



Report from Leeds Youth Offending Service for IGCS Scrutiny Board, November 2017

An overview of current initiatives and existing challenges associated with assisting young people who have offended into the labour market

1. Background information

Leeds Youth Offending Service works with children and young people aged 10 – 17 with the aim of preventing offending and reducing re-offending. The YOS continues to support the Leeds Children's Services obsessions of reducing the numbers of looked-after children, reducing the number of young people not in education, employment and training and improving school attendance. We have three multi-agency area teams based in each wedge in the city, each having an education officer with the specific remit of maximising young people's access to suitable education, training and employment. Our statutory partners come from education, health, local authority, police and probation services.

Our principle methodology involves working with young people and their families to build their ability to desist from crime. We recognise that meaningful education and securing a training placement or employment is a key desistance factor, often leading to improvements in young people's self-worth, a positive identity away from offending and integration within the community. This paper gives information about some of the challenges young people face in accessing such opportunities as well as briefly outlining some of the initiatives we have developed to address these challenges.

At the time of writing, Leeds YOS is working with around 300 individual young people on a range of disposals, from youth cautions and voluntary preventative interventions through to young people in custody. Just over half of these young people are aged 10 – 16 year olds within the school system. 70 are logged as having Education Health and Care Plans (EHCPs). 45% of the young people over the age of 16 are enrolled in training provision of some sort. 9% have some sort of full or part time employment. 41% are NEET. 4% have no Employment, Training and Education information recorded.

2. Existing challenges

Complexity and disadvantage

As the number of young people being processed through the youth justice system decreases, there is a corresponding increase in the complexity and risk associated with those who remain within it. Our young people are among the most disadvantaged in the city and have frequently faced significant trauma in their early years. Their family life has often been characterised by domestic abuse, substance use, poor mental health and

poverty, with parents who struggle to provide a safe, secure home. High numbers of children and young people who come to the attention of youth justice services also have learning, speech and communication problems, low levels of educational attainment and far more unmet health needs than their peers. Often young people who offend have been victims of serious crime themselves. This means that young people in the youth justice system are frequently simply not job-ready at the same time as many of their peers, with poor basic skills and motivation.

Criminal records

The Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974 allows some convictions to be 'spent', meaning they do not have to be mentioned when applying for most jobs or courses after a certain length of time. The rehabilitation period for people receiving cautions or convictions when they are under the age of 18 is shorter than is the case for adults. However, it remains the case that a criminal record acquired in childhood can have far-reaching effects that go well beyond the original sentence or disposal. Certain sentences will never become spent, and certain convictions or cautions will always be disclosed when an individual seeks employment in a particular field.

Special education needs, disabilities and poor attainment

Many of the children and young people in the youth justice system have had little meaningful engagement in education, particularly when reaching high school age. Some have learning difficulties and lack the basic skills in literacy and numeracy to succeed at school, while others have been permanently or temporarily excluded. Around a third of young people of school age who are currently known to the YOS have education and health care plans (EHCPs).

Support needs

As a vibrant economic regional hub, young people in Leeds do generally have the benefit of employment and training opportunities in a number of sectors within a reasonable distance of their locality. However, many YOS young people struggle to access these opportunities. Some cannot tell the time or are excluded from mainstream opportunities due to poor literacy or numeracy. Others do not feel safe outside their immediate area. Some feel so excluded that they do not perceive that the employment market could be for them. Others do not have friends or family who have experience of work and therefore do not get the practical and emotional support many young people need when starting the routine of regular training or employment.

3. Current initiatives to assist young people who have offended into the labour market

Skill Mill (see leaflet attached)

Leeds YOS, in partnership with Newcastle Youth Offending Team, has over the past three years established a Skill Mill. The Skill Mill provides young ex-offenders with a paid job for six months working in natural environments, developing practical and employability skills and promoting desistance from crime. Young people on the programme are also expected to spend a proportion of their time improving their basic skills and gaining qualifications in areas such as construction skills, working at heights, health and safety, invasive species and others. The Skill Mill specifically targets young people who would struggle to obtain/sustain a mainstream apprenticeship or training opportunity without considerable support.

Five cohorts of young people have now completed the Skill Mill programme and the sixth cohort began work in October 2017. The programme has had considerable impact in terms of high levels of engagement (and lower breach rates); lower offending rates and feedback from young people, partners and community has been overwhelmingly positive. Leeds Skill Mill has recently become a Community Interest Company in its own right.

One of the strengths of the programme is that it brings together many partners both within the city council, private business, community and education sectors and also organisations with local, regional and national profiles. Partners include the Environment Agency; Leeds City Council; Yorkshire Water Ltd; the Esh Group; Leeds College of Building; Futureworks Yorkshire; River Stewardship Company; CEG plus other private sector organisations providing free or low cost professional services as a demonstration of their corporate social responsibility. Grant funding has also been secured from Leeds Community Fund and the Police Crime Commissioner.



Partnership work with CEG & Canal Rivers Trust – Vegetation Removal on the Leeds & Liverpool Canal

The process of growing the Skill Mill has been both challenging and rewarding in equal measure. We owe a great deal of thanks to those organisations which have shown their confidence in the idea of the Skill Mill. Partnership is the key to our success and thanks to the direct commissioned work we receive we have been able to develop in both confidence and size.

The Skill Mill continues to spend time at Kirkstall Forge and we have recently been working with the Project Co-ordinator at the Forging Futures site to rebuild a retaining wall, as well as carrying out site maintenance tasks and clearance work.

West and South Yorkshire Resettlement Consortium

There were 27 young people resettled to Leeds last year from custody (licence periods starting between 1/04/16 and 31/03/17). Leeds reflects the national trend of decreasing use of custody.

Since September 2014, Leeds YOS has been the operational lead on the South and West Yorkshire Resettlement Consortium providing a co-ordinated approach and additional services for the successful resettlement of young people into the community from custody. Originally funded through the Youth Justice Board, the consortium is now supported by the nine youth offending teams in South and West Yorkshire, and the links developed and partnerships made will continue to enhance the resettlement prospects for all young people leaving custody and returning to the community.

Delivery is focussed on specific issues we know are crucial for successful resettlement: accommodation, education training and employment, support for family life, and advice around finance, benefits and debt. For example, the resettlement consortium has worked with Wetherby YOI to maximise opportunities for release on temporary licence for purposes such as interviews for college or training placements and to improve planning processes for release.

Basic skills

Many of our young people struggle with literacy as a result of their poor experience of the education system, which functionally excludes them from the job market. To address this, Leeds YOS has recently invested in a new software programme which, alongside one to one support, enables learners to rapidly improve their core language skills – involving reading, writing, speaking and listening. The programme ensure learners understand the core language that has the greatest impact on their understanding of their course or job. We are currently delivering this programme intensively to seven young people.

Right Direction programme

Many of our young people wish to work but need to improve their social and listening skills, understanding of the job market or training providers and confidence before they are ready to move forward. The Right Direction 6 week programme is run by our NEET specialist education officer and aims to get young people work, apprenticeship and college ready to improve their prospects of both getting and retaining the right opportunity. The programme covers presentation and listening skills, interview techniques, understanding all

the different employment and training pathways, CV writing and dealing with disclosure issues. Young people are then supported to access opportunities appropriate to them.

Volunteering

Leeds YOS runs a large and well respected volunteering programme with a wide range of volunteering roles. Part of this programme involves encouraging, supporting and training young people themselves to become volunteers, both within our own service and within their wider communities. Our reparation opportunities are designed to build young people's skill sets and confidence as well as give them an opportunities to make amends. We also run a young people's participation group #RealTalk which has contributed to service improvements in the YOS and within partner agencies. Our CARE group gives a voice to young people who have experience of both care and criminal justice systems and has provided opportunities for young people to take part in consultation events, training, conferences and campaigning to improve provision for young people in care. Such experience is invaluable in improving young people's confidence, skills and ambitions for their future lives, increasing their employability.

Individualised support

Each young person known to the YOS is the subject of a thorough assessment leading to an individualised plan to address their specific needs. All young people have an allocated YOS worker responsible for delivering the plan. This may involve one of the YOS specialist workers, such as the CAMHS nurse or the substance use worker. The YOS education officer will get involved if the young person does not have appropriate school provision, if they have an attendance problem or if they are NEET.