

Qualitative Research UK Focus Groups



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Introduction & Background

The Partners' Meeting in London in December 2013 confirmed in principle the proposal, already suggested by several project colleagues, that we use focus groups for the stakeholder qualitative research.

It was agreed that the qualitative research would be conducted by organising 4 focus groups in each partner country, each group was to comprise of approximately 6-8 participants, to discuss the specific topic intensive fostering as alternatives to custody/institutionalisation for young people in conflict with the law. This strategy would enable partners to involve up to 32 participants in these group interviews, which would more than equate to the '30 interviews' agreed in the Project Description to the EC.

The use of focus groups was chosen at this stage of the project to provide a methodologically flexible research method, susceptible to cross-checking and triangulation against the other sources of evidence you all will be using.

The focus groups follow on from a wide desk analysis of our European countries, followed by more detailed partner desk analyses of the youth justice systems/legislation and how foster care is used as an alternative to custodial and residential accommodation for young people.

The aim of the focus groups was to provide an opportunity to look at the current UK systems of Alternatives to Custody and assess and analyse understanding of these alternatives and consider the gaps, legislation and policies currently in place and what may be needed in the future.

The focus groups had a set of predetermined questions that were developed and agreed by the project partners. In undertaking the focus groups, additional country



specific questions were asked in order to think further about the rehabilitative potential of remand and intensive fostering as alternatives to custody.

There were limitations to applying the methodology in the UK context and undertaking the 5 life stories. In organising the four focus groups the structure of the groups needed to be altered. Factors that affected participation, included participants commitment to other projects, resources constraints and the timing of the groups.

The UK organised a focus group in Manchester in October 2013 with 7 young people participating. In organising a 2nd Young People's focus group with the National Voice, young people were located in different parts of the country and bringing them together at an agreed time and location became a challenge. A decision was made to interview the young people separately, therefore 4 telephone interviews took place and 1 life story was undertaken.

In organising the foster carer and social workers group, we undertook 2 groups one in London and one in the North of England, each group comprising of 5 participants. There were attempts to set up a 3rd foster care group with another Independent Fostering Provider who had offered their services. Unfortunately timing and changes in the organisation hindered this process. The birth families group had 4 participants and the High Level Institutional Actors 7 participants.

In addition, an interview was undertaken with a Youth Offending Service Manager from a London Local Authority that is responsible for 3 boroughs (regions). 2 Life stories were undertaken with 1 young person and a foster carer/social worker.

Groups 1 to 3 lasted 2 hours and were very interactive, informative and had open discussion with mutual learning and a focus on how the needs of a child/young person can be met by alternatives to custody. Additional questions were asked within the context of discussions and also in terms of thinking about the country specific needs of the UK. Group 3 found empowerment within the group and a shared and therapeutic experience that they were not alone in their journey. The



parents all individually saw their Parenting Coordinators and from this group there was an interest to create a support group.

Key Messages

Institutional Actors:-

A drive to highlighting Intensive Fostering and Remand Fostering and increasing awareness.

- There is a high proportion of children in the care system that have come from abuse and neglect backgrounds. Factors that also become risk factors for a range of behaviours that often includes offending behaviour.
- Professionals have not offered Intensive or Remand Fostering as an alternative and there is a need for effectiveness of working together between the judicial and welfare systems
- There is a need for a strategic approach between the police, the crown prosecution service and care providers
- In wanting to explore intensive and remand fostering, there is an issue of ensuring adequate funding and providing other necessary resources
- Increasing diversion screening for mental health concerns increased positive outcomes

Foster Carers:-

These young people are not to be labelled

- In order to manage the high demands of Intensive and Remand Fostering, support to foster carers is crucial
- Young people in conflict with the law are also vulnerable young people who have the stigma of labels
- Accessing suitable educational resources has been the biggest challenge for foster carers in remand settings
- Early intervention and support is important
- Need to build links for the future for children and young people and provide a foundation



- Social Services, Court and Youth Offending Service need to work together
- For many young people the family dynamic is not known
- Young people need to be given positive role models and supported to build their confidence. and build the positive foundations for the future

Birth Parents:-

An acknowledgement that they are not alone in their journeys

- The birth parents felt that peer relationships had been an influential factor in their children being in conflict with the law.
- They had mixed experiences of support from professionals but mainly until they came into contact with the Youth Offending Service, felt they had received little support
- Parents had not been made aware of the resources that could be available to them or where support could be gained.
- Parents felt that in the household their children were mainly respectful and their attitude changed when in the company of friends
- Parents felt different feelings ranging from guilt and shame to bewilderment as to what they had done wrong for their children to be in conflict with the law
- Early intervention and support is important
- Most parents had other children who had positive outcomes
- If there was no other alternative, most parents would choose fostering as an alternative to custody

Young People:-

I need you to understand what I need

- There is a need to be listened to and support provided.
- It is essential there is an increased awareness of professionals and the court system of a young person's needs

Focus Group 1 High level/Institutional actors – judge/magistrate, criminal/youth justice official(s), lawyers, youth justice manager, director of children's services/senior children's service manager



9 people were invited to the group, 7 attended.

Participants were:-

- Female High Court Judge in the Family Division
- Male Magistrate, sitting on family and youth panels. Background in Education
- Female Freelance Safeguarding & Prison Families Coordinator with experience of working with girls and gangs, working across the justice system
- Male Independent Reviewing Officer, worked on the Youth justice Board in the past
- Male Programme Supervisor for Intensive Fostering Programme
- Female Lawyer for a Local Authority dealing With Child Protection matters and also criminal matters, mainly youth matters
- Female Detective Sergeant in the Metropolitan police overseeing 32 Youth Offending Teams

In addition 4 of the UK Project team were in attendance (Minute Taker, external Expert, Focus Group Coordinator and Project Manager).

- 1. Explore what they know (both individually, and what knowledge is available within their profession, e.g. from colleagues, researchers they can access) about foster care for children aged 10-17 years**
 - a. Its benefits and outcomes?**
 - b. The positive impact it can make on young people's lives**
 - c. Any negative factors they are aware of?**

Participants had a large wealth of knowledge about fostering and children 'looked after' and the availability of services within their profession. There was also some knowledge regarding impact of research.

Participants of the group were aware of Intensive Fostering and were interested to hear the overview about the project.



As an alternative to custody it was agreed that it was not always an option offered by the Local Authority and that places were limited, so it was not that you did not want to implement this as an alternative, it was rather that this was not there. Judges found it unusual to have options, and there are usually very few. Most judges want the option to prevent continued offending and to improve lives. Some participants felt that if judges had fostering as an option it would be used.

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Participants felt that alternatives needed to be made available and accessible. It was agreed one fostering model did not necessarily fit every offender, so more than one kind of model was needed and funding and resources should be considered in different ways.

There was further discussion about real budget costs not always being given and society budget holder issues. It becomes difficult for Local Authorities to consider long term about savings and the benefits of interventions for young people because of the responsibilities in gaining funding.

There was a discussion about the research that demonstrates children who commit serious offences are those who may have had neglectful and abusive experiences. A child's abusive experience is likely to affect their ability to relate properly, it affects cognitive functioning and their ability to do well at school, it affects their ability to display empathy and sympathy, and therefore the link between serious offending and child abuse has been made.

In overcoming these psychological factors the UK has been improving fostering by considering the relationship between the child and the caregiver and creating a loving and trusting relationship as well as exploring the resilience factors of this child and young person. Models used successfully have included Multi Systemic Therapy (MST), the Attachment and Resilience model by Kate Cairns and The Secure Base Model by Gillian Schofield and Mary Beek.



2. Would they agree or not that fostering (remand and intensive) can play a significant part in reducing re-offending and turning around the lives of young people who have had difficult / complex experiences?

Yes the consensus would agree from information provided about Remand and Intensive Fostering and what we know, Intensive and Remand Fostering could play a significant part in reducing reoffending and turning around the lives of young people.

Evidenced based projects such as The Prince's Trust can give successful stories. The project encourages the engagement of young people. The Prince's Trust estimates around one in five young people in the UK are not in work, education or training. Youth unemployment costs the UK economy £10 million a day in lost productivity, while youth crime costs £1 billion every year. The Prince's Trust addresses this by giving practical and financial support to the young people who need it most.

3. What can they do or suggest to enable the education system to support these young people to re-attend school or another form of learning?

There needs to be an understanding of the connection between trauma and attachment. The use of pastoral care in schools is decreasing and it is a vital support system in schools in identifying issues and supporting young people, particularly during transitions. Participants felt that young people who have become excluded from mainstream education and referred to Pupil Referral Units (PRU's) are placed with other young people who may have difficult behaviour. Young people may face further peer pressure and can be led to offending behaviour. The PRU system does not encourage 'normal behaviour' and the system cannot encourage positive behaviour.



The UK have a 'Virtual Head' system for looked after children, and this remit should be widened to young people who need the support. There should be phased introductions for young people who have been out of the school system and flexibility of rules and the systems to enable children and young people to have some control within their education. Some schools have moved to using a restorative justice approach that has been quite successful. Sometimes using a small group setting or private tuition can help move towards a supportive educational approach that avoids exclusion from school.

4. What are the barriers - reviewing here the court, social care, and legal systems, legislation and policy, the culture and outlook of key stakeholders - to fostering being used as an alternative to custody for young people in conflict with the law?

a. How might these barriers be overcome?

Participants of the group felt that intervention was often not early enough and local authorities need to also consider the short term and longer term outcomes and intervene earlier in child protection. Often there are issues within the family and community and young people don't have any other role models to follow other than their parents/family members into criminality. It is often when a young person's offending has been taking place for a couple of years and it is at the point of custody that interventions occur. There was well voiced consensus that supporting families and young people earlier to break the pattern of offending would create success.

An example of the connection between child protection and youth offending not always being joined up in the UK was given in the context of years ago the option in the court system had been that you could make care orders in criminal proceedings but when the courts separated into family and youth courts, the option was no longer available.

There was concern raised that in the court system, there have been observations of some young people being served badly by their key worker or social worker. There have been benefits when youth offending and Children Services have worked



together and where continuity has been maintained. Some participants of the group had seen effective working together when the Children Services and the Youth Offending Service were situated in the same building.

There was further discussion regarding children in care, particularly in children's homes where police would be called for young people destructing property and they have to use a criminal approach. The question was raised that if this was our own home would we take this approach with our own children?

Police are not trained in communicating with young people and this can have an impact when young people are stopped and searched. Other professionals will have received training in communicating with young people using a softer approach that displays empathy and understanding to the young people's needs.

The impact of multiple placements is not often considered in looking at serious offenders. An example of a child having 47 placements since the age of 4 was used. The discussion again explored the links between child abuse/ safeguarding and offending. The issue is not as separated as this is offending this is safeguarding, the two are often interlinked and this needs to be recognised. In addition, participants felt there were links between health/well-being and offending. In some participant's experiences, there had been direct links between young people's offending behaviour and being diagnosed with Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), autism, Asperger's or other mental health conditions. During undertaking the Daphne III project in the UK, a number of projects have discussed the benefits of having Diversion Screening projects when a young person comes into conflict with the law.

A key concern and barrier was the need for consistency of approach between decision makers. Young people are often treated differently by the same professionals, there needs to be a quality of approach in order to have improved outcomes. Participants agreed there was a significant need for Local Authorities and



Youth Offending Services to work together, review the availability of resources, the cost effectiveness of interventions. And also receive regular training updating them on all the options available for young people, particularly in relation to understanding the Intensive Fostering and Remand models of fostering. If the intervention is robust and of good quality the judiciary are likely to follow the recommendation without requesting to look at alternatives.

There was further discussion that now the Legal Aid Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act 2012 (LAPSO) has been implemented it allows for more out of court options and although this was positive there was agreement that there were concerns of youth work decreasing and serious crimes that should be coming to court were being diverted. Examples of this were referral orders running parallel with out of court disposals. If you have committed a robbery, have a referral order but then you have possession of cannabis and are dealt with through the out of court disposals, you have the offence looked at and not the person's background.

5. In the light of research evidence on the value of fostering as an alternative to custody/institutionalisation, have there been situations where they would have considered taking a different approach if remand or intensive fostering had been available as an option?

There is a lot to be learned from European colleagues who have a higher age for criminal responsibility and use alternative approaches such as restorative justice.

The consensus from the group was that for Intensive and Remand Fostering to be offered as an option, information needs to be given by the Child's Social Worker.

6. If 'child-friendly justice' means promoting a positive sense of citizenship in young people in conflict with the law by respecting their human rights and needs as young people, how can a fostering service contribute to these aims?



Professionals need to understand the needs of young people and how fostering can be used positively as an alternative to custody. Training opportunities need to be increased.

It was agreed that there needs to be options for young people and a shared understanding of what citizenship means.

UK-specific questions:

What are their views on the present UK age of criminal responsibility?

The age of criminal responsibility in the UK is 10 years. The consensus of the group was that this age should be higher. 10 to 13 year olds tend to run away if they are in the care system as they have been placed far away from home.

“.....I've been a magistrate 28 years and I can probably count on the fingers of 2 hands the number of children aged 10 – 12 years that have been caught.”

The consensus was that the criminal age of responsibility should be 14/15 years. Understanding the root cause of the young person's behaviour is important and supporting young people to have an influence over their lives could enable them to have a greater chance of a young person complying.

A participant posed the question, how are young people assessed in terms of their child development and understanding? There used to be a system in the court called Doli Incapax, where the prosecution had to prove that the young person knew what they were doing was wrong and they were incapable of criminal intention or malice to the extent of being criminally responsible for their actions. Often punitive methods can be used, such as a child writes on a bus shelter and could be in court for criminal damage.

It was agreed there needed to be an investment in education for young people and their families.



**Group 2 Foster carers with their fostering social work practitioners/
support staff (in UK SWs/SSWs, elsewhere may be psychologists or others)**

2 Focus groups were undertaken, one in London with an Independent Fostering Provider including Social workers and Foster Carers and one group in Sheffield with Local Authority Carers. Both groups were specialised Remand Fostering Services.

London Group Participants (Group A):-

This group was foster carers from an Outstanding rated Independent Fostering Provider established in 2012 that specialised in Remand Fostering.

- Female White British Foster Carer, 8 years fostering, previously a Probation officer
- Female Mixed Heritage Foster carer, 1 year ex offender also a Social Worker
- Female Black Caribbean Foster Carer, Special Guardian, Trainer and Remand Social worker about to return to being a foster carer specialising in Remand. 15 years Youth Offending Experience
- Placements Officer (Also Social Worker) in an Independent Fostering Provider
- Director (also previously a social worker) of Independent Fostering Provider

Sheffield Group Participants (Group B):-

The Sheffield Project had youth justice funding when there were changes in the legislation. Sheffield looked at what alternatives could be offered to custody. The project has just completed 2 years of funding that will continue. The Project has 6 dedicated Remand Foster Carers. When they first started they had 1 carer who had been offering foster care to young people in conflict with the law for a number of years. The support group meets once every 2 months and started in September 2013 and is a mixture of networking, training and questions and answers. There is 1 Supervising Social Worker liaising with the Fostering Service and working with the Foster Carers. Open days are used as a way of raising the profile of Remand Fostering with magistrate, children's panels and other professionals. Profiles of the carers are provided to court and each magistrate has a folder with the profiles that



include photographs of the carers. Each carer has 1 remand placement at a time, 2 carers also have task centred placements. A £125 retainer fee is paid to carer if there is no child in placement. In the last 2 years there have been 13 remand and 6 PACE (Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984) placements made.

- Male as White British Foster Carer (part of a couple in the group), Also Appropriate Adult
- Female, White British Foster Carer (part of a couple in the group)
- Female, Black Caribbean Foster carer, remand Foster carer for 19 years
- Female, White British Foster Carer, also works part-time as a Community Psychiatric Nurse
- Female, White British Foster Carer

Starting Question - Do you think it makes a difference having the qualifications or background you have in Social Work and Youth Justice?

There was a consensus from both groups that having a qualification would be of benefit but there were many people who had life skills that could equally make them good carers. There are people who may have experienced knife and gun crime and have a positive attitude towards young people that also gives them a higher threshold on managing difficult situations with young people.

“It's definitely a bonus, I wouldn't say that people without those, that sort of background couldn't make good remand foster carers but it's, it's definitely a bonus because we know the system, we're able to advocate in the appropriate way for young people.”

“I think that there are a lot of individuals who don't necessarily have a criminal justice background or social work background or whatever it is who would make really good remand foster carer.”



1. What do foster carers need – in terms of support, finance, practical help, preparation and training – to be able to successfully foster difficult or challenging children/young people aged 10-17?

Group B felt there needs to be some sort of package in place for young people who want to remain in the placement. Carers agreed that if young people want to stay why are they being moved as this can often have a negative impact? It was acknowledged that if all young people stayed you would have no foster carers for remand.

Preparation:-

Carers commented that you need to have resilience; you need to have a commitment to young people, really want to work with young people. Carers were in agreement that potential carers should shadow other carers, whether that is through day trips, being in their home, talking to young people on open days or training days, the need for interaction would be important.

“.....People have to the right attitude to these children and have an ability to reflect on themselves”.

“

Group A were in agreement that you should look at what the experiences have been that have changed the life of the prospective carer that you should be able to look at some offenders who have been rehabilitated. Sometimes those that have been part of a system are the very people that can help to change the system.

One Social Worker said that you can get applications and think ‘this is interesting, I want to know more’. Other agencies will look at applications and form an opinion without seeking more information and this is exactly what happens to young people.

Group B have 3 days remedy training (restorative justice) in preparation for being remand carers and have opportunities to attend residential staff training.



They were concerned that not enough information given about the young people's backgrounds. For carers having this information it is crucial in terms of safeguarding and risk assessment.

It was felt that the section in the Skills to Foster on Remand Fostering was not enough and there should be more. One carer who was an Appropriate Adult felt that this specific training would be of benefit to carers. Other carers felt visits to the court and visiting the cells and learning the justice system was helpful preparation.

Training

Both Groups felt that training was key and should be in depth. It was felt carers should be well prepared for the role.

The groups agreed that stereotypes needed to be broken down; the process of accepting youth offenders in the community needs to be considered.

All agreed using the young people who had positive outcomes as trainers was key. By having those young people who were in the system working with young people and foster carers, giving the facts and the support, barriers can be broken down and preconceived ideas needs can form an important part of the training.

One carer from Group A suggested training in understanding what is written on paper and what questions you need to ask was important. Sometimes a lot can be read by information and the group were in agreement that what you read on paper is not usually how a young person presents. All carers were able to give examples of being in their roles as Probation Officers or Social Workers and reading lots of files that were not how the young person was at that point, hence why they felt they needed to move to start to make a change within.

Group B felt most young people they had cared for, had experienced some kind of abuse or neglect and they felt it was important to have training that was ongoing in this area.



Financial Support

It was felt more financial support was needed for foster carers and also professionals to invest in providing resources for young people

Practical Support

Group A agreed resources were very important and supporting young people to meet their needs is crucial.

“If the family structure breaks down because the child starts offending that child therefore goes into care, right? What's to say the child that's in care, that then starts offending doesn't break down the foster family, its one step up, which is where the extra help and support has to come

Carers spoke about the need for good support networks and knowing your young person and whether you can leave them alone.

Group A spoke about the need for young people to have mentors and role models, whether that's peer to peer or adult to young person. There needs to be links with projects in the community, assessments need to be done effectively. There should be no expectation of immediate results, need to recognise the need to plant seeds in young people.

There was a strong sense of the need for community activities that created positive participation and also taught young people skills, gave them a sense of belonging.

“..... whether it's a mentor or your local mechanic shop, or your boxing club if these are responsible adults and good influences and there's a certain element of discipline and the children will, young people will get the same messages but from different angles.”



Group B felt that there should be inclusion centres, not just schools for criminals. Young people should receive home tuition if it was necessary and there should be channels for offering an alternative curriculum to children where necessary. There should be mentoring schemes for both carers and children. Carers felt it was necessary to have clear timetables for young people and felt there were ways of teaching young people responsibility.

The groups agreed some young people have never been in care and this needs to be recognised as well as the family support. For young people who are late teens, semi independence houses should be considered that offers support and an integrated way of life. There also needs to be recognition of what a young person can manage when you give them too much too soon, they cannot manage this. There needs to be a clear working together approach.

2. Is fostering youngsters who are in conflict with the law different from fostering other challenging teenagers? If so, how?

No.

Both groups felt that there were some strong labels that young people in conflict are given.

The group had a long discussion about the use of the word 'remand' and 'youth offenders' and how this can label a young person from the onset. When you are given information about a young person's history you could question very quickly, 'why am I bringing this young person into my home'? One foster carer said there was a stigma to the term 'youth offender'.

“They (Children Services) they’re auto-categorising these children and it means they have massively reduced opportunities because of that.”

“When you said about should we even call them youth offenders? Well, yes, you're going to have to because otherwise you're not going to get funding so you have to buy into that as far as the funding's concerned but I did say most



people should be taught, trained when they're coming into fostering to allow the label, but allow that to just fall away. You know, we've all got labels, we can label everyone in the room, right now, but if the child is told constantly you're stupid, you're dumb, it will grow up stupid and dumb."

The main consensus across the two groups was that fostering challenging teenagers from young people in conflict with the law was not different.

".....child's not in care they're with their parents and so on and that's when some families break down when their child is a teenager, intervention should be in place then."

Both groups felt that supporting foster carers managing behaviours from the onset was a crucial part of managing teenage years in placements.

3. What do they consider to have been the impact of custody/institutionalisation on children you have been fostered?

One carer used the example of a young person they had cared for who had tried to commit suicide and who could have had a 15 year sentence but gained a 3 year sentence in the end. He left prison, went to university, now has a family of his own, but he always says if it wasn't for the input that he had at the time when he got into trouble, life could have been very different.

Some carers in Group A said you needed to understand the system, one carer gave the example of a young person who was on an ISS (Intensive Supervision and Surveillance) and he thought it was better to be in custody than on the ISS as there were so many appointments. If the professionals services had worked together they could have had returned to court and had this reduced.



Carers talked about their being different set of circumstances for the same crime in different areas and that there should be a consistent approach. There are sentence guidelines in place in the criminal justice system but you can have offenders that would go to another area to commit a specific crime because they were more lenient. This view was shared by the institutional actors.

“Until the government, legislation and courts adhere to same guidelines and legislation there will be no change.”

Group B suggested that one carer gave an example of having a young person who served 2 years in prison. He was released and placed in a hostel. He had gone back to visit his foster carer at the weekend for support, by Monday he was back in prison.

4. How do they think remand and intensive fostering might help young people in conflict with the law?

Groups agreed the young people were part of a family; they had positive role models in a foster family and also people that understood them and their needs. Group A felt that fostering offers understanding, it enables a child to be a child, there is someone to listen as well as set clear boundaries in a nurturing, loving environment. Carers described fostering as stopping the revolving door of the criminal justice system.

Some carers in Group B felt that custody was the best option as it stopped young people from maintaining negative influences.

“In terms of, you asked a question about what does foster caring give to a child as an alternative to custody, what I would say is you've got a lot of young people come from dysfunctional background that don't even know what the basis of a family dynamic is. You put them into a foster home, you deal with not the offence, but the core issues of the humanity of yourself and of your understanding of socialisation and what you potentially give is these role models, this parenting and this care that enables this child to become a



functioning positive individual and that's what you'll get in a foster home that you won't get in custody. Custody will give you some education and it will punish you but it won't give you that holistic work you get in a foster home.”

5. The funding for our project comes from the EC's commitment to 'child-friendly justice'. By this the EC means promoting a positive sense of citizenship in young people in conflict with the law by respecting their human rights and needs as young people. What else would they suggest needs to be done to further this aim?

Group A discussed the need for the courts to understand the alternatives and to support and encourage fostering. There is also a need for more concrete legislation rather than just guidelines in some areas.

A member of the group suggested that judges and magistrates spend time with young people, so that they can regularly review the decisions they are making.

“How can you promote citizenship? There's still an awful lot of prejudice against young black males it's been there since I was a probation officer at the beginning. It doesn't matter about Stephen Lawrence enquiry cos it's still there now today. I can have two children, one white, one black same age, same offense, one goes inside and the other one doesn't. What's that about?”

It was agreed early intervention played an important part.

“Intervention has to be early as most children will start displaying behaviour in primary onwards so early intervention from parents and any professionals that are involved with that child should be identifying when that child's behaviour is not the norm.”



It was agreed there may be some very simplistic but there will be a sign that there's something not right with that child. It may not be the child, it may be the environment so early intervention for me is one."

"Can I say the horse has bolted by the time we get a child in our care? So all of this conversation is irrelevant in a sense, what we need to move on to is what does that child need? What will help?Italy, Hungary or Bulgaria anywhere in the world, you need to have close links and agreements with people that are providers of that. Yes there have been loads of projects that are up and running and they go up and down and they fail. If it's music then get in touch with a local school of music or you know, there are places everywhere, you can identify them in every area, every catchment area".

Group A said they had mixed experiences of the police and their attitudes.

"A lot of the young people who are in the criminal justice system don't actually feel part of their community they don't actually feel ownership to it."

".....a young male was left with us in the June and in October he still hadn't got a school and I actually said, under the court of European rights of children he, I will support him in suing social services for not engaging him in education."

There was a discussion that as parents you could go to prison for not sending your child yet when it comes to a young person in conflict with the law, gaining basic educational services becomes difficult.

"That's, that's really quite a, a deep question then I think to be able to, I know from my perspective and the experiences of not only my own children but young people in general that I know of or otherwise... I think that there's an element here where we need to look at the policing in this country towards



young people, that you know, the policing towards them is not always friendly, is very judgemental and very stereotypical.”

“I know that for a lot of young people, they don't feel like citizens, what's making them feel like citizens here?”

In linking to the study tour, one of the foster carers who was a police officer had said as a police officer's dealing with young people you get no specific training. One of the social workers spoke of his first social work job in this country.

This was a thought provoking and emotive discussion for a couple of people in the group, when they had seen their own family members targeted for being black or of mixed parentage and targeted by police for being in an expensive car. Foster carers were concerned that Black Males in particular were treated differently in the criminal justice system. In that they were wrongly stereotyped, their experiences were very different, were more likely to be stopped and searched by the police. The consensus was that police need to receive training to work with young people and recognise their needs. Without changing attitudes, culture and perceptions the question was asked how you can have a fair child friendly justice system.

Carers in both groups felt strongly that the removal of community youth services by the Government and the move of family support money, did not enable people to develop and maintain projects and support. It was felt that professionals and communities need to start building on citizenship from primary school, what does the word mean and what would it mean to be a good citizen of your country?



Group 3 Birth families of young people in conflict with the law

Participants

Out of the 4 focus groups this one felt the most powerful, personal and emotive group. These parents shared their very personal journeys with Facilitators/Moderators they did not know. There were tears, laughter and a new feeling of empowerment that occurred from this group and although it was a smaller group than we would have liked the information gained from this small group was very enriching.

Participants were from a Local Authority in the London area

- Mother – 4 children – 2 boys- 23, 6 years and a girl 1 ½ years (1 son aged 18 years in conflict with the law)
- Mother – 2 Sons (both sons aged 17 and 15 years in conflict with the law)
- Mother – 4 children - 2 girls, 28 and 23 years(2 sons aged 25 & 15 years in conflict with the law) – 1 of her daughters now works within the criminal justice system
- Mother – 5 children – 4 boys – 27,22,19,17 years (1 daughter aged 14 years in conflict with the law)

Child Mental Health Specialist – Adolescent Resource Therapy Service (ARTs)

Parents were of Black Caribbean, Black African and Mixed Parentage.

2 Parents spoke about being single parents, the other 2 parents it is unknown if they were in a relationship or were with the children's father.

7 parents were invited to the group, 4 attended.

Outcomes

- 1. What do they feel has been the impact on their son/daughter of having been in custody/an institution?**
 - a. What have been the positives (if any) and negatives (if any)?**

There were mixed outcomes of young people having been in custody. One parent described their children's experiences as a reality check.



Parents described their children being in custody as only placing them with other children/ young people who had done the same thing and it teaches them how to avoid court and teaches them new things.

“If it's not very nice at home, there's so much pressure at home and they have these places it's like a holiday for them.”

“It started about him being angry with me, and he didn't even push that far so when he was arrested and he went to custody, soon as he went to custody, he actually fell in love with it”

Parents talked about how hard it was to travel to often far places to see their children, for a couple of hours. They described how they find it hard to sleep the night before and how hard it is to leave their children. There was also the feelings of guilt and shame at your child being in prison or an institution.

For some parents there concern about their young vulnerable children had been heightened by them being placed far away. Some children had been 'jumped' or attacked whilst in the Institutes. One parent had become concerned when she had seen her son dressed differently to other inmates. He in fact had been rewarded as being a peace maker for other inmates who would fight and he would be the person who would make attempts to diffuse and break up the situation.

Society Pressures:-

Most of the parents felt that custody didn't help.

All parents agreed the removal of activities in the area, the closure of youth clubs and lack of opportunities for young people were factors to their children getting into trouble with their friends.



One parent spoke of her son's medical issues and difficulties at school and had these been managed in the community it would have been better than sending him into custody. One parent felt that having sons made a difference and it was harder for boys to make the change.

Parents described their children losing fear. One parent described her child being stopped and arrested by the police and skipping school so he has now become 'lippy' and quite angry.

For Black Males living in the UK there have been continual concerns raised about the likelihood of them being stopped more than any other race/ethnicity and following the Stephen Lawrence Murder in 1993 and the Macpherson report in 1999, some of the Black community having little confidence in the judicial system and the police. These concerns were also raised in the foster carer/social work group.

Peer Relationships:-

Another parent said her younger son was along the same path as her older son, in and out of prison. She put it down to partial boredom and when there was nothing to do, the group of kids were start getting into trouble.

Another parent described her child as mixing with the wrong crowd in school and then being excluded. When they started to attend the Pupil Referral Unit they again associated with the wrong crowd and became involved in criminal activity.

All parents talked about not wanting to push their children too far and so they try and talk to them about their friendships.

“You can't tie them, tie them to the bed”

“You can't be there 24 hours”



Parents described looking for their children or worrying about their children when they have gone missing and that they would like to think if their child was in someone's house, a parent would ask questions or contact that child's parent. Some of the parents spoke about encouraging their children to bring friends home, so they could see who their children were socialising with.

Parents described their children as respectful, cuddly, not swearing, don't answer back and are not disrespectful in front of their parents. Yet they knew as parents their children were lying. Parents explained they saw more bravado in their children, more attitude, dressing differently, staying out late and running away more.

There was a fear for younger siblings becoming in conflict with the law and one parent had experienced her youngest child following in his brother's footsteps. He didn't feel need to go to school, would stay in bed and was starting to defy boundaries.

The group had a mature student, a parent who had privately fostered, one parent working full time and some parents had other children who worked in the care sector. Therefore for the group it did not mean that as a direct result of their parenting their children were destined to be in conflict with the law. All parents felt they had very positive aspects of parenting. There was a consensus that as parents they were judged by professionals before professionals knew their journey.

Additional Question – At what age did you start to notice the changes in your child?

All the parents agreed it was the start of secondary school, between ages of 12 and 14 years. Their children's attitude changed. One parent commented it came out of nowhere as she had not experienced this with her eldest child and so everything her child was telling her as to why he was home late she believed.

Impact on the family:-



Parents described feelings of blame, numbness, guilt, shock, what did I do that was so wrong? Stress, am I not doing the right thing?

Some of the parents described some of their other children as giving them no problems and even their children who were in conflict with the law as 'bright' and 'sensible'.

“It would be a shock to any parent, for the first time, cause when they, the police officers turned up at my door, the first thing I asked was what happened to my child because I thought it was an accident.”

“.....every time my son spend the night in custody, I spend it with him, my body is at home, but my whole inside being is in that place.”

Most of the parents felt that there were no positives to having their children in custody. Although one parent's child had improved since being in custody, they still had the wrong peer relationships and were in conflict with the law.

Some parents had other children who were younger and there was a fear of them following the same path. There was also descriptions of a secret life that was also in some respects a lie in order to protect their children. . A parent was tired of the judgements made of her family every time the police came to the door. Parents shared feelings of being scared and concern at where it would all end.

2. Do they feel that their family has received adequate help from professionals?

No

Parents had mixed views about support from professionals. 2 parents went and sought help from Children Services and received good support. Others had no support. The Parenting Coordinators in the Youth Offending Service had been giving all the parents positive support.



3. If not, what else might have helped for them as a family and their son/daughter?

All parents agreed, professionals being more understanding, looking at the household and that other members in the family may be doing well would have helped. Asking the question, what is the background to the family before judgments are made?

Parents felt knowing support available from Children Services from the onset would have been helpful. ***“It’s different abusing your child to trying to discipline your child; I don’t know any child who is not supposed to grow up without scolding and discipline”.***

Parents felt it was important to acknowledge they had always tried to teach their children right from wrong and set boundaries. There was a feeling that they were constantly on trial with some professionals.

Parents agreed they needed more community activities and interventions; there is nothing for children and young people now. There are no jobs and youth services anymore. Professionals need to find out what children like and what they would enjoy doing in the community and provide the services. A view shared by foster carers and institutional actors.

Some parents believed that their children had been tricked into seeing all the things they could get if they were to steal and if they were taught more about managing peer relationships this may help.

Being able to trust professionals, it’s hard to know who is on your side were the comments from parents. Parents wanted professionals to show a genuine interest and do what they say they are going to do.

Some of the parents would have valued earlier intervention with their young children so that they do not follow the paths of older siblings. One parent described her



younger child thinking their sibling was in a boarding school and she would value support in how to manage living in her community and talk to her children about where their sibling is.

4. What were the good and what were the less good features of the help they received or were offered?

Most parents agreed they did not like the police, one parent said “I hate them” and went on to describe nearly being evicted the amount of times her door had been kicked in by the police looking for one of her sons. Another parent described police coming into her house and blaming her for her child’s behaviour. Her child has run away, she had asked the police for help and they came into her house and judged her.

One parent described being with another Local Authority where she had no support and when she moved authority was when she started to see the first signs of support.

Parents described the support at times as being minimal and as your child is missing and you are looking for them, you also have to ensure the needs of your other children are also met.

Some parents were not advised they could have received help from Children Services and some parents said they received support too late.

Parents felt they had received good support since they had been involved with the Youth Offending Service and got great support from the Parenting Coordinators.

5. What do they know of fostering? It would be helpful to hear from those who have met foster carers and also the views of those who have not had any direct contact with foster carers



All parents were aware of fostering. One parent had privately fostered 2 family members' children for a number of years, until her son became more involved with coming into conflict with the law and she became pregnant again.

Another parent had her child bring a friend home who was in foster care and who became ill. The foster carer was reluctant to pick her up and was telling the parent to tell her to come home. The foster carer was very reluctant to take on her responsibility and was saying well the police know she's missing. The parent said this was a very negative experience and she had already called the police. The parent was concerned that an adult could treat a child like that.

“The thought of somebody else looking after my child, a foster mother, look, I wouldn't like that.”

“... we had a huge family before and some of them went into care, so that was the beginning of our issues, because those ones that went into care they started coming with money and clothes and then that pressure came on me to fill that gap, I couldn't. “

One parent said if it meant her child going to school, achieving more and being okay then they would agree to foster care, with a view that once they are settled they return home. They had tried to ask for this, it had not been an option.

Some of the parents felt that some foster carers were just in it for the money and therefore wouldn't give that child what they needed. Some also felt their children may receive different care and love to the foster carer's birth children.

Parents wanted to see the fostering system as supportive and foster carers not judging them as parents. Most parents agreed if this was the only alternative they would agree to fostering rather than custody. One parent did not want anyone else taking over her role and being a parent to her child and therefore preferred custody rather than fostering.



**6. (for families where there have been alternatives to custody made available)
Can you tell us about your experience of any alternatives to
custody/institutions that have been provided for your son/daughter?**

Another parent had their child on a tag and that helped with having them on a curfew.

One parent spoke of her child being in custody and being part of a restorative justice approach and this would be good to have in the community.

**7. Do you have any thoughts about how the systems or services provided for
children and young people in conflict with law might work better?**

Parents believed the system needed to change to be less judgmental and more supportive. Where a child needs help, give them the services rather than saying we don't have the resources.

Parents wanted to see more early intervention support, so when their child needs support with their education or health that this is provided.

One parent thought there needed to be more support to help young people develop positive social and peer relationships. When her son had started to go out he had found it difficult to socialise and had become involved with the wrong group of friends.

“Before my son got into crime, he never leaves the house, he always on the computer games and I would always say go out and I think he got fed up with that in the end”.

Endings:-

The carers at the end of the group said they had found it a very therapeutic process and they had not been in a group setting before, where they were parents experiencing the same feelings that they were feeling, they had always for some



reason thought no other parents who had children in custody felt the same as they did.

“This has been so very good for me, because I thought I was the only one, I thought I was the only one with the worst child on this earth.”

“I’ve found this therapeutic; I actually don’t want it to end”.

The Youth Offending Service was going to take the idea of a support group as a moving forward action for the future.

**Group 4 Custody/institutionally-experienced young people
(demographically representative of the custody/institutional population)**

This group provided a challenge to the UK. Although professionals offered assistance in seeking young people, time commitments and bring young people together from different locations became a hindering factor.

As a result we were unable to facilitate a group, based on the location of all the young people and also their availability. 5 Individual interviews took place and the focus group that took place in Manchester, England in October 2013 can also provide informative young people’s perspectives.

Participants of individual interviews:-

Male – 21 years of age, White British

Female – 20 years of age, White British

Male – 21 years of age, White British

Male – 22 years of age, Indian British

- 1. Could you share your views about what’s like to have been in custody/institutional care? What has been the impact on your life? What was the worst thing about it? Were there any good things about it?**

Young people shared experiences of feeling they had no support, no explanations for being in custody. It was not a positive experience.



“There was nothing good about the cell and mentally I could not cope”.

“When arrested I was put into a cell; I was told I will be interviewed first and I just needed to speak with my carer but they would not allow this. I was frightened, it felt like how I was first taken into care and I was lonely and isolated”.

“My behaviour got worse over time and soon I started committing crime and eventually was put into a Youth Offending Institute at the age of 17 – I didn’t really care anymore by this point and felt let down by the system”.

“..... I was in care in a residential home and staff there were not supportive at all”.

- 2. Could or should any of the decisions that have been made about you by professionals (e.g. police, Courts, Youth Offending Teams and social workers) have been different? Could the decision-making have been improved? If so, how?**

There was a mixture of support given and if there could have been an alternative opportunity to custody, they would have preferred this. If more support and a rehabilitation plan could have been offered this may have helped. The young people also agreed the level of their behaviour may have determined the outcome also.

“My social worker fought for my rights and eventually I was given an order to help me with my behaviours especially with my anger issues”.

- 3. Before entering custody, were you given any other court disposals? If so, what were they? What impact did these disposals have on your offending behaviour?**

Court disposals included referral orders and warnings. Some young people learnt from their experiences, others went on to commit more crimes.



“I was only put into cell for 1 day and interviewed and bailed, when I appeared in court I pleaded guilty and was given a referral order to work with the Youth Offending Service”.

“I can’t remember exactly, overall my experiences of prison was not nice and should have been given a chance”.

From the October 2013 focus group, there was a discussion about alternatives to custody and potential effects on their offending behaviour including social and community considerations.

The young people had a lot to say about “punishment” and “welfare”. Whilst recognizing that they may have committed offences for which there should be some form of punishment as they needed to be held accountable for their actions, others had experienced periods in secure accommodation where they felt they were being punished but had not committed any crime. Strong views were expressed about preferences between “care” and custody, hinting at the importance of connections with friends and a sense of normalcy. One young person expressed a view contrary to other group members about the benefit of being placed away from their communities and families.

4. What are your views about fostering from what you’ve experienced or heard from others? Do you see it as helpful to young people? Could it be improved as a system? (If so, how?)

There were mixed views to fostering working as an alternative to custody.

“If I had a choice of going into a foster placement I would most probably of said yes, but it all depends on the type of family or carers you have. If the carers could deal with my behaviours and were flexible I don’t see why it should be a problem”.



“I’ve heard fostering is all right, I know a few people who grew up in foster care and they said it was just like being in a family with all rules and stuff. I feel that it may not work for young offenders as we have issues and I do what I want to do”.

5. Could you live in a foster family where there are rules, limitations, restrictions, as well as rewards at the end of the week?

Again there were mixed views and it was dependent on the type of placement and rules in place.

“No, I’ve been in foster care in the past and it broke down a few times”.

6. What do you see as your current support needs? How far are these being met by professional, or family, or friends or all three?

Support was being provided for these young people but further support was needed to find employment and educational support.

“At the minute I’m in supported accommodation and getting support in finding a flat and doing a few courses, I’ve got a key worker who supports me and things are good at the minute”.

“ Currently I have my own flat and on benefits, I’m getting support in finding a job, I have good friends and support from agencies like in-training”.

“I’m in a hostel, not long come out of prison, receiving help from key worker, looking at doing something in music. I have contact with my brother who is also supporting me”.

“I have my own flat which I have had not long, it’s going ok, I’m looking for work and I have support from some family and friends. I see probation on a regular basis”.



From the October 2013 focus group there was a discussion on the perspective of supports to their families which may impact on their offending. The young people seemed reticent to speak about their birth families steering discussions towards their “care” experiences or the actions of social workers. When they did touch on their families, it was clear that initial memories of becoming looked after were still fairly raw as were related feelings.

**7. Our project is supported by the EC’s programme for ‘child-friendly justice’.
How the courts and the youth justice system could be made more ‘child-friendly’ in your view?**

The young people thought improvements needed to be made; police had a role in not labelling all young people. It was felt there was a need for professionals to understand how to relate to young people and to create more child friendly environments for young people. Staff need to be supported to learn about, listen to and be able to guide young people, particularly through difficult times. A young person suggested they possibly have life experience in understanding crime and ‘being in care’ so that they could act as mentors. These were views shared across the focus groups.

“Courts are a scary place we should be given a chance, the police in my experience have been horrible and because I’m in care they think I’m a trouble maker. No one understands our feelings and why we committed crime”.

“The way I have been spoken to by police gets me angry, the courts is a bunch of posh people who have no idea what’s it like on the streets or being in care. I’ve had to look after myself from a young age on my own. They need to have workers who have experienced care and crime to work and be mentors and guide them through difficult times”.



Conclusions & Recommendations

In undertaking all the focus groups, what became very evident was the connectivity of foster carers and social workers sharing experiences and a passion about supporting young people. Institutional actors shared a common goal in wanting to improve practice and birth families found a therapeutic space in which to explore shared experiences and feelings.

There were people within the four groups who would have liked to have participated in the research and whom were unavailable for the focus groups at the time. These people could have individual interviews (life stories) that we believe will add value to the research.

All groups agreed the need for more support, increased educational and community opportunities, a need to remove the labels and a need for welfare and criminal justice systems to work more closely together.

The UK context highlighted the need to implement some of the points of the Ten Point Plan for Fair and Effective Criminal Justice for Children.

Potential Change

On a political level there is a need to bridge the gap between social care (welfare) and the judicial system working together to encourage the use of fostering as an alternative and to ensure all services are trained accordingly.

The legislative framework needs to reconsider the age of criminal responsibility in the long term and consider this being in line with our European colleagues

There is a need to explore the services and resources currently available and explore an effective way of working together in the current socio economic climate



There is a need to have an agreed approach to interventions for young people in conflict with the law and provide training and support to deliver this, within the context of defining “What a good British Citizen” should be and looks like.



Appendix 1

Life Stories 1

Name Changed – Nora

Nora holds a BA honour degree in Criminology and has over 12 years' experience in working with young people in a variety of both formal and informal settings. She is a registered foster carer and is trained in Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) Restorative Approach and Mediation, Conflict Resolution Behavioural Management and Crime Reduction Strategies.

Nora has been working as a Serious Youth Violence worker for a Youth Offending Service; this role entails preventing serious youth violence through School programmes, includes working alongside young people convicted of serious youth violence offences as well as sharing best practice with other professionals tasked with similar roles.

Nora cares for an 11 year old boy on alternate weekends and displays difficult and aggressive behaviour. He has been diagnosed with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), Autism and Oppositional Defiant Disorder (ODD). He is currently in a £60,000 a year school after being excluded from a PRU. The school struggles to manage him and he lashed out at a teacher, knocking them out and received a caution. Nora has a good relationship with his birth mother and Nora often takes him on holiday with her own son. When he is placed with Nora, he displays positive behaviour and this is starting to impact positively in his day to day environments. Nora previously cared for a 15 year old boy who still contacts her, he needed additional educational support.

As a foster carer and parent, Nora believes it is very important that she has fortnightly breaks for herself and also a holiday each year with her family and one with her friends. Nora believes having a supportive network and recognition of the need of the support, supports her to be a good foster care and parent.

Nora believes you enter things for a reason, because of a passion. Therefore it does not mean you have to be from a social work background. In an ideal world Nora would have respite carers offering day care to carers. If you are caring for babies you have finances for providing nursery facilities or you have good support and opportunities for a break. In caring for young people in conflict with the law, they need similar supervision so why are the finances and resources not available?



It is not a reflection of real life when you have young people in your home and a foster carer is expected to stay with them. If you had a respite pool of carers funded by the Local Authority it would be of support to carers.

There is a need to ensure education is provided. The Government has a legal requirement to provide education and yet education facilities drag their feet. Educational support is crucial. Young people should be acting as mentors and there should be a more inclusive system, where young people are consulted and involved and encouraged in their development.

Any form of fostering is challenging, training is crucial. Any fostering fee should reflect the increased skills needed to care for young people in conflict with the law. Birth families often feel disempowered, if their child has been removed, it gives them messages of not being capable and not good enough. Parents need education support in the form of learning parenting skills. Meetings can be intimidating for parents and young people, as it usually focusses on the negatives rather than what is working in this family. Professionals need to focus on building families, exploring their backgrounds, offering support and respite.

There needs to be multi-disciplinary training, an increased knowledge base of all involved in working with young people involved with conflict with the law. There should be more supervision and enhanced behavioural strategies. What is a young person's idea of identity today? The UK has changed, the demographics, the dynamics and how we view the country is different. Nora feels we should define citizenship, what it is and what it looks like if we want young people to engage in it.



Appendix 2

Life Stories 2

High Institutional Actor – Youth Offending Service Manager of 3 London Boroughs

The service is reliant on the Youth Justice Board to make the Intensive Fostering placements. Usually all other forms of intervention have been tried. You have prolific and persistent young offenders, who are non-compliant, on the brink of custody, children's homes, foster care may also have been tried already. The threshold of care may come down to a decision from Social Care. The Local Authority tries to avoid the use of secure units and recommendation to Youth Offending Institutes.

Fostering when used as an alternative has been successful. There is no Intensive Fostering provision in this Local Authority and placements are out of Borough, which has an impact as young people want to be near home and their families and peers.

In managing 3 London boroughs, tight support packages are offered. Young people who have been in Intensive Fostering placements have done well when they have stayed and there has been a close working relationship between Children's Social Care and Youth Justice. There is also a need to offer support to the families, particularly when young people are insistent on returning home. It is also a careful consideration in considering meeting the needs of a young person and deciding an order. Often parent capacity and a willingness of parents to engage indicates whether there will be the offer of a foster placement.

Usually a Parenting Order may be a starting point with attempts to gain engagement, then the range of orders will change as the young person or family is in breach of the order. When a young person continually breaches an order, a decision needs to be made as to what public protection is needed. The rule of thumb is to try not to propose a young person to go into custody and to have explored all the options, usually undertaken by exploring the likelihood of engagement of the parents and offering a multi-disciplinary service.

There is a particular skill set needed to be a Remand/Intensive Foster Carer. The cohort of young people in this category is those who have real difficulties and challenges, there are weapons and violence involved. What is often needed is to track back to what is sitting behind the behaviour, for example you may have girls who have self-harmed, young people with years of neglect, peer pressure, etc.

Young people who are in custody appears to come to enjoy custody and what develops is gangs on the different wings. If we are to look at alternatives to custody need to be able to measure what a return home may look like, what would be the



context of a care order and what support would a birth family need and are there times when contact should be purposefully discouraged. The Youth Offending Institutes can end up just containing the behaviour and not addressing it. There is an increase in girls in conflict with the law.

Across the 3 boroughs, the threshold of intervention can be different. There is a need to get managers and the judiciary to accept what needs to happen for this young person, what the early interventions need to be. There is a variety of tensions and resources constraints up and down the country. You are asking for investment against outcomes. There needs to be more evidence of what works in changing the behaviour of young people. What can occur is crisis intervention.

There is now a culture to inputting lots of different interventions into a young person and their family and perhaps we need to revert back to 1 or 2 interventions that become effective.

The London Boroughs Project have piloted a 2 year project of working with the Ministry of Justice and Youth Justice Board. There is the freedom to run a project how they want to and they have partnered with another London borough. The project involved consultation with magistrates and exploring how families can take responsibility. Multi Systemic Therapy is used and a breach panel has been set up. Exploring the vulnerability issues of young people is crucial. There are also diversion systems in place which are effective and the Youth Liaison and Diversions Service work together to screen and identify young people at the point of entry into the criminal justice system. The Service has also done a lot of work inside custody. There is a need to develop and expand the Diversion work with the police, as often young people who have been identified via this route do not come back into the system.

There is a need to meet the needs of the young person rather than the behaviours of the young person. The reality is that the custody rates of young people has been decreasing in the last 5 years. And this has been due to the Diversion and Triage schemes. There is a need to be open to the daily life a young person may be experiencing on the streets.

There is a need to understand how the interventions are working. Those involved in restorative justice, 90 % of victims do not want to be involved in the intervention and there is another group who want to know the intervention and to have a letter of apology.

For young people in conflict with the law, there is a need to put things right, before working out why things went wrong.



Appendix 3

Life Stories 3

Name has been changed – Niall

Niall is Black Caribbean, Niall and his twin Jamie were placed with white Remand foster carers at the age of 15 years until Niall left when he was 18 years. Jamie is currently in prison and Niall runs his own business with his dad and is studying at university. Niall would like to go on to undertake a Post Graduate course. Niall has begun to do some work with children and young people and feels blessed that he was able to make a positive choice. Niall continues to have a close relationship with his twin.

Niall and his brother have seven other siblings, Niall's parents relationship broke down when they were in year 5 (age 10) of primary school. Niall and Jamie had other older siblings and so the discussion between their parents was who had the twins. They went backwards and forwards between their parents until they were 14 years. When their parents had split, the streets had become their family following the rejection of their own family in who they should live with. The boys had started stealing and had started to make money, they were placed abroad in a boarding school at 14 years and after a year they were tired of waiting to come home, so they made their own way home.

Their mother had not wanted them to return and therefore made it clear that as they had found their own way home, she would provide them with food and a roof over their head and that was it. They realised they needed money for other things, clothes etc. and they started to find ways to gain money that involved crime.

On return they were not able to return to school education and were instead attending a Pupil Referral Unit and they were stealing by this stage and had got into



trouble with the police. Jamie was kicked out of his mother's home and he went to live with one of his sister's, Niall soon joined him. They lived with their sister, older brother and her sister's son, sleeping on the sofa. They went into a Bed and Breakfast when they had enough and until money ran out and they then took themselves to Social Services with their bin liners of possessions and refused to move. They had tried to separate the brothers but as they were close, they refused for that to happen. Their parents were not accepting them back using a tough love approach at that stage and they were placed in a home for 2 weeks, whilst longer term accommodation was found for them. In the home there were other children with similar experiences to them. It was a bit like 'Tracy Beaker' (UK books and children's television show about children's experiences in children's home and the search for a foster family or a return home). Niall and his brother had been placed outside of their local area and they wanted to return back to the local area. The boys by this stage had become involved with a group of young people that placed them in conflict with the law. Their dad had lost contact with them by this stage and their mum was still trying to help them. Following being arrested, they were placed outside of London with a couple.

The twins were told not to come back to London but they were still able to commit crime in the area they were moved to. In fact they committed bigger and more crimes as they were not known in the area. Jamie got caught at the age of 16 for Robbery and was sentenced to 3 years. Niall calmed down a little bit when his brother went to prison, it was the shock factor. Niall went into education until his brother came out of prison and they just fell back into their old ways. They were shot at, knifed and after one incident the police had wanted names. By this stage the age of 16/17 years Niall had moved from seeing his parents once a day to weekends to when he returned to the area. Jamie had moved to being in and out of prison, the more he spent time in prison, the more he came out and increased the crime level. Niall was arrested for murder at one stage and then assaulted by the police, although he could not prove the complaint he made. Niall's mother and his



foster carer supported him through the process. Niall at this stage began to reconcile with his parents.

Niall's turning point was he had a friend who had been consistently saying why you don't try college, he had eventually given Niall an application form and Niall applied. Niall is dyslexic and this has been a challenge in progressing academically but now aged 22 years, Niall is determined to move forward.

Niall's brother has continued to be in and out of prison, possession of Class A drugs, insuring cars, using his sibling's details and creating debt for his family. Niall's mother is registered disabled and his father has had more children from another relationship.

Niall believes you need youth workers and foster carers who have a passion and experience of working with young people. There is a stigma around young people becoming social workers in that they have unresolved issues and yet they are the best people to become mentors and undertake training and engage young people.