REACHING YOUR POTENTIAL

YMCA DOWNSLINK GROUP

An Evaluation of Reaching Your Potential: A Youth in Focus Project

Abstract

This report explores the work of Reaching Your Potential (RYP) and evaluates the project's utility within the Youth Justice System. The report is based upon qualitative research methods and considers the following elements of the resettlement process: the custodial transition, engagement, and approaches and characteristics of Resettlement Workers (RWs). In addition to this the report also considers the uniqueness of Reaching Your Potential and the importance of the Youth in Focus initiative. The report concludes by considering whether it is the voluntary nature of RYP or the qualities and approaches employed by RWs that make it such an effective project.

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"My time at RYP was valuable and rewarding. I would recommend volunteering with RYP to anyone who desires to learn and gain experience of the youth justice system; you may well find the role more rewarding than you expect."

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Acronyms

BL – Big Lottery

BYC – Beyond Youth Custody

ELAP – England-Wide learning and Awareness Programme

RW – Resettlement Worker

RYP – Reaching Your Potential

SDP – Service Delivery Project

YOT – Youth Offending Team

PW – Participation Worker

1 My Personal experience of RYP

Before volunteering with RYP I had little experience of the youth justice system; I had studied law at A level and was taking an MA in international law, but this proved to be very far removed from the realities of the justice system in action. Summing up what I have learnt and what I have experienced from my time volunteering for RYP will be difficult. I certainly feel humbled, but I would not say that this cliché is an adequate summary of my experience. I suppose I will start with a brief description of what my volunteering entailed, before trying to express myself.
So, the easy bit first. I was asked to do some research on RYP, some research which was evaluative. The team members largely left me with discretion over what precisely the research would entail. I did some background reading and discussed the content of various reports with Siân and the team. After some time thinking about how to go about constructing a piece of research which would actually be of use for the charity, I decided to start with the popular theme of engagement. After deciding upon the topic, I then set to compiling a report which was evaluative, but also – hopefully – of some use to the organisation. The research primarily involved interviewing and reviewing client records. Of the research carried out, the two most impressionable and poignant aspects were: meeting the clients, and gaining an insight into the motivations of the RYP team. I will discuss each very briefly.

The stigma attached to the title of 'offender' and 'criminal' is quite severe; unsurprisingly, it is difficult not to build preconceptions; what would you think before meeting a 'young offender'? Well, meeting RYP clients was a rich experience. The clients I met were refreshingly genuine and appreciative of RYP, and were committed to a process of progression and development as they were trying to leave past mistakes behind. After meeting the clients, I actually felt as though the justice system was guilty of injustice; the young people seemed to be suffering a heavy burden for past mistakes. This is how I felt at that time. The young people I met did not have the privileges I had experienced through my youth, some had faced real challenges and were still battling to surmount them, and though the clients may have made past mistakes, the stigma of being an offender did not seem reasonable. I guess that an appropriate summary is: that the experience was enlightening.

Aside from meeting the clients, I had the pleasure of meeting the 5 members of the RYP team. All the members of the RYP team care about their work and all seemed particularly empathetic; every member treated me with respect and took time to acknowledge me. Working in the youth justice sector is not a glamorous job; accordingly the people I met were working from passion. I interviewed three members of the team as part of the research for the report and I was quite overwhelmed by how ardently each resettlement worker felt about their work, and how compassionate each team member was. The RYP staff were, like the clients, genuine people. I learnt much about their work and how the youth justice system operates in practice. I am happy that I had the opportunity to meet the RYP team, I was impressed by them and it was fulfilling to meet people who really did care. I am grateful for all the help and assistance the RYP team provided, specifically Siân Bolton.

2 Introduction

Reaching Your Potential (RYP) is a YMCA DownsLink Group project which seeks to aid in the resettlement of young offenders. This research explores and evaluates the functions of RYP and considers the utility of RYP within the context of the Youth Justice System. The report is based on qualitative research methods and was conducted, part-time, over a period of approximately six months (see methodology for further details). RYP has been operational for three years now, out of a commissioned term of four years, so it is an apt time to provide a detailed analysis on its operations.

RYP: A Youth in Focus Project commissioned by the Big Lottery Fund

In 2011, the Big Lottery Fund commissioned the Youth in Focus (YIF) Programme. The main purpose of this initiative was to "support vulnerable young people through difficult changes in their lives" (Nacro, 2016). The Youth in Focus Programme focuses on three separate groups of young people – custody leavers, care leavers, and young carers. The programme has a service delivery component made up of projects that deliver services to one or more of these groups and a set of three 'England-wide Learning and Awareness Projects' (ELAPs). The three ELAPs have a national focus, and each one is linked to one of the three client groups referred to above (Big Lottery Fund, 2010, p.4). Beyond Youth Custody (BYC) is one of the three ELAPs and it focuses on young custody leavers. BYC is made up of Nacro, Applied Research in Community Safety (ARCS UK), University of Salford and University of Bedfordshire, who work to establish an evidence base of effective practice that can be used to support a clear strategy for resettlement services. As part of its remit, BYC works closely with those Youth in Focus projects that engage with custody-leavers in particular – including the RYP project (Nacro, 2016).

The YIF projects focusing on custody-leavers are quite diverse, and have focused on a range of issues such as: trauma, exploitation, offending and criminality, and community engagement. Through the Youth in Focus initiative, "up to 30 million pounds was made available to projects in England"; RYP was one such project (The National Lottery, nd).

Reaching Your Potential: structure, purpose and activity

RYP was established in 2012 as a YIF, YMCA DownsLink Group (DLG) project and became operational in January of 2013; it was commissioned for a term of three years and is due to cease activity in October 2016. RYP is a small project consisting of five staff members, three of whom are Resettlement Workers (RWs); it has its head office in Hove but serves the whole of Sussex. RYP is placed within the third sector and seeks to successfully resettle young offenders into the local community. For the

purpose of the project young people are classified as any person up to the age of twenty-five. Since 2013 RYP has pioneered approximately 160 resettlement episodes, providing support and guidance to over 100 clients so far. In their words, RYP aims to,

"...address the barriers young people face when leaving institutions; in order to dissuade them from reoffending and help them see positive alternatives that will enable them to reach their potential" (YMCA DLG, 2015)

The project works in partnership with Youth Offending Teams (YOTs), Probation and prisons across Sussex and is frequently in contact with BYC. RYP performs two main roles:

- Resettlement, which requires RWs to actively meet young people released or being released from custody and support them through the resettlement process.
- Participation, which aims to raise awareness about youth justice by consulting with young people about their needs, expectations and experiences of resettlement services, involve young people in creative communication projects about effective resettlement, and contribute to research;

Resettlement also requires RYP to effectively liaise with relevant Youth Justice Services. It is the RWs who actively meet with clients and it is their job to build a professional relationship with the client; attempting to successfully engage with the young person by "giving them the opportunity to move toward a positive future" (RW 1, 2015). The first meeting often takes place in custody at a time of unsettling transition for the young person.

3 Methodology

Sources

This research used two sources of primary data, and many sources of secondary data. Secondary sources such as: meetings, previous literature, government documents and websites were used to build a relevant knowledge. Of particular importance were reports provided by BYC and their regular literature updates; BYC is the vanguard of youth justice research and their work is highly commendable. The primary sources of data used in this research were: historic client files stored on a secure database; and also, a number of extensive interviews carried out with current clients and current RWs.

OSKA is a database used by YMCA DLG and RYP to maintain records of clients. Summaries of meetings with clients and any correspondences between services

involved with a particular client are recorded in the OSKA database. Basic socio-demographic information, such as age and contact details, and supplementary information considered useful to resettlement are also recorded.

Entries into OSKA have no specified format and can be as extensive or as short as is wished by the RW. In this research a pool of clients were considered for analysis (see next section). The analysis of the OSKA database was undertaken in an attempt to discover whether correlations between successful and unsuccessful cases of resettlement, as chosen by the RWs, could be made. The thematic analysis was revealing, however the findings from this source were not used as primary evidence because of record inconsistency; by this I mean that the absence of a clear criteria to report on meant the data lacked validity. However, as an item of qualitative data, the OSKA database was used to inform client and RW interviews.

Six clients and three RWs participated in semi-structured interviews; the interviews lasted between 40 – 80 minutes. Within these interviews a core set of questions were posed to each interviewee, with supplementary questions being formulated from answers given. These interviews were transcribed and then analysed. The transcripts were coded and themes were recognised. The coding was guided by preparatory background research and the analysis of the OSKA client database.

Shortcomings and Recommendations: Sample Quality and Size

As RYP is a small project operating within a third sector organisation and this research was carried-out voluntarily, the client sample and size was restricted by availability and feasibility. A key point to recognise is that the interviewees were all current clients who represented positive cases of engagement. Unsurprisingly, clients who had not engaged with RYP were not available for interview, if they were still clients at all. This was not detrimental to the research because the research was primarily seeking to establish themes associated with positive engagement; however, data which would have enabled the research to isolate themes associated with poor engagement would have been invaluable. The clients were chosen based on availability, which meant the sample was not attempting to account for age or gender. The clients did include one female client and the ages ranged between 17 -23. All the interviews were consensual and it was agreed with the interviewees that they would be anonymised and their interview recordings destroyed after use.

Future methodological recommendations:
- Include ex-clients where possible and attempt to employ more specific sample criteria which controls for more variables; this would require a greater sample size

- Include a secondary service organisation to provide a comparison control.

4 The challenges of providing successful resettlement

The custodial transition

These quotes are the response of some RYP clients to a question concerning custodial release:

"No, it wasn't easy at all to adjust.... it's a whole new experience... It felt so much longer than six months. When I came out, everything was different. Seeing my family was really strange, being in my house was really strange, even walking around". **– (RYP client 1, 2015)**

"You just lock yourself behind the door for a couple of days because that's all you know…that's all your body knows for them first couple of days. You have to try and wake your body up to tell yourself' look you're not in prison anymore you can leave at your own free will'." **– (RYP client 5, 2015)**

"Coming out is much harder than going in…it doesn't matter if you're there for a couple of months or a couple of years, you live your life going everywhere in single file, everything is one motion… you get told when to go to bed, basically you get stripped of all your freedom. I thought 'how hard can it be?' but it is pretty hard when you come out because everything is just 100 miles an hour." **– (RYP client 6, 2015)**

Earlier this year (2015) BYC produced a qualitative research report on the experiences of young offenders leaving custody. The report found that young offenders often experience major disorientation as they begin the process of realigning themselves with the norms of everyday life (Bateman & Hazel, 2015). Some of the young people reported that they experienced physical symptoms in reaction to the drastic change, and it was suggested that the young people felt "lost and confused" (Bateman & Hazel, 2015, p. 2).

From the research carried out with RYP clients, it is clear that client experiences reaffirm the findings of the BYC report; but one particular finding is most evident, and is perhaps the root cause of the 'disorientation' young people feel when leaving custody. This finding is that young people believe there is a major lack of structure when leaving custody. Each RYP client interviewed explained that when they were in custody they lived by a routine which, on leaving custody, was replaced by the choice and responsibility felt by every independent member of society; however,

ex-offenders also have to comply with license conditions, and they have to come to terms with the stigma of being 'an offender'. There are implications to this transition.

One such implication is that the emotional turbulence of an unsupported release can lead to the offender breaking licence conditions, as occurred with one interviewee who explained that, "it was just this, kind of… stress being out was all too much" (RYP client 1, 2015). A second implication is that, amidst the confusion of being released, lifestyle commitments may be neglected, perhaps making reoffending more likely as well. One client interviewed put it this way:

"You come out of jail, you miss the meeting, you get a sanction [meaning welfare support will be withheld], you've got to wait like six weeks. What are you going to do in those six weeks? You're going to go back to rob someone or shoplifting or whatever. Then you're back in that cycle again." **– (RYP client 2, 2015)**

The BYC report includes recommendations about how to address the problems of custodial transition (Bateman & Hazel, 2015). Certainly, it is in everyone's interest to make the process as efficient as possible: custody is costly for the state, so minimising reoffending is key; it is in the public's interest as they do not want to suffer directly from the act of offending; and, of course, it is in the young person's interest. Though the transition process is unlikely to be addressed soon, the services of RYP, and all other such projects, pose at least a partial solution to the problem. RWs regularly meet clients before release and can then put in place a support package tailored to the individual young person, which serves to provide order and routine in what is otherwise a chaotic time. Providing this initial support and routine is the first step toward successfully engaging with the client.

Engagement: a useful definition

Successfully 'engaging' clients is a key preliminary and ongoing task for a RW, which provides anchorage for effective resettlement work to take place. If the client fails to engage with the resettlement programme, the principles embedded within the programme will not be received by the client and it will be up to them alone to desist from reoffending.

Engagement is certainly a broad concept (YJB, 2010), and undoubtedly, it revolves around qualities of a relationship, meaning it "is a two way street" (RW 1, 2015). Furthermore, because successful engagement revolves around emotional interaction, there is no perfect formula. Below are the definitions of engagement provided by RYP staff.

RW 1 - "Young people actively committed to personal development and who regularly communicate with resettlement workers for support... The young person will want to make positive changes in their life and achieve goals".

RW 2 - "Input and time between a professional and a service user. Examples of successful engagement include: attending appointments and a commitment to the implementation of their support plan; examples of poor engagement include: not attending meetings, and not displaying any effort".

PW – "There are three stages to successful engagement: (1) clients agreeing to take part with RYP whilst in custody; (2) clients developing a sustained relationship with their RW, meeting with them regularly and identifying with the projects aims; (3) and finally, clients actively engaging in training, education and employment – constructive activity in the community which supports their personal development".

From these definitions it is clear that successful engagement requires participation, but that successful engagement is more than passive participation (Bateman & Hazel, 2013, p.18); it must have an active quality to it. It is also clear that successful engagement requires some form of development, suggesting it is a process of gradual change. In a recent BYC report, researchers evaluated the concept of engagement, reviewing various definitions and making suggestions about how to improve the utility of the concept (Bateman & Hazel, 2013). In accordance with the RYP definitions, the report notes that successful engagement is characterised by a desire to change, what the researchers label as "intrinsic motivation" (Bateman & Hazel, 2013, p.19). The report goes on to suggest that engagement, as a process, can be considered in stages: stage 1 requires the project to engage with the client, thereby providing external motivation; stage 2 sees the client respond to the service and develop internal motivation; and stage 3 sees the client develop a sustained change of perspective, demonstrated through positive life choices and actions (Bateman & Hazel, 2013, p. 29). So, from research, it is clear that engagement is a more intricate process than the term may first suggest. In summary one can propose that positive engagement:

'is a process of self-development in which clients, through positive and sustained interaction with service providers, experience a change of perspective; this change of perspective is perhaps reflective and is induced by the programme and people who the client is engaging with'.

A client who has successfully engaged with RYP demonstrates the importance of RYP as stimulus of change in him/herself:

"I feel the way I do because of [RW] and [RW] and the agency [RYP], but I've grown so much in myself, and I think they are a big part of that, they have helped me come on that journey along way. Yes, I've grown up a lot in the last year, two years, since I came out. That was when it all changed, and since then a lot more has changed with the help of [RWs], and now I'm in a position where I look at myself two years ago, that's not me." – **(RYP client 1, 2015)**

Being ready to engage

Having defined engagement it is necessary to delve deeper and to consider the importance of positive engagement to successful resettlement. From interviewing RYP RWs, it became clear that positive engagement did not always lead to desistance from reoffending, but all RWs agreed that clients who had positively engaged with the service were less likely to reoffend than those who failed to engage with the service. It is for this reason that engagement as a concept is so important. Each RW reported that about a third of all RYP clients who seem positive about RYP initially, will fail to progress with the project and thus fail to successfully engage. This suggests that two thirds of all clients who are initially positive about RYP, and see RYP as posing some benefit, will continue to engage and develop with the project. This finding does not seem to contradict, but rather support, the suggestion that, for successful engagement to be possible in the first place, the young person must perceive the intervention to be of a benefit to him/herself (Bateman &Hazel, 2013, p.5). So, it seems that successful engagement is related to a client's willingness to receive help in the first place. This is not to say that any programme which involves a young person who is not yet ready to be helped is wasted. Interventions that otherwise don't seem to have been very successful may have a long term influence; a "time delayed" feature that takes some time for the meaning of a RWS efforts to "sink in" for a young person (RW 2, 2015).

An important point to consider is that the voluntary nature of RYP makes achieving positive engagement an accessible goal. RYP is an entirely voluntary service. Once referred, usually by their YOT or Probation Worker, a young person is visited in custody or soon after release and offered support from a RYP RW. If accepted, this is when the engagement process begins. There is no obligation or condition related to a young person's involvement with RYP and this was seen as very positive by those interviewed. Research did not reveal a hard and fast rule which could be used to indicate when and whether a client was indeed 'ready to engage', however, from interviews it became apparent that being ready to accept help was a vital step in successful resettlement.

A number of clients interviewed recognised a "lightbulb moment" where it just "clicked" (RYP client 4, 2015) and they decided to make serious lifestyle changes; a point at which they became willing to receive help. Whether this moment results from a long process of trial and error and "just getting bored of crime" (RYP client 2, 2015), or whether it is a moment of instantaneous realisation following a custodial sentence, is largely irrelevant. It is likely that both can apply. It is important to note, however, that even in cases where there are such "lightbulb moments" it is unclear how strong the ripples from such an event will be in a young person's life. In some young people they might dissipate quickly.

During interviews with RYP staff it also became clear that a young person's willingness to change is not at all like being left handed or having blue eyes- which you could look for in individuals and identify quite easily whether this attribute is present or not. Willingness to change is dynamic and sometimes fleeting; a young person may feel very motivated on a Tuesday but not so on a Friday (RW 1&2). It is therefore the role of a RW to spot opportunities for facilitating or nurturing a 'willingness to change'. A discussion with Mark Liddle, Managing Director of ARCS (UK) confirmed this, highlighting that sometimes a young person's 'willingness to change' is eroded cyclically over time because the individual has very little resilience in the face of setbacks. Therefore, the continuity of interest by a RW is important, because it can inject hope and resilience in circumstances where the young person is temporarily lacking these things. A BYC report, 'Engaging Young People in Resettlement ', demonstrates that there are characteristics and personal qualities which are important in a client/service user relationship; the research carried out for RYP confirms this (Bateman & Hazel, 2013).

The 'right' person, the 'right' approach?

The RYP resettlement workers do not adopt a rigid approach to resettlement. Building a positive resettlement relationship is a highly individual and dynamic process. When asked about the type of approach RWs would take with clients, they replied by suggesting that they would build a support plan around an individual client's needs at the initial meetings. Following this, the RW would have general aims for each meeting based upon the input of the client.

When asked what they were trying to achieve through their meetings, the RWs replied by saying they were trying to: provide support, empower the young person, and address those barriers or problems in the young person's life which have contributed to their offending behaviour. It was agreed that this process takes time, and can involve "taking some steps forward and backwards to try and work out what the answer is" (RW 2, 2015).

One RW adopted a particularly distinctive outlook on resettlement approaches, which may have been informed by his background as a social worker. This RW felt it was important to attempt to embed a "social conscience in the young person" (RW 2, 2015). The idea of a social conscience is bound to the idea of the community. It is a process which involves promoting self-awareness within the local community. Some key techniques of this RWs approach were: to use passive - non-accusative - language, thereby avoiding the risk of appearing as an authority figure and also using scenarios and examples to cause the client to question his/her initial assumptions and moral perspectives. This RW termed this process as being a form of 'mentoring' (RW 2, 2015). Aside from this RW's perspective on the importance of mentoring, it was apparent that there is not a blanket approach which can be applied to create successful resettlement programmes. However, what is clear is that there are generalisable personal qualities which suit resettlement work.

The RWs all shared certain characteristics which made them effective in their field, as became clear from interviewing their clients. There are several key qualities and behaviours in particular which are important in building a positive resettlement relationship. These are as follows: the ability to be "genuine" (RYP client 1, 2015), the quality of being consistent and reliable, being capable of adopting a positive attitude, the ability to be patient and empathetic, and the ability to maintain a relationship which does not lead to over-dependence (RYP client 1, 2015). The importance of these qualities has been noted in earlier research, and this work only serves to reaffirm these findings.

Each client respected and observed that RWs "came down to [their] level" (RYP client 1, 2015). As will become clear from the proceeding section, those interviewed do not necessarily perceive employees in the criminal justice sector positively. Accordingly, to have any hope of forming a positive resettlement relationship, RWs must do their utmost to be perceived as an equal. Being genuine will help to build trust, but to maintain trust, RWs will also need to be reliable. Young people may feel as though they have been let down by people in the past and it is therefore imperative to meet commitments which are made. This may also breed reliability on behalf of the client as well.

Clients seemed almost surprised by the level of commitment and reliability of their RWs. Clients all reported that meeting with RWs was a highly uplifting and motivating experience, which provided them with structure and centred on prospective life choices and future paths. One client, before release said, "[RW] was the only person that gave me something to look forward to on the outside" (RYP client 4, 2015).

Positivity alone is not enough however. From this research it became clear that the life of a RW is very emotionally demanding and therefore patience, empathy, and determination are imperative.

The final quality of importance is the ability to maintain a relationship which does not cause over-dependence. This is not easy, and again, is very individual. One client described their relationship with their RW as being "almost like a friendship" (RYP client 1, 2015). Interviews with the RWs suggest that they would describe their relationship as having qualities of a friendship but primarily being a professional relationship with boundaries and ground rules (RW 1, 2 & 3, 2015). As the RWs are attempting to provide only temporary support for the client, with a view to one day withdrawing assistance and leaving the client as a successful, competent and independent member of society, they must be cautious in their support. At RYP, there was an incidence in which one RW felt that he/she had to withdraw support as personal boundaries and levels of dependence were becoming jeopardised (RW 1, 2015).

Placing these qualities in context, it can be said that such qualities inform a successful approach to resettlement and are conducive to building a positive relationship with a client, which in turn make successful engagement possible.

So far, this report has been concerned with the process of successful resettlement, using RYP as a model. However, this report has not yet touched on a key principle of RYP which distinguishes it from state supplied probationary and resettlement services. RYP is placed within a third sector organisation, YMCA DLG, and does not have any statutory duties. These factors contribute to young people developing a very positive perspective of RYP.

5 What's so special about RYP?

Resettlement Workers as supplementary but essential: a unique role in the Youth Justice System

The ultimate aim of all rehabilitation programmes is to prevent recidivism. It is well known that rates of youth reoffending are staggeringly high at approximately 70% (Nacro, 2016), and in light of this one would be justified in suggesting that rehabilitation programmes need to change.

An important finding of this research was that the young people interviewed felt quite a significant degree of animosity towards their YOT worker or their probation worker. This does not mean that the young people are justified in feeling this. YOT workers and probation workers play a very important role and are in place to protect society and the young person. They often have to make hard decisions and are tasked with a high level of responsibility. However, it has been demonstrated that the efficiency of a resettlement episode at RYP is dependent upon building a positive relationship with the young person, a relationship of mutual trust and respect. Therefore, it is very significant that the young people interviewed in this research did not have positive relationships with their YOT or probation worker, but that they did have positive relationships with their RW. It is perhaps not hard to understand why young offenders may see youth justice officers as "an enemy" (RYP client 2, 2015). It is the duty of YOT or probation workers to ensure that young people comply with their licence and it is their duty to report and recall young people if necessary. Furthermore, young peoples' experiences with authorities such as prison guards and police officers, if negative, may be over extended to YOT or probation workers, as they also have the power to reprimand young offenders. One client said of probation workers generally that "they treat you like a criminal", whereas they said of their RW that "she is on my side... they treat you like a person" (RYP client 4, 2015). One client interviewed went so far as to suggest that he/she believed that her YOT worker was purposely attempting to make him/her "slip up" (RYP client 1, 2015). It seems as though, from these interviews at least, that young offenders do not see Youth Offending or Probationary services as being in place to help as much as they perceive them as being in place to monitor. It should not be unexpected that young people who have previously offended feel some form of resentment toward the person who can decide whether they return to custody or not. Therefore, building trust within such a relationship may be difficult.

In contrast to perceptions of YOT and probation workers, clients possessed highly positive sentiments towards RYP RWs. In the clients views, RWs were not 'professionals' in the same sense as other members of the youth justice system, RWs were not "patronising" and were there to help (RYP client 1, 2015). An integral component of this positivity is that RYP is not compulsory. In the words of a client:

> "… they said I didn't have to go and see her as well, which helps. She was like; "Want to meet?" and I'd always want to meet, because it's kind of my decision. It's not, ''You have to be here at this time. If you're not, you're going back to jail''"
> **- (RYP client 1, 2015)**

Another helpful point to note is that RYP RWs actively tried to avoid liaising with parents where possible, to ensure that they did not assume the role of an authority

figure in the young person's eyes. RWs would liaise with parents if the young person was still a dependent (under 18) or if a young person's circumstances deemed it necessary, but they suggested that it could be more detrimental than helpful and could place the RWs in an "uncomfortable position" (RW 1, 2015). Qualitatively then, RWs play a very unique and wholly distinct role in the youth justice system. RWs are perceived by young people as being there to help and support them through difficulty. A RW summarised this,

"I'm going to be there for you and we're going to work with you until our support comes to an end. If everything goes according plan, by the time our support does come to an end you will be in a better place and able to not need me anymore" (RW 2, 2015).

6 Conclusion

RYP: A Youth in Focus Project to learn from

This report has identified and discussed elements that are key to the successful resettlement of young people leaving custody. This report has been focused around the theme of engagement, arguing that successful engagement leads to successful resettlement and makes desistance from offending behaviour more likely. It is noted that the immediate period after release from custody is a 'high-risk' time for reoffending, and is perhaps the time at which young people are most vulnerable.

The report has suggested that young people may have negative perceptions of traditional youth offending services and that this negativity can hamper the resettlement process. It was argued that the youth offending and probation services are essential, but that the role of projects such as RYP have great value in being supplementary and non-mandatory. The report has explored the methods employed by RWs and has suggested that there are certain qualities and characteristics which enable them to build successful relationships with clients and foster positive engagement. It was further proposed that the special voluntary quality of such services enable RWs to make progress with those young people who are ready to receive and seek out help.

The extent to which RYP's voluntary nature is essentially related to the effectiveness of the project remains an empirical question; is it the voluntary nature of RYP or the qualities and approaches used by RWs that make it such an effective project? It could be argued that the jury is still out.

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