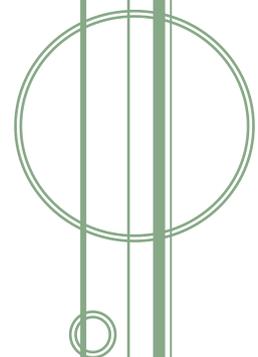


EVALUATION OF THE YOUNG PEOPLE'S REINTEGRATION PROTOCOL FOR HMYOI

POLMONT *A summary of the key messages
for Lothian and Borders Community Justice
Authority*

This report presents a summary of some of the main findings of a small-scale, mixed-methods evaluation of the reintegration protocol for young male offenders aged 18 to under 21 years leaving HMYOI Polmont.

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Evaluation of the Young People's Reintegration Protocol

A summary of the key messages for Lothian and Borders Community Justice Authority

BACKGROUND

The *'Reintegration Protocol for young people aged 18 to under 21 years leaving HMYOIPolmont'* (referred to throughout the report as 'the Protocol') was formally launched by Lothian & Borders Community Justice Authority (LBCJA) in May 2013. This was the result of almost three years of developmental work by a large number of partner organisations. The Protocol sets out the roles and responsibilities of each partner organisation relating to the support of young people returning to the community after a period in custody.

The Protocol is based on the *"assumption that young people are more likely to re-offend when their re-integration needs have not been adequately assessed, planned for and inadequate provision has been made for their release into the community"*. It is also based on the belief that early intervention and positive relationship development (with key workers in and out of custody, family and friends) contribute significantly to improved continuity of support from custody to community, and the likelihood of engagement with throughcare services upon release.

The Protocol covers short-term, non-statutory (that is, with a sentence of under 4 years) offenders leaving HMYOI Polmont, who are aged between 18 and 20 and from the Lothian and Borders area. The overall aim of the Protocol is to ensure every young person falling within this definition has the opportunity to have planned release arrangements, leading to an increase in the uptake of voluntary throughcare services (to help with problems around, for example, addiction, relationships, housing, debt and employability) and reduced levels of re-offending, reconviction and return to custody. By the end of March 2014, 51 young people had been involved with the Protocol.

The specific aims noted in the Protocol are as follows:

- (a) a reduction in re-offending by young people leaving custody;
- (b) an improvement in release arrangements linked to appropriate community-based services;
- (c) an increase in uptake of voluntary throughcare; and
- (d) a reduction in re-entry to custody.

THE EVALUATION

In January 2014, LBCJA commissioned an independent evaluation to examine how the Protocol is working from the perspective of young people leaving custody, partners and frontline staff. It aimed to explore:

- how, in the first year, organisations have worked together to deliver more integrated throughcare;
- the extent to which the Protocol has improved reintegration planning and service delivery through increased engagement with voluntary throughcare services; and
- clients' perceived benefits of reintegration planning since the Protocol was launched.

The findings are based on:

- an on-line survey of key partner organisations;
- interviews with staff (both at management and front-line levels); and
- interviews with young people both in custody.

This paper present some of the key messages to emerge from the evaluation, highlighting some of the main achievements to date, as well as identifying some on-going challenges.

KEY MESSAGES

Achievements

- Partners have generally worked well together during the Protocol's development process, as well as during its implementation phase.
- There is a commonality in thinking around the aims and objectives of the Protocol and a desire to fill in the 'missing link' between custody and community through continuity of care.
- The inclusion of family members and other agencies has been helpful in allowing throughcare staff in custody and the community to gain a better understanding of what can be done to support young people and so reduce the likelihood of their reoffending and returning to custody.
- Ways of sharing information have been agreed and generally delivered without difficulty.
- The joint approach was seen to increase the number of services available to young people and so enable a more holistic support package, as well as reducing duplication.

- The Protocol has had a positive impact on reintegration planning, due to a more joined-up approach and better working relations between local authorities and the prison.
- The implementation of the Protocol may have helped increase the initial uptake of throughcare services, for example through improved early intervention and the increased availability of services within prison. Similarly, levels of agreement for continued support in the community are high at the point of release.
- Throughcare providers' felt that, when trying to maintain contact with young people once they are released into the community, they tend to respond better to methods that involve some personal contact.
- Positive relationships with family and friends are crucial to success in reducing offending behaviour.
- The Protocol appears to have led to earlier intervention with young people, through the increased availability of services within Polmont, as well as a more visible presence and better engagement with community-based staff in the prison.

Challenges

- Common to long-term projects involving a large number of partners, it has sometimes been difficult to maintain adequate levels of engagement. Changing membership has also, on occasion, been seen to slow down momentum and so limit the impact of the Protocol.
- Partners have found it difficult to meet a number of the target timescales noted in the Protocol, raising questions about either performance or the suitability of the targets. For example:
 - it is difficult to hold the initial review meetings within the specified six days and to always get the right people to attend these meetings (particularly within the specified time period) due to pre-existing and unchangeable diary commitments, logistics, problems with getting relevant information on time and shift or leave patterns; and
 - getting care plans reviewed within the specified four weeks and within three months of leaving custody can be difficult, especially as many young people have already disengaged with voluntary throughcare services by this stage.
- Delays in communication between agencies can be more significant if a young person is sentenced in a court outside the Lothian & Borders Sheriffdom.
- To assess the success of the Protocol, it is vital that organisations collect robust performance monitoring information. However, the evaluation found little evidence of this happening during the first year of operation.
- The Protocol recognises that continuity of care from custody to community is key to reducing reoffending. While the availability of services and throughcare staff appears to have increased within Polmont, in some parts of the community there

are difficulties in accessing specialist services to meet the young people's needs. These gaps in provision have potential to undermine the positive work undertaken in Polmont (for example, through an intensive drug rehabilitation programme).

- Accommodation plays a critical role in preventing recidivism and the lack of suitable supported housing can lead to an almost inevitable pattern of reoffending. Although lots of effective work is being done around substance misuse, employment and education, this can be undermined by the lack of access to appropriate housing. The availability of appropriate supported accommodation is limited in all areas, but is particularly problematic in rural local authorities.
- Although the importance of establishing early links and relationships with young people was seen as important by partners, some felt there was little value in meeting with those young people serving long sentences early on in their custodial period because many aspects of throughcare work (such as securing supported accommodation) could not be undertaken until six to eight weeks prior to liberation.
- While take-up of voluntary throughcare support within Polmont is high, sustaining engagement with young people post-release is a still real challenge for throughcare providers.
- The evaluation was undertaken against the backdrop of reform of services, for example the re-commissioning of the Offender Recovery Service for Edinburgh and Midlothian and the introduction of the throughcare support role in the SPS. The evaluation does not seek to comment on these reforms. The evaluation fully recognises (based on feedback from stakeholders and the course of interviews) that the success of these reforms will have an impact on the sustainability arrangements of the protocol

SUMMARY RECOMMENDATIONS

- It is clear that if the Protocol is to have the impact intended, then all partner organisations need to fulfil their commitments in relation to it. L&BCJA should continue to support and promote organisational roles and responsibilities.
- Partner organisations should have systems in place to ensure they are appropriately represented at meetings and that their representatives are fully informed about, and engaged with, the Protocol.
- Partner organisations should regularly review the deliverability of the Protocol process (including timescales) and regularly explore areas for improvement.
- The Protocol working group should explore the potential for maximising impact of limited resources, therefore minimising duplication and allowing potential improvements in coordination. As part of this, the distinctive role of the third sector in desistance needs to be clarified and understood by all involved.

- The collection of performance and monitoring data is key to being able to assess the impact of the Protocol. Some partners have now agreed to collect information for the next phase of the evaluation and it is recommended that organisations continue to provide this data. In addition, each element of the Protocol should be supported by relevant information, consequently partner organisations should agree to collect and review performance against relevant specific responsibilities.
- LBCJA should continue to promote the engagement of the organisations involved and progress made.