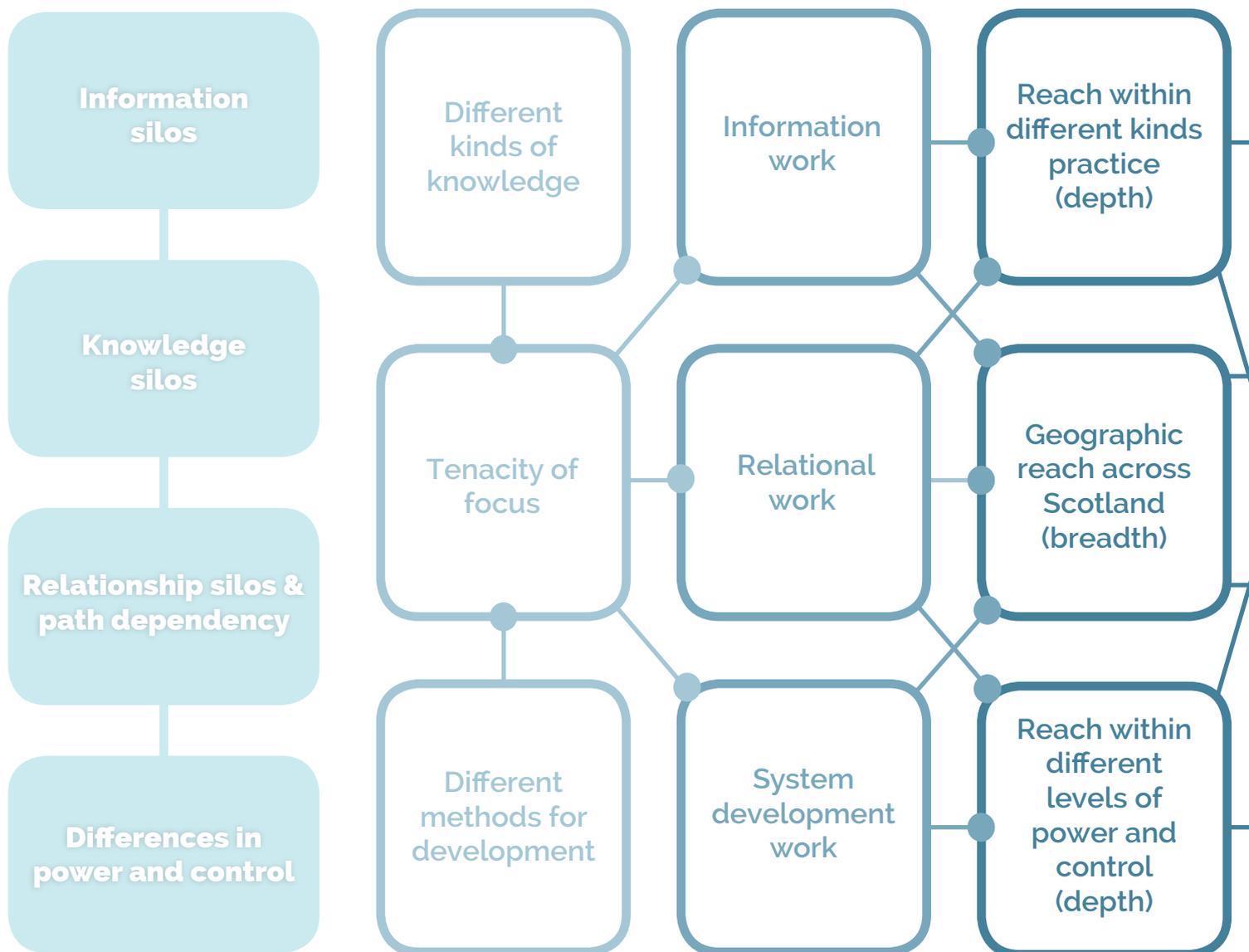
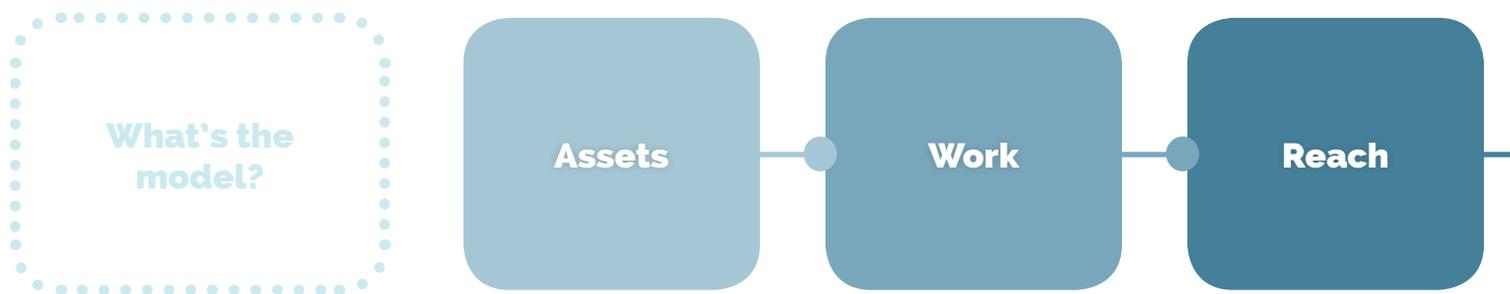
The challenges of the sector are also CYCJ's challenges. How does its current work address issues facing the sector in 2019/2020?

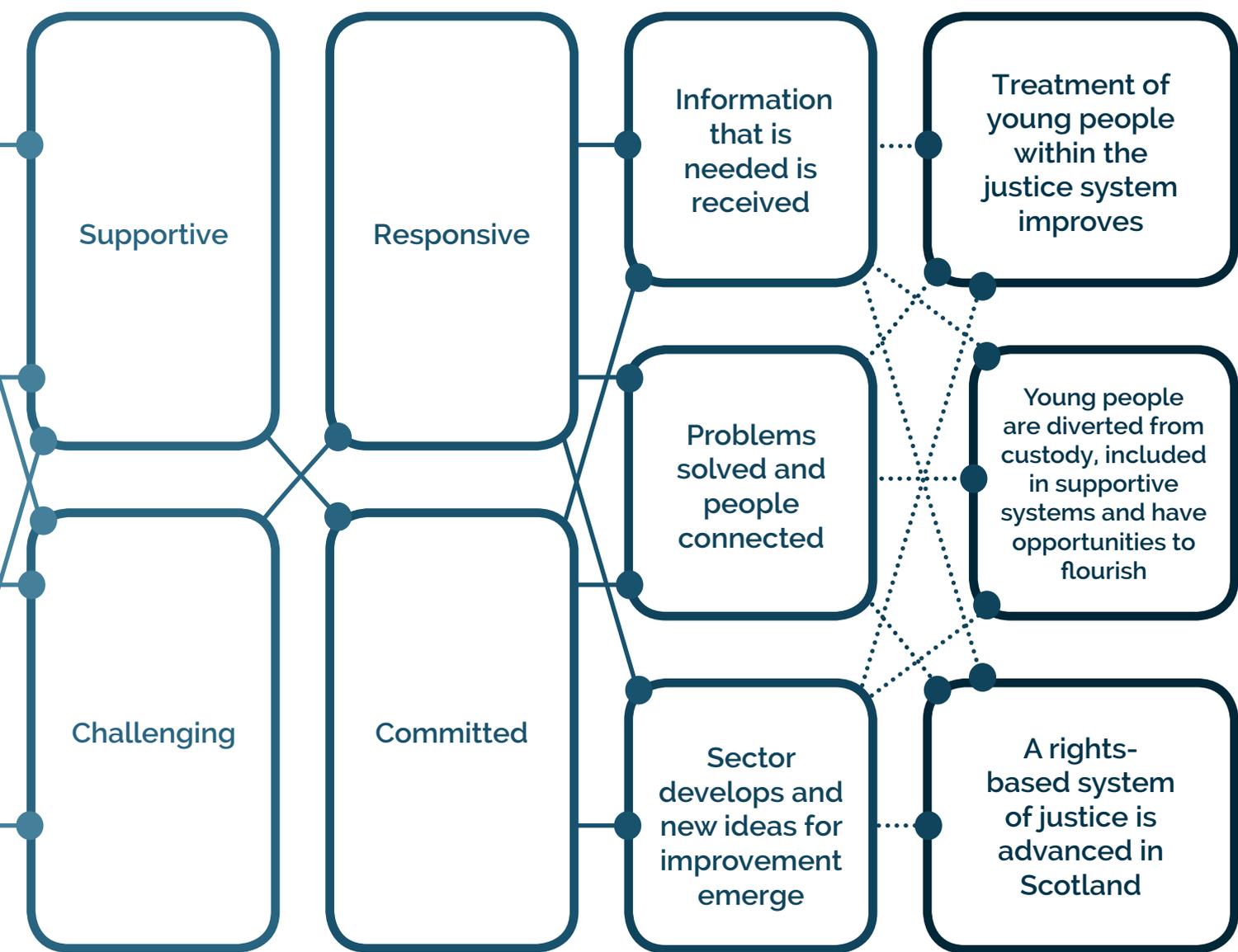
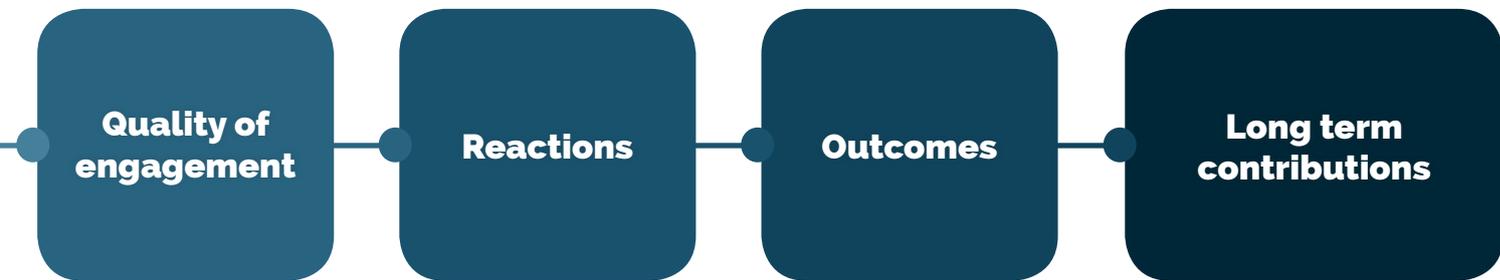
CYCJ's offer is most closely aligned with the challenges faced by practitioners and strategic leaders. In both of these areas, CYCJ offers support to address practical challenges through its information, insight and ability to link people together. The practical support in the form of training and project work was highly valued. Expansion of CYCJ's offer could involve a more close alignment with the needs of service managers, particularly around the dynamics of financing, commissioning, service design as well as the work that managers do to influence, and the kinds of evidence and resources that are needed to do that brokerage work.

CYCJ makes a contribution to filling information gaps and addressing information needs in the sector. Their reach is diverse, which means that the information they share can cross into many parts of the sector – from senior level managers to frontline practitioners, from civil society organisations to third sector service providers, from secure care units and Polmont to the Scottish Government's civil service.

CYCJ's role in system development goes deeper and involves prolonged attention to issues in the sector, such as risk assessment, diversion, the treatment of 16 and 17 year olds in the system, the kind of environment and support offered to young people through secure care, trauma, children's rights and inclusion. Their work on these issues involves research, data gathering and census, the development of guidance and standards, training and the important work of imagining, and conceptualising, alternatives to the current status quo.

Logic model





What are the challenges and enablers to CYCJ's contribution?

The impact of CYCJ's work occurs at the level of individual practice, service and organisational development as well as in the imaginative space where the vision of the youth justice is debated and developed. CYCJ is able to track knowledge between the conceptual space of ideas to the practical realities of individual young people and the support they receive from their worker. CYCJ works with the architecture of the system by supporting the development of legislation, guidance and standards. Just as it works with service managers to shape the practices, and cultures, of organisations delivering interventions and support.

CHALLENGES

The central risk to CYCJ's work is the breadth of expectation around its reach. In order to be an effective boundary spanner, CYCJ will feel compelled to work in as many parts of the system as possible. And the system itself values CYCJ highly for this reach. The breadth of the youth justice sector is wide and covers a range of professional groups, such as youth work, social work, prison officers, lawyers, the judiciary, the prosecutor fiscal, education and so on. There is a clear need for the organisation to further examine its reach and define its engagement and relationships with these different groups.

A corollary to this risk is CYCJ's ability to make sense of its many roles. The system values CYCJ for its overview and perspective as well as its ability to be targeted and effective in its problem-solving. Given the complexity of youth justice – and the many fields of practice, geographies, life experiences – that it touches, CYCJ will need to take up different roles in order to address the challenges from multiple angles. A short list of roles include: expert, support, trainer, policy insider, monitor, researcher, alarm bell, service provider, facilitator, campaigner, connector and innovator. For those working with CYCJ, there was a desire for greater clarity about which role CYCJ was taking up in different circumstances.

The approaches that CYCJ take to system development involve a variety of methodologies – some of which are more explicit than others. The robustness of their work will continue to depend on the robustness of their methods. Greater clarity on these approaches will also help others to develop a deeper understanding of CYCJ's work and learning.

Of all the roles that CYCJ takes up, its role as an expert was commented upon by the majority of stakeholders. CYCJ's expertise is grounded in different knowledges that it knits together: academic knowledge, policy insight, practice wisdom, and lived experience. The risk for CYCJ is understanding which kind of knowledge is needed to address the issue at hand. For some, CYCJ was viewed as most effective when it was able to draw on robust intel and insight from the practice context. For others, its links to policy and academic research were most valued. CYCJ could work with collaborators to be transparent about what kind of knowledge a particular issue or stakeholder requires

CYCJ's connectedness was praised by the majority of stakeholders. With that connectedness comes an expectation that CYCJ "represents" the diversity of views of the different worlds it traverses: policy, practice, research and lived experience. It would benefit CYCJ and their collaborators to explore assumptions about reach and representativeness, in order to maintain trust in the insight which CYCJ presents.

ENABLERS

First and foremost, CYCJ's reach into the sector is a significant enabler of its contribution. As a boundary spanner, it must find ways to cross not just organisational boundaries, but the boundaries of power within organisations and fields of practice and the geography of Scotland's 32 local authorities. This reach, in terms of breadth and depth, is a highly-valued asset for CYCJ and the sector.

From the perspective of stakeholders, CYCJ's work is effective because they balance a supportive offer with one which also challenges the sector. The combination of these two approaches is what seems to draw people to CYCJ. Where people need support – with training, with information, with problem-solving – that support is on offer. And yet, CYCJ was also described as an organisation that challenges the status quo, that prompts development, that champions the value and rights of children, regardless of their behaviour or circumstances.

Stakeholders reacted to this combination of challenge and support by saying they felt CYCJ was responsive and committed. Stakeholders felt that CYCJ was responsive to challenges by being an alarm if need be, and committed to the progression of the sector. But that CYCJ was also responsive to problems and calls for help and that their commitment to problem-solving meant that they were felt to be non-judgemental in their offers of support.

RECOMMENDATIONS: HOW CAN CYCJ STRENGTHEN ITS CONTRIBUTION?

Continue

- To fill information gaps, support argumentation, help with problem solving, broker relationships, and work on entrenched issues from multiple angles.
- To be a hub in the sector that maintains a tenacious focus on the workforce, on children, and on addressing key issues over time.

Be transparent

- About reach and representativeness.
- About role and method.
- About the evidence need and CYCJ's offer.

Collaborate

- With the sector to document the size and scale of youth justice workforce
- With all of CYCJ's stakeholders to explore precariousness and vulnerability within the sector.

Expand

- CYCJ offers to fit with the particular needs of service managers.
- CYCJ's existing measurement of activity and reach to offer intel to the system about key issues, challenges, and opportunities for improvement.
- CYCJ's reflective practice to support regular synthesis of learning and effectiveness of action.
- CYCJ's use of this research to support analysis of its offer as a boundary-spanner in the youth justice sector.

What will CYCJ do differently?

Those who have worked at CYCJ have put their heart and soul into this endeavour, as well as a wide range of analytical, practical, relational, strategic and reflection skills and knowledge. This evaluation demonstrates that our work makes a significant difference to a range of outcomes in a variety of ways, but also that the youth justice sector values our work and sees our commitment, determination and tenacity.

The evaluation powerfully describes the difficult balancing act we face as a boundary-spanning organisation in providing both support and challenge, how unsettling this can be for our colleagues in policy and practice settings, and crucially, how both roles are absolutely necessary. The evaluation has provided us with a powerful reminder of the need to be compassionate and understanding of the issues and challenges our stakeholders face, whilst always being true to the evidence and our determination to deliver for children and young people. We are committed to reflecting on how we can balance compassion and understanding with our unflinching resolve to bring about change.

We are developing an action plan to respond to these, including:

- Improve our offer of support for service managers, particularly in relation to strategic leadership and service redesign
- Explore research funding opportunities to support work about: (1) financial models, commissioning and realignment of resources (2) system change (3) professional marginalisation.
- Improve our mechanisms of collating information, and communicating about, the reach of our work across geographical areas and professions
- Better capture and share on a routine basis the system diagnostic information we hear on a daily basis to provide a more robust intelligence to system leaders about the state of youth justice in Scotland
- Ensure we use the theory of change articulated in this evaluation to inform what we intend to do when planning projects and as a framework to help us monitor our impact on an ongoing basis
- Be more explicit about the methodologies being used across our work, to help people assess the validity and robustness of our inputs
- Share learning from this evaluation for other intermediary/boundary spanning organisations to build on
- Build in more time for reflective practice across CYCJ

Some of these actions will be implemented quickly and others will take us time; regardless we will share details of our progress at the end of 2020. We would like to thank everyone who gave their time to engage so constructively with this evaluation, to the research participants and the evaluation advisory group members who have generously offered guidance to support this work to fruition. We are immensely grateful to everyone for their input and are determined to now build on it to improve what we, and what we all, do.



Claire Lightowler and Fiona Dyer
(CYCJ Director and Deputy Director)

ABOUT THIS RESEARCH

This report is the culmination of a 60-day embedded research and evaluation project with CYCJ. The research took place between June and December 2019. The evidence presented here was derived from interviews with 25 of CYCJ's collaborators and stakeholders, one focus group with policy makers, and dedicated work with CYCJ staff, including: 60 days of embedded research, two full-team workshops and ten staff interviews.

The project used an innovative approach to the research, combining appreciative and ethnographic inquiry with robust theory-based evaluation. For more on this approach, please read the researcher's blogs about this project at: <https://www.cycj.org.uk/innovation-in-evaluation-cycjs-learning-journey/> and <https://www.cycj.org.uk/how-to-have-good-evaluation/> The CYCJ team also wrote about their experiences of this research: <https://www.cycj.org.uk/evaluation-how-was-it-for-you/>

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A picture from the Artivism project which is a joint collaboration between Youth Justice Voices and Articulate. This new collaboration will host eight creative workshops, led by Glaswegian artist Scott Lang. Project participants are exploring identity through various art forms: using spray paint, stencil, photo montages and more to express what being care and justice experienced means to them. The workshops will culminate in an exhibition showcasing the work created by the group. Get in touch with ruth@staf.scot to hear more! Photo by Laura Frood from Articulate.

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