



Title: No Fixed Abode: The Housing Struggle for Young People Leaving Custody in England

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SCS topic headings: Personal Safety; Home Safety; Safety in Public Spaces; Safety of Vulnerable Groups; Partnership Working; Evaluation and Monitoring

This document is a REVIEW of effective intervention approaches.

Summary of the intervention's aim

According to criminal justice legislation and statutory guidance, the effective resettlement of young people from custody should be a seamless 'end to end' process of planning and practice that starts when the young person enters custody, is maintained throughout their sentence, and continues as they move into the community. It should encompass seven interlinked resettlement pathways identified by the Ministry of Justice and the Youth Justice Board as important in reducing reoffending: education and training, health, substance misuse, families, finance benefit and debt, accommodation and support, and the cross-cutting 'case management and transitions' pathway.

This report focuses specifically on the 'accommodation and support' resettlement pathway and was prompted by the experiences of staff at Barnardo's advocacy services in the secure estate. Accommodation on release was one of the top five issues of concern raised by young people who used the service in 2009-10 and was reported to be a pressing issue. In addition, staff working in Barnardo's services in the community reported encountering significant numbers of homeless young people whose initial post-custody placements had been untenable.

Outcomes

Obtaining a national picture of the numbers of young people who have left custody and are living in unsuitable or temporary placements is difficult as there is no systematic, accurate data collection by the secure estate, Youth Offending Teams or local authorities.

Youth Justice Board statistics suggest that 297 (i.e. 7%) young people did not have 'suitable' accommodation on leaving custody in 2009-10; an improvement of three per cent on the previous year. However, the quality of Youth Offending Team recording that produced this information is very varied, there is no agreed definition of suitability and the data only captures a snapshot in time. A more accurate source of information is survey data, which suggests that there has been little progress in the last seven years.

- Chapter 2 presents an overview of key current policy and legislation impacting on the planning and provision of suitable accommodation in England for young people leaving custody- Barnado's refer to custody as resettlement.

Barnado's research for this report provides the following outcomes:

- The structure and stability that can be instilled in one young person's life through supported accommodation on release from custody can produce savings of more than £67,000 over a three-year period (see chapter 3 for examples of costing related to approach, particularly pp.15-23).
Barnado's analyses the costs and benefits of three typical resettlement journeys when a young person is released from custody. The quantitative analysis shows the public costs of these journeys up to three years after release from custody. Although it does not include any social costs (for example impact on the emotional wellbeing of the young person or any family members) it illustrates the savings that early stable and supported accommodation can produce.

The report delivers its findings on the outcomes of different resettlement approaches by describing young people's journeys. These are constructed based upon the collective experiences of the young people featured in this research, data gathered from the research interviews, and available evidence in published literature. (See the EIR section below [How the evaluation gathered information for findings and conclusions.](#)) An analysis of the interview data also enabled three 'typical' resettlement journeys to be summarised and were used to base the cost-benefits analysis highlighted in the previous bullet point.

- Entitlements and consequent support for voluntarily accommodated young people drops off when they enter custody, resulting in relatively unsupported, rushed transitions into the community and unsettled starts (see chapter 4, p.24). *Example: Voluntarily accommodated; In custody- Loses looked after child status, Feels 'forgotten about', and behaviour deteriorate, and an address is provided two days before release; Unsettled start- final warning for breach; Remains in children's home.*
- Looked after young people who are entitled to support perceive themselves as 'forgotten' about while in custody- receiving limited help to plan suitable accommodation (see chapter 4, p.29). *Example: Full care order; In custody- Retains looked after child status, and little communication from YOT or social*

worker about accommodation, and no address provided one week before early release, and becomes increasingly anxious, and early release denied due to bad behaviour.

- A significant number of 16 and 17-year-olds are being insufficiently supported on release- resulting in disengagement from services and costly reoffending (see chapter 4, p.33). *Example: No legal care status; In custody- Local authorities did not accept responsibility for carrying out initial assessment in custody, and no support from children's services whilst in custody; Temporarily accommodated in unsuitable placement with little support whilst assessment carried out; Recall to custody.*
- A limited range of accommodation options for 16 and 17-year-olds is resulting in delays in allocation of placements, and young people living for lengthy periods in unsuitable placements such as B&Bs and hostels (see chapter 4, p.38). *Example: Voluntarily accommodated; In custody- Loses looked after child status, and little contact with 16+ worker, and YOT and 16+ worker cannot find suitable accommodation; Housed temporarily in a B&B with little support in an area known for crime; Awaiting a breach hearing, and has been in B&B for eight weeks.*
- Children and young people as young as 13 are being placed back with families unable to cope and with little support- resulting in homelessness some months after release (see chapter 4, p.43). *Example: 'Relevant' young person; In custody- Status remains unchanged; Lack of information sharing, and 16+ worker did not regularly keep in contact, and no support to address family relationships, and no suitable address arranged – released to mother's home; No family support- placement breaks down and becomes homeless; Children's services provide B&B accommodation.*

Summary of evaluation conclusions

- Despite long-standing government awareness of the poor accommodation pathways of young people leaving custody and significant financial investment in the youth justice system, vulnerable young people continue to follow unsettling and risky accommodation pathways from custody to the community- at significant cost to themselves, their communities and the public purse.

The report's recommendations include:

- A cross-government action plan and dedicated senior officials from the Ministry of Justice, Department for Education and Department for Communities and Local Government who will work with local authorities and criminal justice agencies to ensure that suitable accommodation for young people leaving custody is an issue of urgent priority.

- A cross-government team to consider revisiting aspirations previously set out in the Youth Crime Action Plan⁷ to develop a more comprehensive statutory package of support for *all* young people serving a custodial sentence, including a lead professional for each child during and after their sentence, and a clear pathway for resettlement similar to the care plan⁸ for looked after children.
- The Government should consider reinstating the assumption included in the *Care Matters* Green Paper (but excluded from the White Paper and thus the legislation) that former voluntarily accommodated young people will continue to be looked after on entering custody.
- Where temporary or emergency accommodation must be used for young people leaving custody, there should be minimum standards and a quality assurance framework so that housing options can be assessed and monitored against nationally agreed standards.
- The Government should guarantee earmarked funding for social worker posts in Young Offender Institutions (YOIs) to help bridge the gap between YOIs and local authorities.
- The Government should consider tougher, more meaningful inspection of resettlement support provided by local authorities to looked after young people in all custodial establishments (including YOIs), which gives sufficient weight to young people's feedback.
- The Government should consider developing a long-term strategy to support the families of young people in the secure estate and invest in good quality interventions such as family group conferencing and multi-systemic therapy.
- Local authorities and statutory partners should pool budgets creatively to ensure that adequate resources are available to commission a range of supported and semi-supported housing options for young people leaving custody.
- A national reporting mechanism is required that provides a clear picture of supply and demand of accommodation provisions for young people leaving custody.
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How the evaluation gathered information for findings and conclusions

Barnardo's researchers interviewed young people serving Detention and Training Orders who had approached Barnardo's advocacy service with accommodation issues and who were due for release in the next two months. Permissions were granted from the National Offender Management Service and the Youth Justice Board and the research took place during August to November 2010.

Semi-structured interviews were carried out with 15 young people (14 males and one female) in the secure estate. Four were being held in a Secure Training Centre and 11 were held in three different Young Offender Institutions. Eight of the young people were selected as 'case studies' and researchers continued to track their circumstances as they moved through the gate from custody to the community. This was done through interviews with the professionals working with them and in one case the researchers attended a pre-release planning meeting. The follow-up interviews were carried out at release and then at one-month intervals or at significant points in the community element of the Detention and Training Order, for example, at a breach hearing. Four of the young people (Liam, Daniel, Amy and Chris) feature in this report – chosen because their stories represent a number of the common themes that were evident throughout the research.

Additionally, three case studies were supplied by Barnardo's homelessness services. In these cases the staff had met the young people some time after their release from custody because their placements back home with family had been unsuccessful. These case studies clearly illustrated the pressures put on families when young people are released from custody and return home with very little support.

Semi-structured interviews were carried out with 27 professionals about the challenges of ensuring that young people in the secure estate are supported into suitable accommodation. Those interviewed in the community included social workers, Youth Offending Team workers and housing officers; while case workers, resettlement leads, a social worker and a governor were interviewed in the secure estate. An additional 12 professionals were contacted in order to gather updates and additional information on the case studies.

Analysis of all the interview data enabled researchers to build a picture of the realities of resettlement and identify key barriers to suitable accommodation. It also enabled the development of three 'typical' resettlement journeys on which to base a cost-benefits analysis. The researchers consulted with a range of stakeholders in the sector to test the findings and develop the policy and practice recommendations. Participatory anonymity is practiced in the final published report.

Chapter three uses data from one of Barnardo's successful supported accommodation projects and compares the costs and benefits to the state of a typical supported accommodation journey with two typical unsupported journeys.

No information is detailed about how literature material was sourced or assessed for methodological robustness.

Further details about the SCS evaluation of this report are available on request. Please contact info@scsn.org.uk

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