

Supporting young people in the youth justice system

Introducing a national pilot scheme for liaison and diversion

The needs of young people

Children who spend time in custody are three times more likely to have mental health problems than those who do not.

We also know they are very likely to have more than one mental health problem, to have a learning disability, to be dependent on drugs and alcohol and to have experienced a range of other challenges such as significant speech and communication problems, domestic violence, being in local authority care, homelessness, sexual abuse, health problems, dropping out of school or significant under achievement. Many of these needs go unrecognised and unmet.

At the point of arrest, there is an opportunity to identify these needs early on, to link young people and their families with the support they need and to reduce the chance of people going in and out of the youth justice system, causing difficulties for victims and their communities.

Intervening early

We have set up a national pilot of Youth Justice Liaison and Diversion. It aims to ensure that children and young people with mental health problems, speech and communication difficulties, learning disabilities and other problems get the help they need as soon as they enter the youth justice system.

This scheme is supported by:



Ministry of
JUSTICE

National Offender
Management Service

Centre for
Mental Health



YJB Youth Justice
Board

How does the scheme work?

A worker is employed in each site to work closely with the police and screen under 18 year olds coming into the youth justice system for a range of problems. For those with less complex support needs, the worker liaises with parents and helps young people in getting the necessary assistance. Where more complex concerns are identified, they are able to access a specialist mental health worker who is able to provide a second opinion and rapidly assess the young person's needs, refer on to other community specialist services and to identify packages of help.

This two-stage model of assessment means that specialist mental health workers are able to intervene at an earlier than usual stage in the youth justice pathway.

Finally, (with consent) these workers will liaise with the police, the Crown



Prosecution Service, sentencers, solicitors, bail support workers and Youth Offending Team staff to provide additional information to support their decision making.

What is Diversion?

'Diversion' means identifying young people who need help as early as possible and making sure that they get support as quickly as possible.

The six sites

Six youth offending teams are taking part in this two-year pilot scheme.

They are Halton and Warrington, Lewisham, Peterborough, the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea, South Tees and Wolverhampton.



We have commissioned the University of Liverpool to evaluate the six schemes to see how well they work. We will use the results to inform policy and practice in health, youth justice and children's services across England.

Diversion can mean diverting someone *within* the youth justice system through making more coordinated help available to them or it can mean diverting people *away* from the youth justice system and towards mental health support where this is thought to be appropriate by the police and the Crown Prosecution Service.

Diversion can happen at any point in the youth justice system, but it works best when it happens early.



Jason's story

Jason was 15. The police arrested him for fighting and had some concerns about comments he had made. They contacted the triage mental health worker from the Youth Justice Liaison and Diversion project to follow Jason up and assess his well being.

After visiting Jason at home, explaining his role and getting agreement, he chatted to James and to his mother. The worker confirmed some early stage mental health difficulties.

A referral was made with Jason's consent (and after some work to reassure him of what this referral was likely to mean) to the local

early intervention in psychosis team for a full assessment.

He faced a 6-week waiting list for this service so the mental health worker supported Jason with weekly contact in the meantime.

Once linked up with the service, the Youth Justice Liaison and Diversion team kept an eye on his attendance of initial appointments with mental health services to make sure that he did not fall back out of the services he needed.

Jason received medication and support from this team and did not re-offend.

It can reduce re-offending and can prevent young people with mental health and other needs from drifting deeper into the youth justice system. For it to work effectively, services must be designed and coordinated to engage young people and meet their health and emotional needs.

These Youth Justice Liaison and Diversion schemes aim to improve the health and wellbeing of vulnerable young people while contributing to public protection.

They do not aim to replace sanctions for serious crimes but they do try to prevent further offending and avoid future harm through tackling at the earliest possible opportunity the problems that have led young people to get into trouble.

Contacting us

To find out more about this scheme, contact:

Lorraine Khan,
National Programme Manager
Centre for Mental Health
lorraine.khan@
centreformentalhealth.org.uk
020 7827 8318

Carly Tutty,
Project Manager
Department Of Health
carly.tutty@dh.gsi.gov.uk
020 7972 1302

Shola's story

Shola was 13 and was found on her own, drunk and unconscious, in a public area. When roused she was adamant that she was OK. The police took her home.

They called the screening worker from the Youth Justice Liaison and Diversion team who quickly chatted to her mum and to Shola to make sure she was OK.

As they chatted, Shola talked about both her difficulties of coping with domestic violence in the family in the past and of her experience of a significant bereavement.

After some thought she agreed that she was drinking to blot things out and that she would like to see the worker again to think about this a bit more. She eventually decided that she would like to talk to someone more often and was successfully referred to a counsellor.