

Engaging with CYCJ: a stakeholder’s perspective.

Report on online survey and focus group findings

April 2014

A REPORT BY:

**Nina Vaswani**

cycj@strath.ac.uk

CONTENTS

KEY HIGHLIGHTS 3

INTRODUCTION 4

METHODOLOGY 4

RESULTS 5

1 WHO RESPONDED TO OUR SURVEY? 5

2 WHAT ARE THE PRACTICE AND INFORMATION NEEDS OF OUR STAKEHOLDERS? 7

3 HOW CAN WE WORK TOGETHER WITH OUR STAKEHOLDERS? 11

4 WHAT ARE CYCJ’s STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES? 13

5 WHICH ISSUES SHOULD CYCJ PRIORITISE OVER THE NEXT TWO YEARS? 15

YOU SAID…WE DID 16

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

**Who**: responded to our stakeholder research?

A total of 117 people responded to our consultation (75 survey responses; 20 focus group participants and 22 young people). The findings suggests that the CYCJ audience tends to be based in the statutory sector. Based on the location of survey respondents, it appears that CYCJ has very little reach outside of Scotland at this point.

**What**: are the practice and information needs of our stakeholders?

Respondents are keen to develop practice in relation to a range of specific interventions or about how to deal with certain groups of people (these are listed in more detail on page 7). The most frequent practice needs concerned alternatives to custody, community reintegration and the interface between adult and children’s systems. Respondents also indicated the need for structural developments (such as policy or system change) as well as the opportunity to better connect with partners and share best practice.

The most common response about knowledge and information needs (see page 10 for more detail) was to generate research and evidence about ‘what works’ in general. There were also specific requests to increase knowledge and understanding about the use of specific interventions; increased understanding about youth offending and the publication of a range of statistical information. ‘What works’ and support for practitioner research also featured in responses to both the practice *and* information needs responses.

**How**: can we work together with our stakeholders?

Feedback suggests that the range of materials that CYCJ produces is useful, in that short factsheets and bulletins are accessible and easy-to-read but the availability of more in-depth reports lends weight and credibility to CYCJ outputs and allows practitioners the opportunity to explore topics in depth. At times respondents can be overwhelmed by the availability of information, or lack the skills or confidence to critically assess information. Respondents value both formal and informal opportunities to network, such as training and forums. It appears that respondents see value in CYCJ as a *filter* for information; as well as a *producer* of information and also as a *facilitator* of learning and the sharing of best practice.

**Where**: are CYCJ’s strengths and weakness?

CYCJ appears to be a well-used and credible source of information for its stakeholders. The provision of networking opportunities, training and events is valued by respondents; as are the communications such as e-bulletins and papers. CYCJ staff are seen as approachable, helpful and knowledgeable. Areas for improvement include better interaction with Local Authorities, especially those outside of the central belt. Other suggestions relate to the historic lack of a strategy for CYCJ such as: lack of clear remit, the need for clearer articulation of work priorities and the need for stability.

**Which**: issues should CYCJ prioritise over the next two years?

Responses centred around five key activities: supporting practice; generating information; connecting people together, consolidating the work and profile of CYCJ and influencing policy. These are outlined in more detail on page 15.

INTRODUCTION

Throughout 2013 the Centre for Youth and Criminal Justice (CYCJ) experienced a period of considerable change with: a rebranding, a move in venue from Edinburgh to the University of Strathclyde and the filling of the full range of vacant posts across practice development, research and knowledge exchange. The appointment of a new Director meant that, from January 2014, the CYCJ had a full complement of staff and began a programme of work to refresh its vision, focus and strategic direction.

In order to ensure that the future direction of the CYCJ was congruent with the needs of its stakeholders a short-term research project was designed to generate and gather a range of information, viewpoints and experiences from across the sector in order to inform the development of the 2014-2016 strategic plan. The exercise was multi-purpose in that the outputs also provided a baseline of CYCJ reach and performance from which to measure future progress; were designed to inform the work and focus of stakeholders; and aimed to strengthen stakeholder engagement and raise the profile of the CYCJ.

METHODOLOGY

1. ONLINE SURVEY

Two separate online surveys were developed using Qualtrics[[1]](#footnote-1): one for over 18s and one for young people aged under 18. The surveys were live between 8th January 2014 and 31st January 2014. The over 18 survey included two separate strands: one for professionals working in the justice field and one for interested members of the general public. Surveys were made available on the CYCJ website and were emailed directly to known stakeholders. In order to reach potential stakeholders who were as yet unknown, the survey was also promoted widely using social media.

The young person’s online survey was also made available from the CYCJ website, and could be accessed directly from the adult survey if required. In addition Education Scotland promoted the under 18 survey among secondary schools via their weekly e-bulletin.

1. POSTCARD SURVEY

In order to supplement the online survey and to ensure a broad reach across young people, a further three-question postcard-sized survey was developed and directly targeted at more vulnerable, or excluded, populations of young people and those with direct experience of services. Postcards were distributed to young people via Includem, a youth justice team and Who Cares? Scotland.

1. FOCUS GROUPS

Focus groups, lasting for two hours, were also held to explore stakeholders’ experiences in more depth and to develop CYCJs understanding of themes and ideas emerging from the online survey. One focus group was held in Edinburgh and one in Glasgow in the last week of January 2014. The focus groups covered three broad themes encompassing: types and sources of information used during a ‘typical’ day; experience and opinion of current CYCJ materials; and a general discussion that was driven by the participants but also informed by early findings from the online survey.

1. ETHICS

Advice was sought from the University of Strathclyde Ethics Committee, although the stakeholder research was exempt from formal ethics procedures due to being categorised as ‘service evaluation’. However, the online surveys were briefly piloted before launch, an information sheet was provided at the start of the survey and consent was required before the respondent could access the survey.

RESULTS

1. WHO RESPONDED TO OUR SURVEY?

A total of **117** people responded to our consultation process. It should be noted that youth and criminal justice professionals were presented with different online questions to the general public, and not all respondents answered each and every question in the online survey, therefore response sets vary from question to question. Unless specified, the results relate to responses from people who responded in a professional capacity only. Readers should be aware that the feedback reported below only represents the views of respondents, who may not be representative of all CYCJ stakeholders. The small sample size of members of the public should be noted, and results from these respondents interpreted with caution.

* 1. *ADULTS*

**75** adults responded to our online survey, including 64 respondents who worked in the field of youth or criminal justice and 11 members of the general public.

**Figure 1: number of respondents by main role (*n*=75*)***

Considering only those who responded to the survey in a professional capacity, it was clear that the majority of respondents were drawn from the statutory sector such as youth justice social work. All respondents bar one were based in Scotland, suggesting that the current stakeholder base for CYCJ is, unsurprisingly, limited to the national boundary, and perhaps also indicating that the stakeholder survey did not reach potential stakeholders outside of Scotland.

Similarly, awareness of CYCJ was high among professional respondents, with **83%** of respondents either ‘very aware’ or ‘aware’ of the work of CYCJ. Awareness tended to be lowest among agencies that are related to, but are not *specifically* about, youth or criminal justice, for example education professionals. Around **6%** of respondents had not been aware of CYCJ at all, prior to completing the survey.

Contact with CYCJ was most frequently made via online channels such as the E-Bulletins or emails. As expected, involvement with the newer aspects of CYCJ’s work such as the twitter feed, or more specialised services such as the High Risk Clinic, was fairly limited. Figure 2 below highlights the extent and nature of contact with CYCJ in more detail.

**Figure 2: nature and extent of contact with CYCJ**

There also appeared to be differences between agencies, for example while one-in-three Third Sector respondents reported that they followed CYCJ’s twitter feed at least some of the time; this dropped to less than one-in-six of youth justice social workers. The use of new social media was discussed in depth in the focus groups and will be discussed further in the next section.

Focus groups involved over **20** individuals who worked in the youth or criminal justice field. Each focus group was comprised of a mix of statutory and voluntary sector participants and included those both highly familiar with the work of CYCJ and those with no prior contact.

* 1. *YOUNG PEOPLE*

**Fifteen** young people aged under 18 returned one of the brief postcard surveys and **seven** young people responded to our online survey. As with adults, young people did not answer every question, especially on the online survey, and as such response sets vary. A total of seven respondents were female and 15 male, and the age range was from eight to 18, spanning the full age range of youth justice provision. The ‘typical’ respondent was a young man aged 15 years old. Online survey respondents tended to not have been involved in any offending behaviour, although two young people had previously appeared in Court. Postcard surveys did not ask specifically if young people had ever been in trouble, nor did they cover young people’s direct experience of services, but focused on what adults and young people could do to help stop young people get involved in offending more generally.

1. WHAT ARE THE PRACTICE AND INFORMATION NEEDS OF OUR STAKEHOLDERS?
	1. *PRACTICE NEEDS*

Respondents were asked to outline the three biggest development needs for youth and criminal justice practice over the next two years. More than 100 responses could broadly be grouped into six categories, as highlighted in Figure 3 below. It has not been possible to list all responses, although the most frequent responses in each category are listed in order of occurrence. Overall, practice development needs in relation to alternatives to custody and reintegration and suggestions in relation to the interface between adult and children’s services / justice systems were common responses. Interestingly, information and evidence needs were also noted under ‘practice development needs’ by a number of respondents, highlighting the interaction between evidence and practice.

**Figure 3: Practice Development Needs (online survey)**

* + 1. *WHAT DO YOUNG PEOPLE THINK ABOUT PRACTICE NEEDS?*

Young people mainly thought that people were most likely to get in to trouble through boredom or a lack of constructive things to do in their spare time: *“Cause their is nothing decent to do”*. However there was also a level of insight into the impact of a young person’s upbringing or other contextual circumstance on their behaviour, with young people citing family background, lack of education, poverty and a lack of money to buy things: *“their background – family* + *where they live”*.

**Figure 4: reasons why young people get in to trouble (*n*=22): respondents could provide more than one answer**

Given the role of boredom, it is therefore unsurprising that young people most frequently stated that adults should help young people find activities to do, especially in relation to employment or training (6 responses). However young people also asked that adults talked to them, emphasising listening and respect (4 responses) and that they should offer support and encouragement to young people (4 responses). Other responses included educating young people about rights and wrongs and the consequences of actions, and the responsibility of parents in ensuring that their children did not get in to trouble or associate with antisocial peers:*”* *educate what's right and wrong and about seriousness of crime, so they're not casual about serious things like stabbing people”*.

One online survey respondent felt that some services were too busy to address young people’s needs properly: *“I think that more time and effort should be given to supporting youth offenders, this should be done by youth workers and specialised workers, not social work as they are to busy to actually support the young person, youth workers etc opinions and recommendations should be listened to by courts before passing sentence”.*

Young people were also asked what actions young people could take themselves to ensure that they did not get involved in offending behaviour. It was clear that young people were more likely to view ‘finding things to do’ as their responsibility, not just that of adults, with 9 responses to this effect: *“Get a hobby, stay off the streets”*. Wider societal factors such as poverty and community were also alluded to, with the costs of participating in positive activities viewed as quite prohibitive: *“need money to do anything”* and *“not to have young people in an area that has a high number of criminal offences*”. Other responses tended to relate to the maturation process such as walking away; settling down and trying hard at school, in order to gain employment.

* + 1. *WHAT DO THE GENERAL PUBLIC THINK ABOUT PRACTICE NEEDS?*

More than three-quarters of the members of the general public who responded to our survey thought that youth crime was ‘a bit of a problem’ in Scotland today. Only one person felt that it was a big problem, and another respondent thought that it was not a problem at all. Opinions about the best way to reduce youth crime in Scotland included: better education or more employment and training opportunities (38%); more social and leisure opportunities, facilities and clubs (38%); social inclusion and community cohesion (13%) and other suggestions (13%).

* 1. *INFORMATION NEEDS*

Respondents tended to use a broad range of information to inform their work, drawing fairly equally from research, academic theory, practice wisdom, professional guidance and lived experience. Opinion from highly experienced or high-profile practitioners or academics was also widely used, but to a lesser extent than the other types of evidence. When looking for information and evidence (Figure 5), respondents turned most frequently to their colleagues, with more than one-in-four saying that they obtained information from colleagues ‘all of the time’.

Figure 5: Sources of information (online survey)

This may simply reflect a pragmatic approach, utilising readily accessible information, but from the focus groups there was a sense that respondents enjoyed fact-to-face contact, the opportunity for discussion and placed a level of trust in the information obtained in this way. However, respondents tended to rate academic-led or other empirical research as the most credible or trustworthy sources of information (see Figure 6 overleaf). Respondents were most likely to respond ‘never’ to the use of in-house research, perhaps reflecting a lack of research resource or capacity within organisations. Information that was seen as credible was that which came from respected sources, most often that backed up by research and references, or from trusted or experienced colleagues. The CYCJ was the most often cited research centre, suggesting that it is well respected by its own stakeholders, although given that this was a survey about CYCJ then it may also reflect that CYCJ was most prominent in respondents’ minds at that point in time.

**Figure 6: Sources of information that are most credible (online survey)**

Respondents were also asked to identify areas of youth or criminal justice in which they think there is insufficient knowledge and understanding, or areas that they would simply like to know more about. Responses have been broadly grouped into seven separate categories.

**Figure 7: Information and Knowledge Needs (online survey)**

* 1. *WHAT DO YOUNG PEOPLE THINK STAKEHOLDERS NEED TO KNOW?*

As reported earlier, young people mainly thought that adults should spend more time listening and talking to young people to find out their views. Young people also that that adults needed to know *why* young people offend and *how much* youth offending there was in the country.

* 1. *WHAT ARE THE INFORMATION NEEDS OF THE GENERAL PUBLIC?*

All general public respondents obtained information about youth crime from newspapers (100%); followed by television news programmes (73%) and from conversations and discussions with friends or family. This suggests that these mediums would be the most useful methods of communicating with the public about youth crime issues. Other sources of information (approximately one-third of respondents each) included: from the internet; from television programmes other than news programmes; and from their own direct experience or observation.

In relation to their own information needs, members of the general public wanted information about what interventions are effective at reducing offending or ‘what works’ (100%); local information about service provision (73%); statistics relating to the extent of youth offending (64%) and information on the nature of youth offending (64%). Other popular responses were: information about policy and provision nationally; and local information about the extent of youth offending. There were broad parallels between the information needs of the general public and of practitioners, suggesting that it may be possible to meet both their needs in similar ways.

1. HOW CAN WE WORK TOGETHER WITH OUR STAKEHOLDERS?
	1. *PROVIDING USEFUL AND ACCESSIBLE INFORMATION*

Stakeholders were asked what supports or barriers existed in their own organisation that helped or hindered them in using evidence to inform their day-to-day work. These questions allow CYCJ to identify what challenges practitioners face and what can be built upon to help support evidence informed practice within youth and criminal justice.

Around two-thirds (63%) of respondents who answered this question stated that there was *support* in their organisation to facilitate the use of evidence, and this was most frequently in the form of supportive individuals (management or colleagues, for example) or supportive structures (in-house research team, training or support for practitioners to collect their own evidence). However, a similar proportion of respondents stated that there were *barriers* in their organisation which made it difficult to use evidence. This was most commonly due to a lack of access to information (difficulties in accessing information such as journals or podcasts; or resource and financial constraints that impact upon the ability to attend training or to digest information). On a related note, one-third of those who experienced barriers in using evidence cited time as a major inhibitor. Other barriers included a lack of skills or freedom to use evidence (either on the part of the respondent, or of their organisation in general). Focus groups commonly reported challenges in information-sharing between agencies as a barrier, with this often dependent on individual working relationships rather than systems, although practice did vary across different areas.

The consultation also encouraged reflection on the use of different formats of information, both in the online survey and in the focus groups. This was to ensure that the outputs from CYCJ can best meet the needs of its stakeholders. Online respondents expressed a clear preference for more established methods of disseminating information such as via face-to-face contact at training and events (67% responded ‘very useful’), accessible written documents such the briefing papers or factsheets (59%) or full written reports (57%). In contrast, 72% of respondents found podcasts either ‘not at all’ or ‘not very’ useful and one-in-three respondents reported the same experience of videos. Focus group participants felt that the different levels of information that CYCJ provides, from one-page factsheets and e-bulletins to more in-depth briefing papers and comprehensive research reports was a useful approach. Participants utilised bite-sized information when time was tight, but the provision of links to references, further reading or more detailed versions of the factsheets or briefing papers allowed participants the opportunity to explore areas of interest in more depth and, crucially, added credibility to the shorter documents. It appeared that respondents welcomed having someone to filter their information and were often looking for specific or direct information, rather than having to wade through this themselves.

The use of social media was explored in more depth at the focus groups, and exploration of the format of information used in a ‘typical’ day revealed a distinct divide between work and home. Outside of the workplace there was a fairly even balance between traditional and new communication methods, but a greater emphasis on face-to-face, written information in the workplace (see Figures 8a and 8b below). The low level of social media usage in the workplace was generally as a result of workplace restrictions; a sense that it was not appropriate in the workplace or from a general ‘fear’ surrounding the use of social media. Access to personal smartphones and tablets had increased the use of social media both within and outside of the workplace, however this often left participants with a complicated balance of work and personal life in their social media accounts. Only one out of 20 focus group participants was following CYCJ on Twitter. However, most focus group participants accepted these forms of communication as long as they did not replace other forms of communication. Many were amenable to learning more about how to use social media.



**Figure 8a: types and sources of information used at home and socially (Focus Groups)**



**Figure 8b: types and sources of information used at work (Focus Groups)**

* 1. *HELPING PRACTITIONERS WORK TOGETHER*

In order to assist professionals in the youth and criminal justice field share knowledge and work together, respondents suggested three main forms of activities. The opportunity to network and share ideas with colleagues in informal but structured ways was the most frequently mentioned (54%), mainly involving face-to-face activity such as local or practice-based forums, networking opportunities, informal lectures, or where direct contact is not feasible then through some form of online mechanism for sharing information and resources. Around one-third of respondents also felt that more formal events such as training or conferences were a useful opportunity to meet and work together with colleagues from across different agencies. Lastly the provision of information, including news, research and case studies was seen as useful in increasing understanding across agencies and sectors (15%).

1. WHAT ARE CYCJ’s STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES?

Participants were asked to think about their working relationship with CYCJ and to identify elements that worked well and elements that were working less well. A total of 43 discrete suggestions were made (see Figure 9 overleaf). The role of CYCJ as a *filter*, a *producer* and a *facilitator* was evident here. Bringing practitioners together via training, events or other networking opportunities was seen as invaluable; as was the regular and accessible communication (in the form of bulletins, factsheets and papers) that helped practitioners remain up-to-date. CYCJ staff were viewed as friendly, approachable and professional who had a good understanding of the issues facing practitioners.

Some practitioners found that communication with Local Authorities could be improved, especially for those outside the central belt where time or resource constraints meant that it was not always as easy to develop the same kind of working relationship with CYCJ as other practitioners enjoyed. One respondent suggested that the use of video conferencing might help reduce geographical barriers. A small number of respondents found that barriers to working with CYCJ included a lack of time, or organisational unfamiliarity with e-communications. The lack of a clear CYCJ strategy (mainly due to level of uncertainty amid considerable change over the past few years) was evident in a small number of responses, with suggestions that on occasion CYCJ could be more organised, that there was not sufficient clarity of the remit and scope of CYCJ or at times the approaches to prioritising work could be more transparent and better articulated.

**Figure 9: working relationship with CYCJ (areas above zero are seen to be working well, areas below zero less so)**

In relation to impact it is clear that CYCJ has made a considerable impact on youth and criminal justice knowledge, it has had some success in translating that into an impact on practice, but less of an impact on youth and criminal justice policy (see Figure 10).

**Figure 10: impact of CYCJ on a scale of 0-100 (online survey)**

Examples of the impact of CYCJ included the dissemination of information which keeps practitioners up-to-date and encourages local discussion and, at times, practice change at a local level. Other examples included putting in to practice knowledge and skills learned at training events, such as working with trauma or sexually harmful behaviour. The High Risk Mental Health Clinic was also mentioned by a small number of respondents as having an impact on practice through CYCJ’s direct input in to cases, but also indirectly through exchange of knowledge and advice about risk formulation.

1. WHICH ISSUES SHOULD CYCJ PRIORITISE OVER THE NEXT TWO YEARS?

Although issues identified by respondents in both the practice development and information needs sections of the survey will inform the CYCJ strategy, given the anticipated (and realised) diversity in the responses, CYCJ was keen to seek help from its stakeholders in prioritising these areas of work. To this effect, respondents were asked what they would like to see CYCJ achieve in the next two years. Responses from both the online survey and the focus groups were organised into five key activities as outlined in Figure 11 below:

**Figure 11: priorities and wish list for the next two years (online survey and focus groups)**

YOU SAID…WE DID

CYCJ has used the findings from the stakeholder research to set out its strategic vision in the 2014-2016 Strategy document. Sitting underneath this strategic plan is the first CYCJ annual workplan to help is progress towards achieving these aims and objectives.

It is not practical to outline all of our stakeholder feedback aligned to our actions for the coming year, but we hope the following summary gives our stakeholders a flavour of how we have listened to your feedback.

**Support Practice**

Mental Health: One full day of the National Youth Justice Conference will be devoted to mental health. IVY will continue to support practitioners by promoting best practice in forensic mental health risk assessment and management as well as direct interventions.

Early Intervention: E-learning materials will be developed for EEI practitioners

Resources and interventions: the feasibility and content of an online resource bank and toolkit for practitioners is being considered.

Young people in custody: CYCJ will be supporting mentors who work with young people in custody. In addition a circular will be produced for reintegration and transitions practice, and a survey to further identify practice needs in this area will be undertaken.

Girls and young women: A focus will be on developing multisystemic approaches to intervention for vulnerable young women. A multimedia training resource will be produced to support practitioners in this area. Work will be undertaken into gender-specific assessment tools for vulnerable young women.

**Produce Information**

Evidence about What Works: the main priority in the research workstream in CYCJ will be about conducting supporting and synthesising research to meet knowledge needs. This includes: the evaluation of Safer Lives; a literature review about effective practice with high risk young people; research into pathways into Polmont and the evaluation of the Systemic Practice and Family Interventions Course.

Practitioner Research: a one day event will be held to explore practitioner research skills, to encourage self-evaluation, to develop outcome monitoring and to help practitioners generate evidence from practice.

CYCJ will also continue to produce a range of information and resources, designed to reflect the varying needs and preferences of its stakeholders. Brief factsheets, lengthier factsheets and comprehensive reports will remain available as written outputs, but CYCJ will also develop other methods of sharing information such as videos and podcasts.

**Facilitate and Connect**

Sharing Best Practice: Through the delivery of practitioner networks and events CYCJ will continue to provide opportunities for practitioners to network and share best practice. A Youth Justice Practitioners Group will also be created to share practice knowledge, and the feasibility of an online community will be considered.

**Continuing the engagement**

CYCJ is grateful to all stakeholders who took the time to participate in the research. The process has been incredibly useful and we plan to repeat the Stakeholder Research on an annual basis to ensure that we remain in touch with our stakeholders’ needs as knowledge, practice and society develop and change. This will also allow us to benchmark and monitor how well we engage with our stakeholders. In the meantime any feedback is welcome via cycj@strath.ac.uk.

1. An online survey design tool [www.qualtrics.com](http://www.qualtrics.com) [↑](#footnote-ref-1)