

# Children and Young People in the Youth Justice System

*Report of seminars organised by the All Party  
Parliamentary Group for Children 2009/10*



*My criminal  
record is the  
biggest obstacle  
to me and the  
life I want*

*There are no hard  
to reach young  
people, only those  
who are easy  
to ignore*



ALL PARTY PARLIAMENTARY GROUP FOR  
CHILDREN



# Children and Young People in the Youth Justice System

*Report of seminars organised by the All Party  
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CHILDREN



NCB's vision is a society in which all children and young people are valued and their rights are respected.

By advancing the well-being of all children and young people across every aspect of their lives, NCB aims to:

- reduce inequalities in childhood
- ensure children and young people have a strong voice in all matters that affect their lives
- promote positive images of children and young people
- enhance the health and well-being of all children and young people
- encourage positive and supportive family, and other environments.

NCB has adopted and works within the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

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# Contents

Foreword from the Chair	1
Meeting 1: Prevention and entry into the youth justice system	2
'Practice what you preach' – putting young people at the heart of solving problems	2
Reluctant Gangsters	3
Case Study: Engagement in the London Borough of Hounslow	3
Summary	3
Meeting 2: The courts system	4
Unsuitability of Crown Court trials for young offenders	4
The vital role of youth offending officers: Supporting young offenders	5
Summary	5
Meeting 3: Custody	6
Young Offender Institutions	6
Safeguarding in Young Offender Institutions: A young person's perspective	7
Resettlement and release – young person recently released from custody	7
Summary	7
Meeting 4: Vulnerable children	8
Acknowledging the links between poverty and the youth justice system	8
Identifying needs early	9
What works best? – the young person's perspective on intervention and leaving care provisions	9
Summary	9
Meeting 5: The age of criminal responsibility	10
The case for raising the age of criminal responsibility in England and Wales	10
The welfare system versus the criminal justice system	11
Early criminalisation – setting a child up to fail	11
Summary	12
Meeting 6: Resettlement	13
Breaking the cycle of re-offending	13
Case Study: The Foyer Federation	
Case Study: Jonathan and his resettlement broker	14
Summary	14
Concluding observations	15
Contributors and APPGC members	16

# Foreword from the Chair



The All Party Parliamentary Group for Children (APPGC) chose 'Children in the Youth Justice System in England and Wales' as its theme for 2009–10. Six seminars have been held.

We invited professionals working in the youth justice system, academics and young people to give us their views. The audiences included parliamentarians, young people, the voluntary sector and a wide variety of people working in youth justice.

The seminars and their conclusions are reflected in this report. They showed widespread concerns about young people's experiences in the youth justice system but also some examples of good practice. There was overwhelming disquiet about the current age of criminal responsibility in England and Wales and about a seeming emphasis on punishment rather than rehabilitation.

We hope that this report will be read by politicians, practitioners and those who have influence in the youth justice system so that appropriate changes can be effected.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Joan R Massey".

**Baroness Massey of Darwen**

Chair, APPGC

## **The officers of the APPGC:**

Baroness Blood of Blackwatertown  
Kate Green, MP for Stretford and Urmston  
Baroness Howarth of Breckland  
Jessica Lee, MP for Erewash  
Earl of Listowel  
Baroness Walmsley of West Derby

The officers of the APPGC would like to thank NCB for its support and assistance in organising these seminars and Naomi Wiseman for collating the report.

# Meeting 1: Prevention and entry into the youth justice system

The meeting was convened on 15 December 2009.

## Speakers

Graham Fletcher (National Youth Agency, NYA)

Adnam (NYA participant)

Jodi (NYA participant)

Professor John Pitts (University of Luton and author of *Reluctant Gangsters*)

London Borough of Hounslow Youth Service Detached Team

According to the Youth Justice Board, over 87,000 young people in England and Wales entered the youth justice system for the first time in 2007/8, and youth crime continues to have a high profile in both the media and in political debate. There are known risk factors that increase the chances of a young person committing an offence. This meeting addressed how we reach those most at risk and identify their support needs as they enter the youth justice system.

## ‘Practice what you preach’ – putting young people at the heart of solving problems

Graham Fletcher from the National Youth Agency commented that there needs to be a shift in focus towards practice and community initiatives that address a young person's lack of sense of belonging.

- Young people need to have a stake in making the system work, with a series of structured activities that give them a sense of purpose in the long term.
- Mentoring and building long-term meaningful relationships are key.
- Young people should be involved in the commissioning process.
- Young people can provide creativity and a fresh perspective on how to solve problems.

*Youth participation is close to my heart. I felt disaffected and separate from the world that the rest of you live in. Now I know that young people have the right to have a say under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. This combats discrimination and engages young people with the system. Young people need to have a sense of ownership and they need to understand the hard work that goes into earning a living or making something you want happen.*

**Adnam (young person)**

## Reluctant gangsters

Professor Pitts spoke about his research into gang formation in Waltham Forest and Lambeth in London. It was found that the areas with the highest levels of crime also had the highest levels of poverty. The demographics of these areas show that 70 per cent are black and minority ethnic people living in poverty. Youth crime is falling nationally but not in these areas. Much of the crime is violent and drug related, with a 39 per cent rise in murder rates in these areas when murder rates have fallen elsewhere. As a higher proportion of the population experience prison, a prison mentality begins to develop. Youth gangs are a new trend that have appeared in the last five to eight years.

Professor Pitts concluded that the fundamental structural issues in these neighbourhoods need to be changed. These changes entail:

- rethinking local economies, as they relate to crime – three large hospitals in Lambeth are large employers but none of them offer work internships for local people
- providing policing that engages young people in troubled areas with social programmes – such as the Chicago and Boston examples of Operation Ceasefire
- gaining good, coherent intelligence about gang activity to inform the commissioning of services – at the moment, commissioning is carried out in a random way which does not reflect the problems
- coordinating, often excellent, youth work better
- giving greater support to schools, which are often at the hard end of the problem
- offering greater support to families – some parents are unhappy and not coping, and often gang activity is the way for young people to bring home a wage to support the family
- expressing solidarity in these areas so that the problems are owned by everybody – at present, these areas feel both abandoned and blamed.

### Case Study: Engagement in the London Borough of Hounslow

The Detached Youth Service Team gave an overview of their work engaging young people.

Detached youth workers go out to engage young people on their familiar territory, rather than bringing them in to an unfamiliar setting. They will join young people on street corners or where they naturally congregate. The team was established to target 'hotspot' areas and to counteract anti-social behaviour. Youth work is seen as a preventative activity and targets the young people who do not engage with mainstream provision. The focus is on personal and social development. Work focuses on sexual health, drug awareness, supporting young people into mainstream education, and running healthy eating programmes. A preventative approach is combined with the aim of presenting a universal offer of 'things to do' to all young people. The team focuses on working with young people rather than criminalising them.

## Summary

It is important to:

- engage with young people
- involve communities
- rethink local economies
- focus on personal and social development
- raise aspirations.

# Meeting 2: The courts system

The meeting was convened on 11 January 2010.

## Speakers

Sally Ireland (Director of Criminal Justice, JUSTICE)

Lorna Hadley (Vulnerable Young People and Youth Offending, London Borough of Newham)

The courts system in England and Wales deals with children aged between 10 and 17 years who have been charged with an offence. Usually, criminal cases involving children are dealt with by the Youth Court; with more serious offences heard in the Crown Court. The discussion in this meeting centred on how best to support children and young people who experience the courts system.

## Unsuitability of Crown Court trials for young offenders

Sally Ireland spoke about necessary changes to the way children are prosecuted.

In England and Wales, formalised court proceedings lead to children and young people being tried in Crown Courts. This is not the case in Northern Ireland or Scotland.

In England and Wales, the use of Crown Court proceedings has expanded to include a much wider range of offences, leading to far larger numbers of young people being tried there.

The disadvantages of using the Crown Courts system in cases involving young defendants are numerous.

- There is no specialised jurisdiction, judges do not have to be criminal law practitioners and may have little or no experience of proceedings involving children or young people.
- There is no obligation to exclude the public.
- The formality is intimidating, particularly for vulnerable defendants.
- It is not a child-specific forum, leaving young offenders to mix with adult offenders.
- The maximum sentences in Crown Courts are very similar for adults and young people alike.

In contrast, Youth Courts provide a forum that is specialised and experienced at dealing with children and young people. In spite of this, it is very challenging and difficult for young people to put forward their own defence effectively.

In addition to this, the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child has stated that countries should be aiming for an age of criminal responsibility of between 14 and 15 years old. This would ensure that no child under the age of 14 would be subject to criminal proceedings in any setting.

## The vital role of youth offending officers: Supporting young offenders

Lorna Hadley spoke about the work of youth offending officers in supporting young people. She described a typical week as follows.

- Youth Offending Teams (YOTs) track all young people who are charged with an offence. Youth offending officers check police records and investigate whether there are any risks that require safeguards to be put in place.
- Officers accompany, monitor and manage young defendants as well as supporting the young person's family if they are present.
- YOTs try very hard to keep young people out of custody by focusing on pre-sentence reports.
- Officers have detailed knowledge of the legal system and work together with children's services colleagues to gain a thorough insight into the young person's circumstances.
- Officers support, advise and monitor defendants, including assessing any language or communication needs they may have.

Lorna concluded with several suggestions for improvement.

- Early intervention to change behaviour is extremely important.
- Lawyers, judges and magistrates need to adapt to using more informal settings without jeopardising the fairness of proceedings.
- A more holistic approach should be taken, involving children's services and social workers.

### Summary

- Keeping young people out of custody in the first place is crucial.
- Crown Court trials are unsuitable for young offenders.
- Youth Courts are more appropriate (than Crown Courts).
- Youth offending officers have a crucial role in supporting young offenders.
- Early intervention is important.
- A coordinated holistic approach to young offenders should be taken.

# Meeting 3: Custody

The meeting was convened on 9 February 2010.

## Speakers

Dame Anne Owers (HM Chief Inspector of Prisons)

Dr Diane Hart (NCB, Principal Officer, Youth Justice and Welfare)

Shez Sutton (The Howard League for Penal Reform) reading a statement from a young person

Recent figures show that, as of November 2009, there were 2,464 under-18-year-olds in custody in England and Wales. There are three types of accommodation where young people can be placed to serve a custodial sentence: a young offender institution; secure training centre; or local authority secure children's home. This meeting examined how these institutions work in practice and how effective they are in achieving their goals.

## Young Offender Institutions

Dame Anne Owers gave a detailed account of current practice in young offender institutions (YOIs). She commented that there are high levels of mental health problems and learning difficulties. Eighty-nine per cent of young people entering custody had been excluded from school, and 50 per cent of young women and 25 per cent of young men have been in care.

The number of children and young people in prison is shrinking and is now at its lowest level since 2001. Institutions are becoming more child centred but continue to be a poor environment for children and young people.

Four key criteria are important.

**Safety:** A quarter of young people in custody feel unsafe, mostly at larger units. Both the behavioural difficulties of others, and young people's own vulnerabilities, contribute to this.

**Respect:** Discipline is too much of a focus and force is used as a short cut. Young men are still strip-searched which is not appropriate if they have been abused.

**Purposeful activity:** Young people often have different care plans for different needs instead of a comprehensive one. For example, one young man had seven separate care plans.

**Preparation for resettlement:** This is vital.

Mental health services have improved and mental health problems are now dealt with well by some institutions. Education and training has improved – with more learning support assistants and more vocational training, which has seen one YOI have 90 per cent of their young people go on to higher education.

However, the need for more small units is clear, and young people continue to be held too far from home. A lack of social workers at YOIs, due to recent funding disagreements, has been very damaging for support services; particularly as many young people feel safe in prison but find that support falls away after release. Custody should not act as 'respite care' for local authorities wishing to get young people off their hands for a while; and more mentoring and one-to-one support is needed after young people leave prison.

## Safeguarding in Young Offender Institutions: A young person's perspective

Di Hart spoke about her consultation with young people in custody.

- Young people felt safest in secure children's homes and least safe in large YOIs.
- Young people did not feel actively afraid of staff but of other young people and the threat of bullying or violence from them.
- Harm from self: The stark environment in custodial settings as a result of removing all potential means for young people to harm themselves, can be emotionally abusive in itself. Settings need to look at the reasons why people self-harm and provide support to help them stop.
- Harm from others: This is the greatest fear for young people in custody. A creative approach to stopping bullying is needed and young people need to be involved in finding the solutions themselves.
- Harm from staff: There is no evidence of systematic abuse and young people generally feel safe with staff. More research is needed to look at emotional harm and neglect from staff and this will require greater external scrutiny.
- Secure children's homes tend not to impose the culture of an adult prison establishment, as they are child centred and the staff have chosen to work with children and young people. This approach needs to be extended to larger YOIs.

## Resettlement and release – young person recently released from custody

The Howard League for Penal Reform gave an account from a young person on his experiences in custody, covering four key points.

**Visitors/visiting:** Visitors are often treated with very little respect having travelled a long way to make their visit. The visiting areas are filthy and uncomfortable. Placing young people in institutions far away from families is also unfair.

**Environment:** Communal areas in custody are filthy and the speaker was refused cleaning products when requested.

**Transfer/training:** When in the institution at first, the young person was very busy and engaged with training. When he was transferred to a new site it took three months to begin education again and, during those three months, the speaker was mostly left in his cell.

**Inside versus Outside:** Inside you have everything done for you. As soon as you are released you have to start taking care of yourself again with very little support. A halfway house would really help; and having a mentor/social worker/solicitor also really helped.

## Summary

- There are high levels of mental health problems and learning difficulties among young people in YOIs.
- The number of young people in prison is at its lowest level since 2001.
- Young people need safety, respect and purposeful activity in YOIs.
- There is a need for far more small units so that they are closer to the homes of the young people.
- Visitors need to be given more respect and better surroundings.
- Halfway houses and mentors can help with resettlement.
- Bullying and violence within secure units need to be tackled.

# Meeting 4: Vulnerable children

The meeting was convened on 29 June 2010.

## Speakers

Enver Soloman (Barnardo's)

Lorraine Kahn (Sainsbury Centre for Mental Health)

Pat Thompson (Catch 22)

Kieran (Catch 22 project participant)

One in three young people in custodial settings has a mental health issue and one in five has a learning difficulty. Young people involved in persistent offending and risky behaviours are overwhelmingly the most vulnerable and the most victimised young people. This meeting focused on the support that vulnerable young people need in order to prevent them from entering the youth justice system; and, at the resettlement stage, the support needed to break the cycle of re-offending.

## Acknowledging the links between poverty and the youth justice system

Enver Soloman drew on Barnardo's research to explain the need for greater early intervention to protect vulnerable children from entering the youth justice system.

Overwhelmingly it is the most vulnerable and most victimised young people who become involved in persistent offending. This raises five issues of concern for the youth justice system.

**The role of social workers:** At present at least half of the social worker posts in the secure estate are vacant due to a funding dispute between local authorities and central government.

**The use of custody:** Although the number of young people in custody has been reduced, England and Wales still has a high rate compared to Europe. At least a third of young people in custody should not be there.

**Resettlement:** There is limited coordination between the secure estate and wider agencies and this needs to be improved.

**Alternatives to custody:** The new Youth Rehabilitation Order is hopefully a more robust package but needs to be monitored. Some children need to be in semi-secure accommodation but others should be placed outside of the secure estate. Residential provision needs to be more creative and Section 34 of the Offender Management Act 2007, which allows selected young offenders to serve part of custodial sentences within a supported residential unit, needs to be implemented.

**Prevention:** Family intervention projects (FIPs) have been effective but are resource intensive. However, FIPs can deliver real cost avoidance in relation to the longer term cost of children in custody and other social problems. There also needs to be an early response to challenging behaviour demonstrated in school.

## Identifying needs early

Lorraine Kahn spoke about the particular disadvantages faced by young people in custody.

- One in three young people in custodial settings has a mental health issue.
- One in five young people in custody has a learning difficulty.
- There is a lack of focus on safeguarding, with more awareness and emphasis placed on offending.
- Mental health services can be stigmatising, with many young people preferring the label 'offender'.
- Families need support early, so support services should be available when challenging behaviour is first identified.
- The education system is particularly important – raising academic attainment can make a significant difference to those at risk of poor outcomes.
- The Washington State Institute for Public Policy has shown through research that prison is the worst value for money. Community sentences with multi-systemic therapy, functional family therapy and early intervention provide the best value.
- The majority of funding has gone into custody but this is the least effective response with the highest rate of re-offending.

## What works best? – the young person's perspective on intervention and leaving care provisions

Kieran, from Catch 22's 18+ service, spoke about his own experiences of custody and the help he needed to get back on his feet.

- Kieran had been in and out of young offender institutions after having spent time in care.
- Kieran had 11 different social workers between the ages of 10 and 18.
- On leaving the youth justice system, Kieran was placed on a community-based programme run by Catch 22. Kieran was provided with a pathway planning model and a personal advisor for young people leaving care.
- Kieran's personal advisor helped him get into college and begin training, he represented a constant and consistent presence for Kieran to help him with the day-to-day planning and activities he needed to give himself a chance.
- The result of this was that Kieran was able to complete a college course, now has a job and a place to live, and is starting a family of his own. He has not re-offended.

*Before meeting Pete I wasn't doing anything and had been thrown out of my care home. He helped me get into college and start my training as a chef. He helped buy my books and my chefs whites. Now I can focus on looking after my family, keeping a good job and going from there. **Kieran***

## Summary

- The most vulnerable and most victimised young people are most likely to be persistent offenders.
- This raises issues for the youth justice system:
  - there is a shortage of social workers
  - at least a third of young people in custody should not be there
  - coordination between the secure estates in wider agencies needs improvement
  - alternatives to custody should be considered
  - early response to problems in families and at school is essential.
- Prison is poor value for money; community sentences with early intervention, family therapy and multi-focused therapy are best value.
- Pathway planning and a personal advisor for young people helps rehabilitation.

# Meeting 5: The age of criminal responsibility

The meeting was convened on 18 October 2010.

## Speakers

Dr Tim Bateman (University of Bedford)

Chris Callendar (Solicitor with The Howard League for Penal Reform)

Liz Fisher-Frank (Solicitor with The Children's Society)

England and Wales has one of the lowest ages of criminal responsibility in Europe, whilst Scotland has recently raised the age of criminal responsibility from 8 to 12. Offering a comparative analysis of the law in other jurisdictions, this meeting focused on the impact on children and young people of being criminalised at the age of 10, offering persuasive arguments for raising the age in line with international trends.

## The case for raising the age of criminal responsibility in England and Wales

Professor Bateman gave a comparative view of ages of criminal responsibility across the world. He commented that the question of an age of criminal responsibility is not just about when a child becomes criminally liable. It is important to look at the consequences of having different ages and how we treat children who are in trouble.

England and Wales have the lowest age of criminal responsibility in Europe, and it is also low in comparison to the rest of the world. By contrast, the age of criminal responsibility in other countries includes:

- Scandanavia – 15 years old
- Romania – 14 years old
- Bulgaria – 14 years old
- Spain – 14 years old
- France – 13 years old
- Cuba, Chile, Hong Kong and Russia – 16 years old
- Canada, Turkey and Costa Rica – 12 years old.

The most common age of criminal responsibility is 14 years old, and the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child has encouraged all countries to increase the lower threshold to 12 years old as an absolute minimum. As such, England and Wales are not in line with international practice.

There are two broad consequences of having a lower age of criminal responsibility. The first of these is the level of youth custody. England and Wales lock up more children than any other country in the rest of Europe. We imprison four times more young people than Portugal, 25 times more than Belgium and 100 times more than Finland. The earlier a child is drawn into the system the greater the chance that they will re-offend, the greater the chance of creating an antecedent history that will lead to further custodial sentences.

The second consequence of a lower age of criminal responsibility is society's attitude towards young people. An elevated age of criminal responsibility indicates a society viewing problematic behaviour through a welfare lens of disadvantage and need. A lower age indicates a society that views young people as criminals. This is self-reinforcing. Where a 14-year-old cannot be prosecuted, services are developed to respond to their problematic behaviour. Where there is an option of arrest and conviction, mainstream services do not have to deal with children over the age of criminal responsibility. The issue of problematic behaviour is a welfare issue, not a criminal justice issue.

Other countries look for alternatives to prosecution. In France, educational intervention is given priority and proceedings do not take place. In Italy, pre-trial supervision is used and where successful, prosecution does not ensue. Where a young person is involved in criminal activities we should be asking how and why this young person has fallen through the welfare net – not criminalising them. Adults are not paying sufficient attention to the needs of the young or identifying early warning signs.

This debate is not about right and wrong. A six-year-old will know the difference between right and wrong but this does not make them criminally responsible. The debate needs to move away from issues of right and wrong and focus on the question of what is the right thing for us to do in relation to children of this age.

## The welfare system versus the criminal justice system

Chris Callendar, a solicitor with The Howard League for Penal Reform, drew on his experiences of working with young people to comment on the failings of the current system.

He commented that the current criminal justice system is not effective in meeting the needs of the children caught up in it. As a society, we continue to fail these children by placing them in a custodial setting that cannot meet their needs; and we are failing to ensure resettlement frameworks and structures to care for them post-release.

In England and Wales, because of the low age of criminal responsibility, the failings of the welfare system are met by intervention from the criminal justice system. When we should be responding with welfare, instead we utilise the criminal justice system. This has led to a commercialisation of the criminal justice system, where an industry has grown up around surveillance to control and contain children.

## Early criminalisation – setting a child up to fail

Liz Fisher-Frank, a solicitor with The Children's Society, spoke of the damaging effect of the early criminalisation of children.

Being classed as a criminal at the age of 10 is setting a child up to fail. It affects how society views that child and therefore how that child views themselves.

There is inconsistency in the approach of our courts towards children and their place in the judicial process.

- In care proceedings, the court will assign a guardian to act in a child's best interests and speak on their behalf. A child cannot have a direct role in proceedings until they reach a sufficient age and this is usually between 13 and 15 years old, depending on the individual child.
- In Judicial Review or Personal Injury matters, a child under 18 has no right to even begin proceedings unless through a litigation friend.
- Across the judicial process, children are viewed as not having the maturity to be directly involved until they reach 14 years old.
- If an adult charged with a criminal offence was deemed to have a mental age of 10, they would be deemed unfit to stand trial on grounds of diminished responsibility. Yet a child who is this age can face trial.
- In the criminal justice system, in contrast to adults who can plea diminished responsibility, the overriding view is that every child from the age of 10 can deal with the consequences of his or her actions.

A possible way forward is to treat children between the ages of 10 and 14 who come into contact with the criminal justice system as 'children in need' under the Children Act 1989. Our duty as a society is to safeguard and promote children in need with a clear focus on the best interests of the child. The criminal justice system is not the starting point for this.

## Summary

- England and Wales have the lowest age of criminal responsibility in Europe, and it is low in comparison to the rest of the world.
- The most common age of criminal responsibility is 14.
- The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child has encouraged all countries to have a lower minimum age of 12.
- The current criminal justice system is generally not effective in meeting the needs of children.
- There is inconsistency in the approach of courts towards children and their place in the judicial process.
- Children between the ages of 10 and 14 who come into contact with the criminal justice system should be treated as children in need under the Children Act 1989.
- A key worker can assist a young person to reintegrate into society.

# Meeting 6: Resettlement

The meeting was convened on 25 October 2010.

## Speakers

Dr Francis Done (Youth Justice Board)

Colin Falconer (Foyer Federation)

Emma Parris (Arena Housing)

TJ (Catch 22)

Youth Justice Board figures show that half of the 4,000 children and young people coming out of custody in 2009 re-offended within six months. Effective resettlement can and should prevent re-offending by giving young people the support to reintegrate within local communities and take up new opportunities to change their lives. It is also essential to achieving and sustaining improved outcomes for young people leaving custody. This meeting focused on the importance of resettlement and gave the unique perspective of young people who have been through the process.

## Breaking the cycle of re-offending

Francis Done spoke about the work of the Youth Justice Board in supporting young people leaving custody. She emphasised that resettlement is a key factor in young people making a successful transition from custody and in stopping re-offending. The key issues she identified were accommodation, education, employment, training and personal support. Support is needed for all young people, not just looked after children.

A joined-up effort between local authorities and the voluntary sector, looking strategically at what is missing for young people, is proving very successful. These efforts have seen young people finding work, getting into training, being placed in supported accommodation and receiving ongoing support. It is a lot easier to focus on the resettlement needs of young people if there are fewer of them in custody.

### Case Study: The Foyer Federation

Colin Falconer and Emma Parris spoke about their projects assisting young people leaving custody. The Foyer Federation now runs 140 projects involving 150,000 young people. The concept behind Foyer was to give young people places to live, work and learn in an integrated way.

The Foyers are an alternative support network for young people. It is not just about resettlement, but about providing a place for young people to thrive and grow, develop and learn.

Young people leaving custody are most afraid that they will never escape the fact they have been to prison. There is a need to focus on aspiration and how to rebuild lives, not on negativity.

### Case Study: Jonathan and his resettlement broker

TJ, a Catch 22 resettlement broker, spoke about a young person he had helped resettle.

*I work as a resettlement broker in the London Borough of Hackney. The project assists young people as they are leaving custody. When a young person from my area goes into custody, I will visit them to try and engage them with the project. Jonathan is a recent young person I've worked with. Jonathan is 17 years old. His mum was a heroin user who died from an overdose when he was 10. His father is serving a life sentence for murder. Jonathan has been known to social services his whole life, he has been in and out of care and spent time living with extended family. Jonathan ended up in custody serving a two-year sentence for robbery.*

*I visited Jonathan three times in custody to engage him with the project. At first he was resistant but on my third attempt he agreed to take part. As part of Jonathan's licence conditions he wasn't allowed to stay in London, so I helped him with a resettlement plan to move to Portsmouth. This involved finding him a flat to live in, finding him a college place and a part-time job, and activities for him to engage in. On the day of his release I accompanied him out of his cell, travelled with him to Portsmouth, took him shopping, helped him build his furniture and took him for a haircut. I found a local mosque for him to worship at and introduced him to the imam. I also got him involved with a local youth inclusion project where he has started a music production course.*

### Summary

- Youth Justice Board figures show that half of the 1,010 children and young people leaving custody in 2009 re-offended within six months.
- Resettlement is a key factor in breaking the cycle of re-offending.
- Joined-up efforts between local authorities and the voluntary sector are effective.
- It is easier to focus on the resettlement needs of young people if there are fewer of them in custody.
- There is a need to focus on aspiration and rebuilding lives.

# Concluding observations

- The early criminalisation of children and young people adversely affects their future prospects.
- Problematic behaviour in young people needs to be addressed by the welfare system, not the criminal justice system.
- Addressing the causes of problematic behaviour is the key to preventing entry into the criminal justice system.
- Processes in the criminal justice system should aim to avoid prosecution.
- The age of criminal responsibility should be raised to at least 12 years, the absolute minimum recommended by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child.
- A range of integrated support in custody is vital.
- Re-offending will only be prevented if young offenders are engaged in some form of resettlement plan before leaving custody and receive the necessary support and structure to rehabilitate into society.
- Young people leaving custody need support to realise their aspirations and to develop the skills to achieve them.
- Young people can help to solve their own problems and can be given ownership over how they proceed.

# Contributors and APPGC members

## Contributors

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# Children and Young People in the Youth Justice System

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