



Where we see our standards delivered well, in practice.



HM Inspectorate of Probation

AN HM INSPECTORATE OF PROBATION EFFECTIVE PRACTICE GUIDE



Effective practice guide: **Working with young adults**

Based on: The quality of services delivered to young adults in the Probation Service. A thematic inspection by HM Inspectorate of Probation.

September 2024

Acknowledgements

This effective practice guide is based on information sourced while undertaking the thematic inspection '[The quality of services delivered to young adults in the Probation Service. A thematic inspection by HM Inspectorate of Probation](#)' and work arising from key lines of enquiry. The inspection was led by HM inspector Maria Jerram, supported by a team of inspectors and operations, research, communications, and corporate staff. User Voice undertook interviews with young adults who had experience of being supervised by the Probation Service. The manager responsible for this inspection programme is Helen Davies.

In collaboration with Helen Amor, effective practice lead, Maria Jerram has drawn out examples of effective practice (where we see our standards delivered well in practice) across organisational delivery and case supervision. These are presented in this guide, to support the continuous development of practitioners and managers.

We would like to thank all those who participated in any way in this inspection, and especially those who have contributed to this guide. Without their help and cooperation, the inspection and effective practice guide would not have been possible.

Please note that, throughout the report, the names in the practice examples have been changed, to protect the individual's identity.

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The guide is aimed at a range of audiences; it is intended to support [practitioners](#), [middle managers](#), and [strategic leaders](#) to reflect on their own experiences and consider how they may apply the salient learning points in their own contexts. Therefore, please use the contents page to navigate directly to the sections pertinent to you.

Introduction

About this guide

His Majesty's Inspectorate of Probation has a duty to identify and disseminate effective practice.¹

We assure the quality of youth offending and probation provision and test its effectiveness. Critically, we make recommendations designed to highlight and disseminate best practice, challenge poor performance and encourage providers to improve.

This guide highlights where we have seen our standards delivered well for young adults in the Probation Service. It is designed to help commissioners and providers improve their work with young adults in the criminal justice system (CJS) who are serving community and custodial sentences.

I am grateful to all the areas that participated in this review, and for their additional help in producing this guide. We publish these guides to complement our reports and the standards against which we inspect youth justice services and probation.

I hope this guide will be of interest to everyone working in probation services and seeking to improve their practice. We welcome feedback on this and our other guides, to ensure that they are as useful as possible to future readers.



Martin Jones CBE

HM Chief Inspector of Probation



Contact us



We would love to hear what you think of this guide. Please send your comments and feedback on this guide, including its impact and any suggested improvements, to Helen.amor@hmiprobation.gov.uk

Finding your way



Tools for practitioners



Video produced by HM Inspectorate of Probation



Useful links



External video

¹ **For adult services** – Section 7 of the *Criminal Justice and Court Services Act 2000*, as amended by the *Offender Management Act 2007*, section 12(3)(a). **For youth services** – inspection and reporting on youth offending teams is established under section 39 of the *Crime and Disorder Act 1998*.

Background

Transitioning from youth to adulthood is gradual and affects behaviour and decision-making. Young adults are at higher risk of reoffending, breaches, and recalls, which can be due to low psychosocial maturity, cognitive challenges, and impulse control issues. Factors such as traumatic brain injuries, substance use, mental health disorders, and adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) can further hinder maturation. Young women in the justice system have distinct needs and vulnerabilities compared with young men.

The 2016 Justice Committee report on the treatment of young adults in the justice system, and its 2018 follow-up, emphasised the unique needs of young adults, particularly young men, and called for tailored strategies and additional investment. They noted the lack of a clear strategy and adequate policies to address these needs. Despite the Ministry of Justice's (MoJ) commitment, maturity assessments, routine screening and appropriate treatment remain limited, with most interventions focusing on risk management rather than supporting young adults to mature.

David Lammy's 2017 review raised concerns about the increasing proportion of Black, Asian, and minority ethnic individuals in the justice system and their over-representation in the care system. The 2020 Probation Reform programme and the 2021 Target Operating Model stressed the need for skilled staff to support young adults effectively.



Figure 1. Timeline of policy, legislation, and guidance on young adults in the criminal justice system

The Probation Service Management of Young Adults Policy Framework (2022) sets out mandatory actions and specific guidance for staff on engaging with young adults effectively. It promotes a holistic, trauma-informed approach, integrating recent research on neurodevelopment. The guidance covers transitions to adult services, court proceedings, sentence planning, risk management, and sentence delivery.

Key principles include:

- Adherence to the youth to adult transitions framework process and the joint national protocol.
- Understanding and addressing the needs of young adults.
- Assessing and responding to maturity levels at critical contact points.
- Considering the impact of age, intersectionality, and diversity on engagement.



Please refer to the [further reading section](#) at the end of this document for links to policy, legislation, and guidance on young adults.

Maturity

In the United Kingdom, individuals are considered legally adults at 18 years, but adolescence is a flexible developmental period that extends beyond this age. Young adults' brains do not mature at the same rate, nor finish developing on their 18th birthday (Holmes and Smith, 2022) and these varying rates of development do not easily map on to legally defined dates (Brewster, 2020). As figure 2² illustrates, brain development, particularly of the prefrontal cortex,³ can continue into the mid-twenties (Hughes and Strong, 2016).

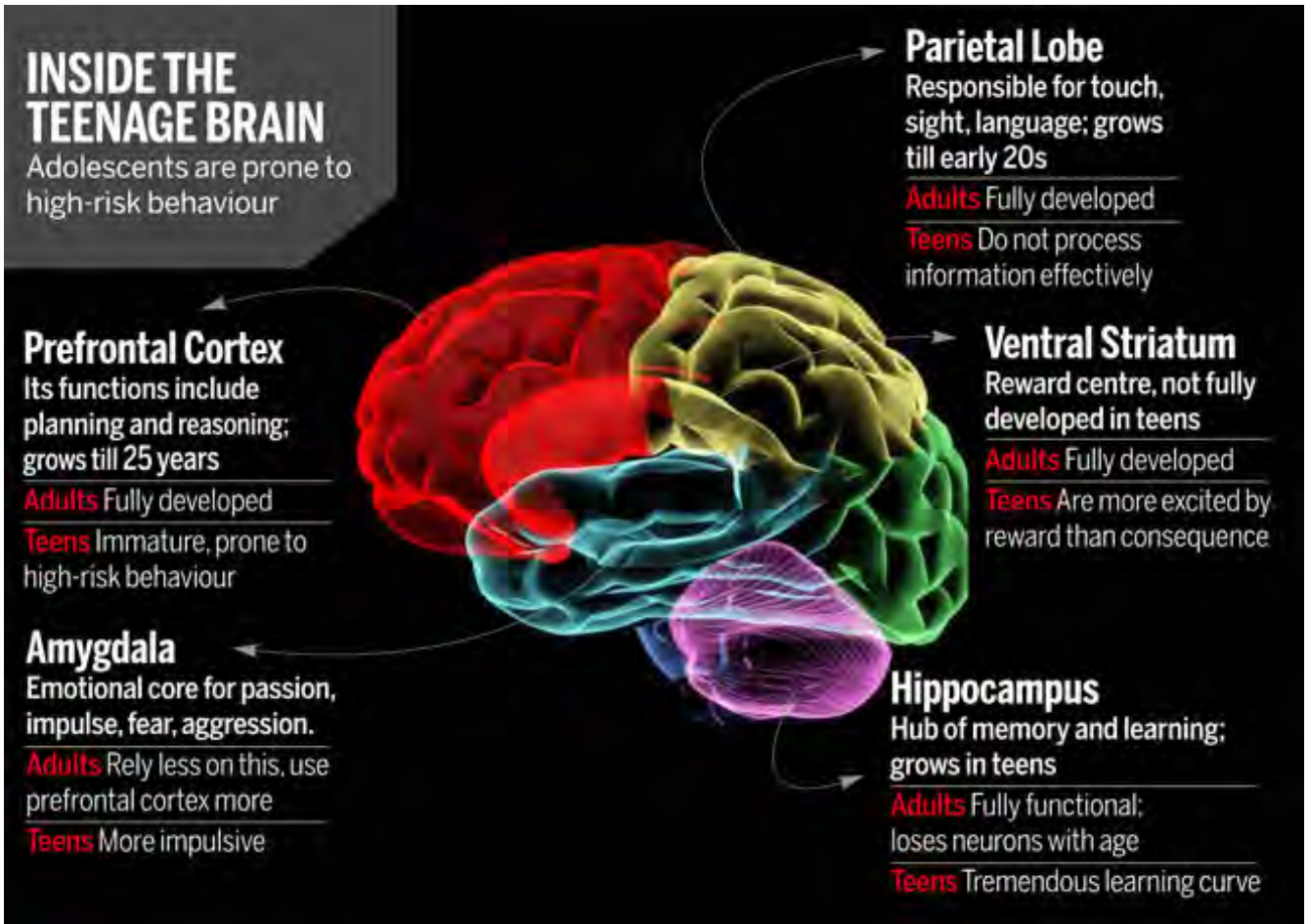


Figure 2. Stages of development of the teenage brain into adulthood.

This ongoing maturation affects behaviour and decision-making, making young adults more prone to emotional sensitivity, risk-taking, and valuing short-term rewards over long-term outcomes. Incomplete development can be exacerbated by ACEs and involvement in the youth justice system.

Factors linked to psychosocial maturity that can affect criminal behaviour are:

² Resilience Navigator [Inside the Teenager's Brain – Resilience Navigator \(wordpress.com\)](#). Accessed 03 June 2024

³ Prefrontal cortex links with the limbic system, which manages, among other things, consequential decision making (Hughes and Strong, 2016).

- **temperance** – the ability to evaluate the consequences of actions, limit impulsivity and control aggressive responses and risk-taking
- **responsibility** – the ability to act independently, be self-reliant and have a clear sense of self-identity
- **perspective** – the ability to consider the views and feelings of others before acting.



This short video by the Howard League for Penal Reform and the T2A alliance focuses on why young adults require a distinct approach within the CJS [Video \(YouTube: 3:33\)](#), [Brain Development and Maturation in Young Adults \(Howard League\)](#)



The T2A Alliance has produced [Taking account of maturity: a guide for probation practitioners](#)



His Majesty's Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) has published the [Choices and Changes – Resource pack supporting young adult men \(Master\) \(justice.gov.uk\)](#), which consists of a series of exercises and activities for young adults, designed to target all three components of psychosocial maturity.

The resource pack can be used in custody or in the community and can be delivered by any member of staff, including keyworkers and probation practitioners. The pack is flexible and should be delivered with a style that is responsive, encouraging, and supportive.

Our standards: what we looked for and our expectations



The examples in this guide are drawn from evidence of effective practice identified while undertaking fieldwork for the thematic inspection.

We define effective practice as:



“where we see our standards delivered well in practice, with our standards being based on established models and frameworks, which and are grounded in evidence, learning and experience.”

During our inspection, we identified effective practice against our standards listed below:

- **governance and leadership arrangements support and promote** the delivery of high-quality, personalised, and responsive services for young adults
- **staff within the service are empowered** to deliver high-quality, personalised, and responsive services that meet the needs of young adults
- there is a **comprehensive range of high-quality services in place**, enabling personalised and responsive provision to meet the needs of young adults
- the **pre-sentence information and advice provided to court is sufficiently analytical and personalised, considers age and maturity**, and supports fair and objective decision-making
- **service delivery focuses sufficiently on maturity** in order to engage young adults, support their desistance and manage risk.

[You can read our inspection report here.](#)



Reflection questions

Thinking about your practice as a leader and/or practitioner working with young adults:

From a strategic perspective:

- How would you assess your area's work with young adults against these standards and what could be improved?
- How well do you understand the profile and needs of young adults?
- What is your area's strategy for working with young adults on probation?
- What gaps have you identified?

From an operational perspective:

- What practice is effective and ineffective in your area when working with young adults?
- Do training and development programmes equip staff to work with young adults in a gender and trauma-informed way?

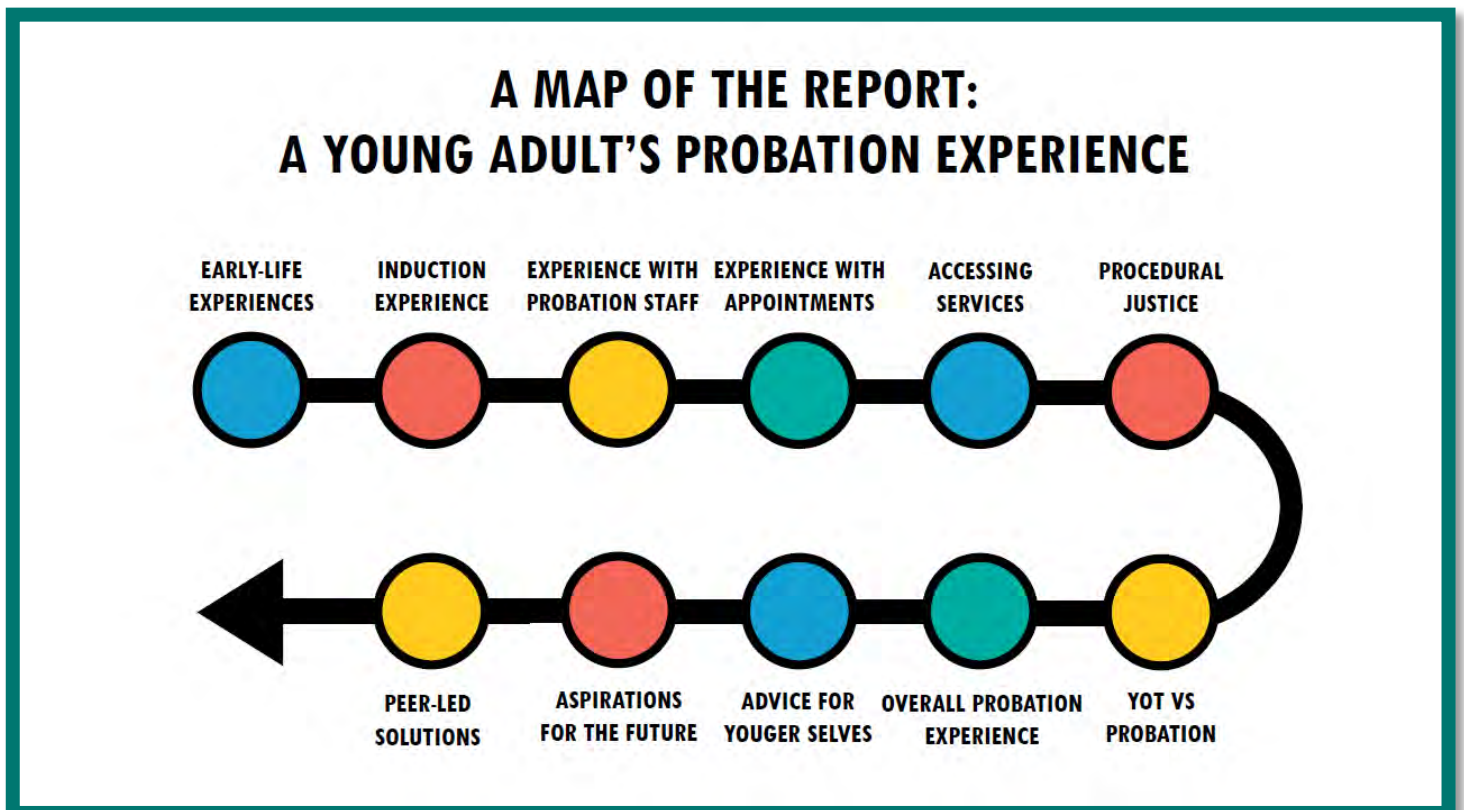
Learning from the young adults on probation:



We commissioned User Voice, a charity run by people who have been in prison and on probation, to gather the views of young adults in the youth justice system. This ensured that the research was peer-led at every stage.

User Voice gathered the views of 259 young adults to understand their experiences. We are grateful for the insights of those young adults, whose feedback we have used to inform the findings of the thematic inspection.

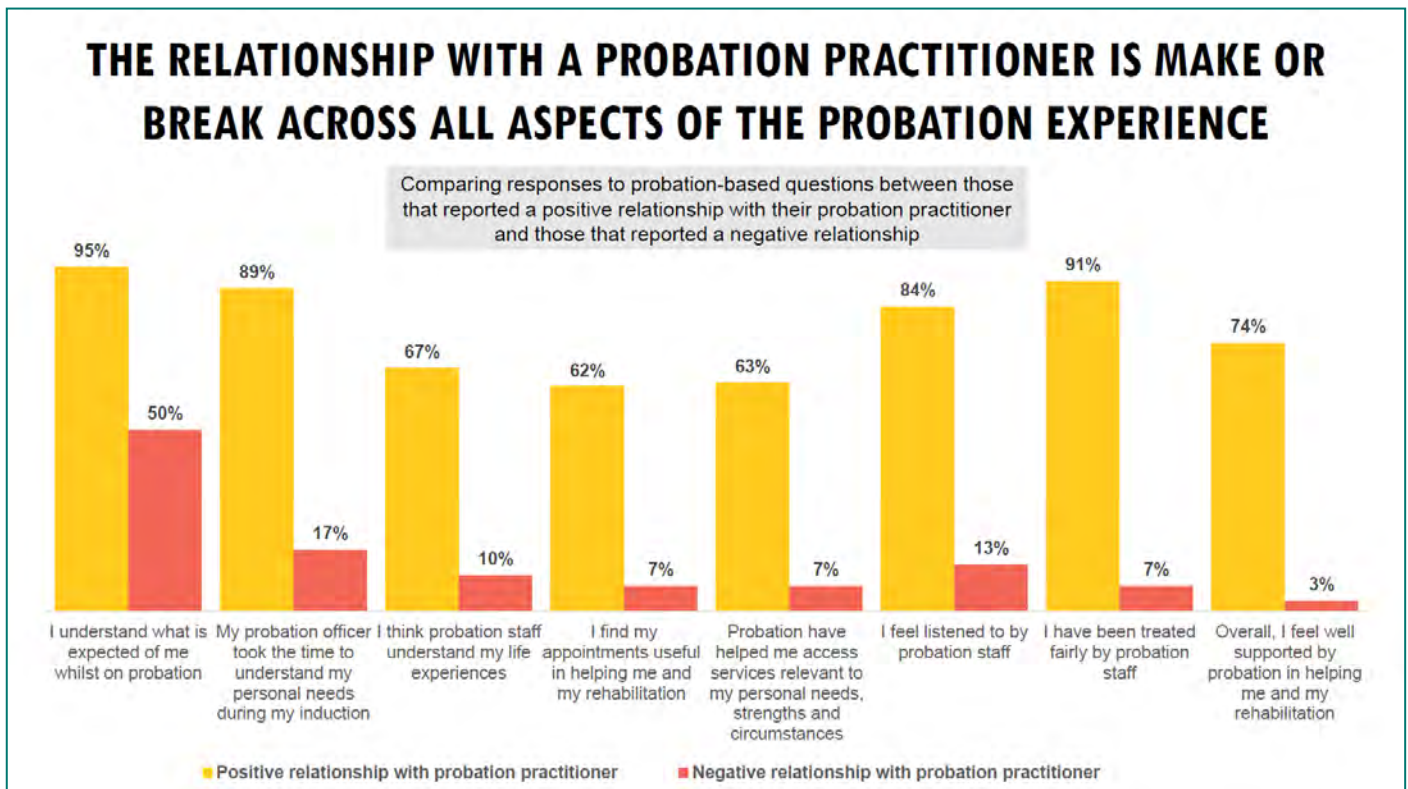
The map below highlights the areas User Voice focused on during their research:



One of the key findings from the User Voice research highlights the importance of the relationship between the young adults interviewed and their probation practitioner. During the inspections we met with many probation practitioners who were committed to and enthusiastic about working with this age group. They understood the importance of building

positive working relationships to successfully engage them. Young adults reported that the relationship with their worker was *'make or break'* when it came to engaging with probation services, accessing interventions and support, successfully completing their sentences, and making positive changes in their lives.

The graph below compares the responses to probation-based questions of young adults who reported having a positive relationship with their probation practitioner with those who did not. The results show the difference that positive relationship made to those being interviewed across a range of areas.



Half of the young adults interviewed said that their practitioner took the time to understand them, which they unanimously seen as beneficial. Collaboration with children and young adults is one of the central principles of trauma-informed practice (Davis, Hull, Ross Reynoso-Serna, 2024).

The following quotes were provided by young adults interviewed by User Voice, emphasising the importance of relationship-building with their probation practitioner:

"It is very important she understands me, because this is my first time on probation, and I know they work with the police so it's important we get on and she understands me which she does."

"She [probation practitioner] listens to me when I speak and does try to work with me, instead of pressuring me into doing things or bullying her way with me. She's also kind."

"[A good probation officer is] someone who gets my background and how I've been brought up and sees who I want to be and how they can support me to become that person."

"Good conversations, good communication, tries to help me with my mental health, asks if I'm good etc, understands me and how I grew up, always listens... its important so they know me."

"Appointments are always good with my probation officer. We have regular catch ups which go into depth each time. They [probation] have signed me up to correct services promptly, no problems."

Example of effectiveness: Understanding and responding to individual needs of the young adult

In the case illustration below, we saw effective practice by the probation practitioner, who, through building a relationship with Ana, made appropriate assessments and decisions to respond to her needs following the birth of her child. The practitioner also considered Ana's diversity, and issues related to intersectionality, in managing this case.

Ana shared her thoughts with User Voice:

"She understands my experiences, this is very important for me, I'm Romanian and some other people can be racist, but she wasn't."



Case illustration

Ana was a young Romanian woman who was made subject to a 12-month community order for the offence of shoplifting, with rehabilitative activity requirement (RAR) days and unpaid work (UPW) hours. She had no previous involvement with the criminal justice system. The case was allocated to a probation services officer in the women's concentrator team. Ana was pregnant at the time of sentencing.

Inspectors noted the following strengths:

- *The probation practitioner had a good understanding of intersectionality and engaged Ana well in completing the assessment.*
- *She discussed the pre-sentence report (PSR) with Ana and delved deeper into some of the issues to get a fuller understanding and analysis for the initial sentence plan.*
- *Ana was engaged and invited to have input into areas she wished to focus on throughout her sentence.*
- *the practitioner responded to Ana's circumstances by carrying out more home visits due to her pregnancy and following the birth of her baby, working in a gender-informed way.*
- *When Ana gave birth, the decision not to enforce UPW appointments was appropriate and supported.*

Outcome:

The probation practitioner's efforts enabled her to build trust and a good rapport with Ana. This helped Ana to feel comfortable, heard, and safe.



You can read the HM Inspectorate of Probation *Research & Analysis Bulletin* '[The links between the quality of supervision and positive outcomes for people on probation](#)' to learn more about how the quality of delivery and relationships can have a positive impact on later outcomes such as completing the sentence and proven reduction in reoffending.



[You can read the report from User Voice here.](#)



Reflection questions

Reflecting on this section:

- How do you ensure that you capture the voice of young adults and how do you use it to influence delivery and interventions?
- What could you do differently to strengthen your approach?

Organisational delivery

Organisational arrangements set the direction for delivering services to young adults. It is therefore important that the expectations set out in the [‘Management of Young Adults Policy Framework’](#) and the [‘Joint National Protocol for Transitions’](#) are implemented at regional and probation delivery unit (PDU) levels. This requires the Probation Service to understand young adults’ profiles and to ensure the availability of sufficient services that are appropriate for this group and that research has identified as most effective for them. Effective delivery requires strong governance to assess and understand the quality of work with young adults, enabling the identification of areas for improvement and the development of necessary services. Training should ensure that all staff clearly understand what a ‘maturity-informed’ approach means, embedding this into practice through reflective supervision and focused quality assurance activity.

Leadership and governance

In all areas inspected, established joint processes were in place to facilitate the transition from youth to adult services. Staff and managers demonstrated a clear understanding of the complexities and demands associated with this cohort. While resources, training, and support have been challenging, we noted strong partnership working in some regions, a focus on continuous learning and development, and additional support mechanisms for practitioners. This included specialised training and forums such as risk management panels.

Example of effectiveness: Young adult support workers, Liverpool

Merseyside was allocated funding to recruit four young adult support workers (YASW), which are probation services officer roles and have been embedded into existing integrated offender management (IOM) schemes. The YASW roles are designed to support 18–25-year-olds involved in serious youth violence or who are gang affiliated.

The YASWs provide a crucial service to people on probation, acknowledging that building trusting relationships *“based on mutual respect, and a good understanding of the life, associations, and environment of the individual”* can contribute to a route out of offending. Working closely with probation practitioners and partners, the YASW provides additional support, relationship-building, diversionary activities, and mentoring for young adults. Their core duties include direct intervention, stakeholder engagement, facilitating purposeful activities, and robust information-sharing to safeguard and protect young adults and the public.

YASWs, as outreach workers, do not hold caseloads. This allows them to actively find and engage people on probation in the community and support them to attend appointments. This approach aims to achieve positive outcomes for young adults and reduce the risk of reoffending.



[You can read the national YASW operational guidance here](#)



We interviewed Jen Williams, SPO, to find out more about the YASW role [Video \(YouTube, 19:18\): Effective Practice: Young Adult Support Worker, Liverpool \(HM Inspectorate of Probation\)](#)

Example of effectiveness: The Next Steps Programme

Effective engagement and relationship-building are essential when working with young adults; transition to adult services and supervision should not be merely procedural. In



September 2021, the London probation region won the Butler Trust Kathy Biggar trophy for its innovative Transition Programme, now called Next Steps. This programme, designed for probation practitioners and youth justice service (YJS) secondees, helps young adults to understand and engage with probation supervision. It uses a modular format and involves families, carers, and key professionals to ensure timely information exchange and effective sentence planning.



The programme has been rolled out nationally and you can access the Next Steps resources and advice notes on Equip: [Next Steps supporting the transition from youth offending services to probation](#)

Example of effectiveness: Youth to adult dashboard, Yorkshire and the Humber

Yorkshire and the Humber probation region has developed a regional performance and quality tool to focus on young adults.

It uses the youth to adult dashboard in the following ways:

- to evidence progress against agreed key performance indicators and to improve performance and outcomes in relation to transition/young adult cases
- to evidence that key standards set out in the [‘national joint transfer protocol for transitions in England’](#) are being met,
- to help evidence progress against the recommendations in HM Inspectorate of Probation’s thematic reports
- to help with data reporting and assurance to YJS boards

The dashboard helps PDUs and the region to monitor performance at a strategic and operational level, and to identify good practice and areas for improvement. Sonja Harrison, deputy head of service, Hull and East Riding PDU, reflected that *“the caseload profile assists PDUs to identify the demographic of our young adults so that we can work collaboratively with our partners and stakeholders to put in place provisions to meet their needs and identify any gaps in provisions”*.

Training for practitioners working with young adults







High-quality training focusing on working with trauma should be provided to practitioners so that they can develop clear and consistent responses to individuals who may not have previously had stability in their lives and can find it difficult to trust.

HMPPS Learning

The HMPPS intranet learning platform specifies the mandatory, required, and desirable learning for practitioners working with young adults, based on role. It includes national and local training, seven-minute briefings, videos, reports, and guidance for self-directed learning.

The myLearning platform has dedicated young adult, maturity, and trauma pages with a range of e-learning training, videos, and written guidance for practitioners to access. Training applies to all practitioners working in custody and community. **Note: These links may require a MOJ login.**

-  [Learning based on roles \(sharepoint.com\)](#)
-  [Young adults myLearning page](#)
-  [Maturity myLearning page](#)
-  [Trauma myLearning page](#)

The examples below from Hull and East Riding and Greater Manchester demonstrate a proactive approach to learning and development.

Example of effectiveness: Use of the young adults resource pack for court staff, Hull and East Riding

Practitioners across courts and sentence management teams have two half-day protected practice development days (PDD) per month.

The court teams have focused on young adults as a PDD theme. All practitioners were introduced to the activities within the young adults resource pack, designed by the Improvement Services Group (formerly known as the Effective Practice Service Improvement Group). The aim of the resource pack is to provide senior probation officers (SPOs) with materials to deliver to their teams on the key principles of working with young adults. The pack encourages reflection and helps to identify areas for improvement, while promoting academic insights, policies, and resources.

The feedback from court staff in Hull and East Riding was positive, with staff feeling fully engaged with the materials. They described how this enhanced their knowledge and understanding of how to engage with young adults during the pre-sentence stage, and how best to provide advice to magistrates and judges.

The inclusive delivery of training across teams in the PDU also ensured that court staff felt connected to the sentence management teams and the overall vision for working with young

adults. Court staff described how they were using the principles of trauma-informed practice to work effectively with young adults.



[Young Adults Resource Pack \(Master\) \(justice.gov.uk\)](https://www.justice.gov.uk/young-adults-resource-pack)

Example of effectiveness: Providing a clear analysis to the court to support recommendations for young adults

In the following case, inspectors saw evidence of a detailed analysis of Keiron's current circumstances and background. The report made explicit reference to factors that underpinned his offending, including trauma and lack of maturity.

Case illustration

Kieron was a 19-year-old male who received a 24-month suspended sentence order for drug-related offences. He was sentenced to RAR days, UPW hours and a curfew. He was not known to the CJS before this offence.

Inspectors noted the following strengths:

- *The PSR author considered Kieron's ACEs in their discussions with Kieron and in their approach to writing the report. They assessed Kieron's maturity and carried out a thorough and detailed assessment of his circumstances and previous trauma.*
- *The PSR gave the court a detailed explanation of the trauma Kieron had experienced, how this can affect individuals, and what negative behaviours may be displayed as a consequence of traumatic life events.*
- *The needs assessment was thorough. It considered Kieron's neurodiversity and his learning disability and mental health.*
- *The rationale for the risk assessment was clear and defensible.*
- *Kieron's emotional wellbeing, vulnerabilities, and childhood trauma were highlighted as priority areas that would be more appropriately targeted through supervision in the community.*

Outcome:

Due to the PSR author's own understanding and knowledge of trauma and maturity, they could confidently form a rationale and argument for a community-based disposal to manage identified risks and needs. This enabled the court to have a clear understanding of Kieron and to follow the recommendation made.

Example of effectiveness: Microsoft Teams young adults resource page, Hull and East Riding

Yorkshire and the Humber region encourages its staff to use the young adults HMPPS excellence and quality in process (Equip) page to access national policy and guidance, and its local intranet, named Junction, to access information related to training.

You can access the national HMPPS Equip page here:



[Young Adults Equip landing page](#)

Additionally, practitioners and managers in Hull and East Riding told us about their PDU Microsoft Teams page, which has been developed locally. This aims to connect people over a large geographical area, where staff can support each other with queries and signposting regarding anything related to the young adults they are working with. The page also contains all young adult related policy, guidance, and interventions.



Example of effectiveness: Risk management panels, Hull and East Riding

In Hull and East Riding, SPOs chair monthly risk management panels to oversee and ensure the management of risks associated with young adults. These panels, in collaboration with the YJS, address cases where young people are transitioning between YJS and probation, in addition to cases relating to all other 18–25-year-olds, focusing on individuals at risk of harm or who pose a risk. The multi-agency partnership ensures compliance with safeguarding legislation, the IOM process, Multi Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA) guidelines and local strategy, taking account of the Youth Justice Board's definition of serious youth violence. Representatives from partner agencies, including the voluntary sector, participate as needed.

The panels have successfully improved information-sharing and networking with stakeholders at both organisational and operational levels. As a result, practitioners have improved their risk assessment skills and understanding of young adults and the support available from other agencies. This has led to a reduction in the volume of referrals to the panel, reserving resources for the most complex and concerning cases.



Samantha Bassett, SPO, and Sonja Harrison, deputy head of PDU, have shared an overview on the risk management panels, why they were introduced and give their top tips to practitioners who are considering implementing these in their own services. You can view it here: [Video \(YouTube, 11:16\): Effective Practice, Risk Management Panels, Hull and East Riding \(HM Inspectorate of Probation\)](#)



Hull and East Riding PDU have shared an example of their risk management panel referral form: [‘Hull Risk Management Panel Case Presentation Form’](#).

Example of effectiveness: Structured sessions, Greater Manchester

In Greater Manchester, all PDUs participated in a structured session on managing young adults to reintegrate learning about young adults' needs and best practice into the heart of PDUs. Developed by Helen Latham, SPO and young adult operational lead, the material drew from the PDUs' intensive community order experience, evaluations, and T2A Alliance research.

The session objectives included:

- discussing the 'working with young adults' seven-minute briefing in detail
- focusing on the benefits of a Greater Manchester approach to working with young adults, and how to achieve this

- ensuring local understanding
- identifying strengths and weaknesses in each PDU for further action planning by the young adult strategy group.

Key topics covered were:

- maturity and brain development, with practical ideas for adapting material that considers maturity and personal history
- supporting individual identity to aid desistance and foster a pro-social identity
- future focus and perspective-taking to help drive desistance and address risk-taking behaviours
- analysis of the disproportionate prevalence of care leavers within the CJS, enhancing staff awareness and understanding
- introducing and discussing a toolkit for working with care leavers
- signposting the Choices and Changes and the Next Steps initiatives.



[Greater Manchester region have kindly shared an outline of their structured session here.](#)

Partnerships and Services



Effective partnership arrangements are vital for providing high-quality services to young adults on probation, who often have complex needs requiring specialist support. Each organisation must understand its role and the roles of other services and agencies to collaboratively support a bespoke, targeted, and individualised approach for young adults. There also needs to be a shared understanding of the approach being taken to ensure consistency and prevent young adults from receiving mixed messages or feeling overwhelmed. Additionally, there must be a clear understanding of what information needs to be shared to inform assessment, planning, sentence delivery, and review. To ensure young adults benefit from relevant services, staff need an up-to-date understanding of the provision available both within the organisation and from community providers. In this section, we provide examples of successful partnership working observed during our inspection.

Example of effectiveness: Strong voice influencing partnership decision-making in Hull and East Riding

Hull and East Riding PDU aims to maximise partnership arrangements through visibility and strong attendance at strategic partnership boards, where it has influence over commissioning plans and arrangements to support the delivery of work with young adults.

Specialist substance misuse service for 18–25-year-olds

ReFresh is a free, confidential service in Hull for young people under 19, aimed at reducing or stopping alcohol and drug misuse. It also supports families affected by parental substance misuse and provides information for parents, carers, and professionals.



It was clear from working with partners in the city that substance and alcohol use for young adults was a concern. There was also a theme established that many young adults were reluctant to transition to adult services. To address this, Sonja Harrison, deputy head of the PDU and strategic lead for alcohol and substance misuse, collaborated with key partners and proposed the use of government funding to establish a bespoke service for 18–25-year-olds. This recognised that generic services may not be suitable for young adults and that a bespoke service would provide dedicated support to transition children to adult substance misuse services. This commission was successful and is an effective example of the opportunities to work with partners at a strategic level to influence commissioning arrangements locally, bridging the gap between youth and adult provision to meet the needs of young people in Hull.

Extension of Multi-Agency Child Exploitation (MACE) panels to 18–25-year-olds

MACE functions as an information-sharing forum to identify at-risk children, potential perpetrators, and concerning locations, and to develop multi-agency action plans to detect and disrupt these risks. The strategy involves various partner agencies, including the voluntary sector and education, with the Probation Service playing a key role.

In Yorkshire and the Humber region, effective practice led to the extension of MACE panels to include young adults aged 18-25 years old, acknowledging that exploitation issues often persist beyond age 18. Previously, MACE panels only considered victims up to 18, but it was found that many individuals previously listed as child victims were later brought back as perpetrators after turning 18. Recognising the complexity of child exploitation and grooming, the agencies agreed that turning 18 should not automatically reclassify someone as a perpetrator.

MACE was initially extended to care leavers aged 18–25 years old in October 2023, which as a result, has already shown the level of risk posed by these young adults has reduced. Additionally, young people approaching their 18th birthday and discussed at the MACE panel are now considered for referral to adult services. This ensures that they continue to receive protection and support to reduce their risk of exploitation.

Example of effectiveness: The Phoenix Programme, Leicester

The Phoenix Programme in Leicester is linked to the violence reduction network and addresses serious violence among young adults (up to 25) in Leicester, Leicestershire, and Rutland. It operates under the governance of the adult reoffending board and aligns with MAPPA, IOM, and serious organised crime frameworks.

Local strategic needs analysis showed the burden of serious violence in the area and that young adults up to 25 years old were disproportionately affected by violence. Therefore, young adults under 25 years old across Leicester, Leicestershire, and Rutland were made a priority group. The aim was to reduce harm by working with young adults who are linked to networks of criminality, such as urban street gangs and organised crime groups.

Funded primarily by the Youth Endowment Fund until August 2025, the programme benefits from the involvement of the Probation Service, YJS, and police. Lead workers from these



services and additional staff (managers, analysts, coordinator, disruption officer) are funded by their parent organisations and the programme. Community navigators are also provided by Ingeus⁴ and are key to developing and implementing focused interventions with the young adults and working closely with the probation practitioner.

The Phoenix Programme aims to support young adults through a combination of personalised assistance and structured enforcement, ensuring a balanced approach to reducing reoffending and promoting positive life outcomes:

The team aims to offer tailored and tangible support carefully balanced with deterrence through swift, certain, and well-coordinated disruption and enforcement activity if concerns persist.

Support offered:

- **initial appointment:** Clear communication about the programme and reasons for identification.
- **lead worker allocation**
- **community navigator:** Personalised guidance based on individual aspirations and needs.
- **therapeutic support:** Focus on neurodiverse needs and behavioural understanding.

There are high levels of trauma and ACEs within this cohort, and the programme encourages engagement and contact in the community, where young people feel more comfortable, rather than in offices.

Services included:

- emotional and behavioural support
- community-based interventions
- comprehensive engagement strategies to avoid office settings.

In the case example below, a young adult was allocated a community navigator who had lived experience of the CJS themselves. The community navigator worked closely with the probation practitioner and the young adult to develop and implement a focused intervention that was having a positive impact on the young adult's life.

Case illustration

Matthew was a 19-year-old male serving a community order for an assault against a police officer.

Inspectors noted the following strengths:

- *The probation practitioner was committed to working with Matthew and recognised his diverse needs.*

⁴ Ingeus delivers services to help people improve their employment, skills, health, and wellbeing, by using evidence of what works, rethinking public services and building alliances with expert partners. Their programmes are designed to help people overcome challenges and are accessed by thousands of people every year. Ingeus work with government, supply chain partners, employers, and community organisations, and have been delivering trusted and tailored solutions for customers across the UK since 1997.

- *The practitioner was conscious of Matthew's low maturity and simplified communication to help Matthew to become more open and express his feelings.*
- *The referral to the Phoenix Programme gave Matthew access to a 'community navigator' who had regular contact with him and the probation practitioner.*
- *The Phoenix Programme offered a holistic package of information-sharing and monitoring, in addition to intensive contact and intervention.*
- *Through relationship-building, the community navigator encouraged Matthew to complete his UPW hours after he had previously refused to attend.*

Outcome:

The probation practitioner highlighted how much Matthew appreciated the support of someone with lived experience of the CJS and how the community navigator helped Matthew to keep engaging with his community order. The improvement in Matthew's progress in the latter part of the community order was significant and evidences the benefits of relationship-building and promoting desistance.



You can read more about [The Phoenix Programme](#) at the violence reduction network website.

Example of effectiveness: National Autistic Society, Regional Outcomes and Innovation Fund commission, Liverpool

Managers and practitioners in Liverpool are mindful of neurodiversity and its impact on young adults and their engagement. They have access to services such as the National Autistic Society (NAS) to support them with their interventions with young adults and to consider how they can adapt their work.



We inspected some positive work in this area in relation to commissioning and using Regional Outcomes and Innovation Fund money to bridge a gap that will be left when the current education, training and employment Commissioned Rehabilitative Services provision comes to an end.

The commissioned service with NAS provides the following:

1. **case conference service for probation practitioners** – support in exploring the neurodiversity needs of people on probation and how best to navigate through the sentence
2. **co-working offer** – if more support is needed
3. **supporting the Probation Service** to work better with people with neurodiversity, for example providing training and assessing reception areas and interview rooms.

Funding has been approved for three years and the work will be evaluated by the strategic commissioning group.

Example of effectiveness: Early Break substance misuse service – Greater Manchester



Early Break registered as a charity in 1994 and was one of the first national substance misuse services designed specifically for young people. The service is driven by the voice of the child at every level and operates across six areas of Greater Manchester.

Since 1994, the service has continued to evolve and it now offers a range of other services, including advocacy, outreach, accredited training, sexual health, bereavement counselling and holistic therapies.

A person-centred approach is at the core of the service's values and relationships.



You can learn more about this charity, its referral process, and the latest news through its website: [Our Story – Early Break](#)

In the following case, we saw an effective approach to working with Tracey that took account of her previous trauma and ACEs. Early Break provided interventions and worked collaboratively with Tracey from the outset.

Case illustration

Tracey was a 19-year-old female who received a 12-month community order with RAR days for an offence of racial harassment. She was subject to another community order for violent offending at the time of the offence. Tracey had multiple complex needs, including significant childhood trauma, mental health and substance use concerns. There were also concerns that Tracey was a victim of domestic abuse and subject to criminal exploitation.

Inspectors noted the below strengths:

- *The practitioner who assessed Tracey took a trauma-informed approach to understand the ACEs that triggered her beliefs and attitudes about offending. They identified how these had led her to use alcohol and drugs as an unhealthy coping mechanism*
- *There was a good assessment of Tracey's maturity and her struggles with transition to adult services after being a looked after child and her experiences of post-traumatic stress disorder*
- *The practitioner fully explored Tracey's experience with males and the current risk to her based on her behaviours and use of substances*
- *The assessment highlighted concerns about suicidal ideation and significant self-harm.*
- *The practitioner used information from multi-agency risk meetings and sought the views of other professionals to inform assessments of risk and safety and wellbeing, and to plan interventions.*
- *The practitioner escalated concerns to her head of PDU about the suitability of available interventions to meet Tracey's needs.*

Outcome:

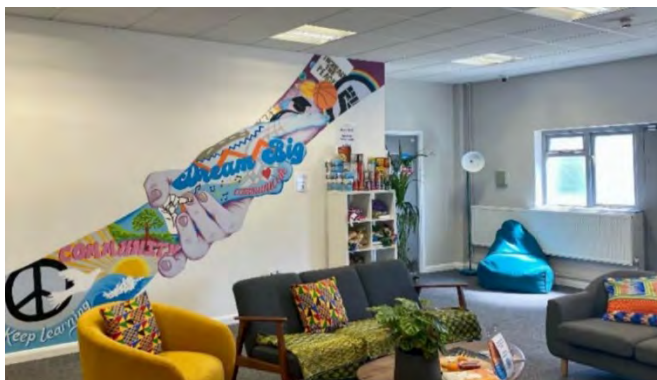
The head of PDU in Bury and Rochdale worked with early help services to find an alternative provider of substance misuse services, recognising that the generic services were unsuitable for Tracey.

Tracey engaged with Early Break, which helped her to address her issues around addiction. She was given a choice of child or adult interventions. She chose a child approach, looking at her own childhood trauma and how it linked to her substance use. This enabled Tracey to understand how past experiences were affecting her current decisions. This collaborative approach, offering her choice, supported Tracey in overcoming barriers to trusting professionals. It was noted that this was a real turning point for her engagement.

Example of effectiveness: Health and mentoring provision through the youth to adult (Y2A) Hub, London Borough of Newham



Young people transitioning from the YJS to adult probation at 18 years old can experience a significant drop in support, often referred to as a 'cliff edge'. To address this, the Youth to Adult (Y2A) Hub pilot in Newham was established as the UK's first multi-agency hub for young people on probation. Operational since April 2022, the Y2A Hub is a collaboration between the Mayor's Office for Policing and Crime (MOPAC), the Ministry of Justice, and the London region of the Probation Service.



The Y2A Hub model promotes a maturity-informed, trauma-sensitive approach, helping young adults to develop skills to engage with services and transition smoothly to adult services.

Figure 3. Image of Y2A Hub⁵

The pilot aimed to test a developmentally appropriate method of working with young adults to improve desistance and life outcomes, recognising that turning 18 does not instantly change a person's maturity or needs.

A multi-disciplinary approach that includes probation officers offers young people a range of statutory and voluntary sector support to help them overcome complex circumstances, desist from crime, and find stability. The following provision is available:

- **Core services:** emotional wellbeing, speech and language therapy, mentoring and coaching, housing support, education, training and employment, young women's support, meaningful activities, substance misuse support, restorative justice, sexual health services, and foodbank services.
- **Embedded user engagement:** User Voice ensures that services are shaped by young adults' feedback, producing quarterly reports and proposals for improvement.

The health provision in Newham Hub was impressive. Data analysis demonstrated that meaningful engagement with health services promoted better engagement with other

⁵ Image taken from [Youth to Adult Hub | Centre for Justice Innovation](#)

statutory appointments. This reinforced the need to engage young adults in care and provide support that is meaningful to them.



Laura West and Philip Minoudis from the NHS told us more about the health provision and the positive outcomes observed: [Video \(YouTube, 25:37\): Effective Practice: Health Provision at Newham Hub \(HM Inspectorate of Probation\)](#)

A hybrid evaluation by MOPAC's evidence and insight team and Sheffield Hallam and Middlesex universities, commissioned by the MoJ, is assessing the pilot's performance and impact. Early reports have been positive, and more evaluation is required to understand the full impact on compliance, engagement, and reducing reoffending. Investment in services and staff within Newham continues, supporting an alternative model of working with young adults beyond the Y2A pilot phase, which ended on 31 March 2024.



You can learn more about the Y2A Hub through the Alliance for Youth Justice website [Youth to Adult Hub: a new approach to supporting young adults on probation — AYJ, Alliance for Youth Justice](#)

In the following example, the holistic nature of the Y2A hub meant that a range of services could engage with Lenny, a student with previously unidentified neurodiversity needs.

Case illustration

Lenny was made subject to a community order for his first offence, having had no previous contact with the CJS. According to available information, there was no known evidence of trauma. The case was transferred from another PDU after Lenny returned to his family home from the area where he was attending university.

Inspectors noted the below strengths:

- *The use of the transitions hub to both meet Lenny's needs and manage the risk he presented.*
- *Before Lenny was transferred, only passing attention had been paid to his age or lack of exposure to the CJS. It was assumed that, because he attended university, he had no trauma, ACEs or neurodiversity needs. Once he was transferred, these needs were recognised and Lenny made use of the health and wellbeing services, art therapy, mentoring, and speech, language, and communication needs services.*
- *The collective interventions capitalised on his engagement, leading to previously unidentified neurodivergent needs being explored. The practitioner led the coordination of this joint approach, referred to as the 'village approach'.*
- *Risk management remained a priority and Lenny also completed offence-focused interventions, and fulfilled the requirements of the order.*
- *This enabled other professionals involved in the community order to be aware of Lenny's anxiety and adapt their approach accordingly.*

Outcome:

The holistic approach was a significant benefit to Lenny and is an example of how the use of a variety of services available in the Y2A hub, in addition to use of professional curiosity, enabled a full understanding of Lenny's needs to then move forward successfully

with appropriate support. Lenny immediately accessed health provisions within the hub which then opened wider engagement with other professionals.



Reflection questions

For managers:

- How well do you understand the needs and profiles of young adults within your region?
- Do you use your understanding to prioritise access to services and resources to meet the needs of young adults?
- Do you gather and analyse data on the numbers of young adults accessing and engaging with available services and use this information to identify any barriers?

For practitioners:

- Are you familiar with the services or interventions available to support young adults in your area and do you know how to access them?
- Do you know which third sector organisations offer services for young adults and do you use these to create bespoke interventions?

Delivering effective case supervision

There is strong evidence to suggest that young adult's maturity can affect the way in which they engage with staff, prison regimes, community sentence, licence conditions and interventions.

In this section, we begin with some theoretical understanding of the importance of adopting a trauma-informed approach and addressing neurodiversity needs. We then share effective practice examples of case management observed during our thematic inspection, covering the broad themes of young adults in court, youth to adult transitions, care experience, involving family and exit planning.

To improve outcomes for young adults, it's crucial to offer:

- **structured interventions** to develop key skills; impulse control, emotional regulation, problem-solving, critical thinking, and empathy
- **comprehensive support for reintegration** into the community after release from custody
- interventions focused on **enhancing psychological resilience and stress management skills**
- assistance with **education training and employment**
- support to **strengthen familial and social ties**
- opportunities to **develop psychosocial maturity**
- **cultivation of positive, trusting, and respectful relationships** with young adults.

The young adult policy framework (2022) states: *Every interaction with a young adult is a potential 'teachable moment', and opportunity for practitioners to demonstrate their interest in the young adult's compliance and successful completion of their sentence to support their journey to desistance.*



Here you can access our [Adult effective case supervision \(justiceinspectorates.gov.uk\)](https://www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk) guide which provides comprehensive guidance and case examples to support practitioners in effective probation case supervision. The principles of which are applicable to working with young adults.

Trauma-informed practice with young adults

There is no agreed definition of trauma, but it can be categorised as encompassing both an event (or several) and an individual's response to it, resulting in overwhelming fear and a sense of powerlessness. Van der Kilk and Fisler, 1995 and McCarten, 2020 defined it as:

"an inescapable stressful event that overwhelms one's existing coping mechanisms".

Within the criminal justice context in England and Wales, discussions around trauma primarily revolve around ACEs. ACEs refer to negative childhood experiences such as abuse,

neglect, and household dysfunction, which have been linked to adult physical and psychological health issues. Additionally, ACEs are associated with behaviours like substance abuse, interpersonal violence, and involvement in the CJS (McCarten, 2020). The prevalence of ACEs and post-traumatic stress disorder in male prisoners has been found to be higher than in the general population, with strong correlations between high ACEs and youth, prolific and violent offending (HM Inspectorate of Probation, 2022).

Children and young adults involved in the CJS often face higher levels of adversity and trauma compared to their peers in the general population. This trauma can result in a constant state of fight, flight, or freeze, potentially impacting their self-awareness and efficacy and derailing intervention efforts. Trauma-informed approaches help services reinterpret the behaviour manifestations of trauma and using a trauma-informed lens improves the experience of both staff, children, and adults. As set out in figure 4 below, six key principles underpin trauma-informed services and interventions.

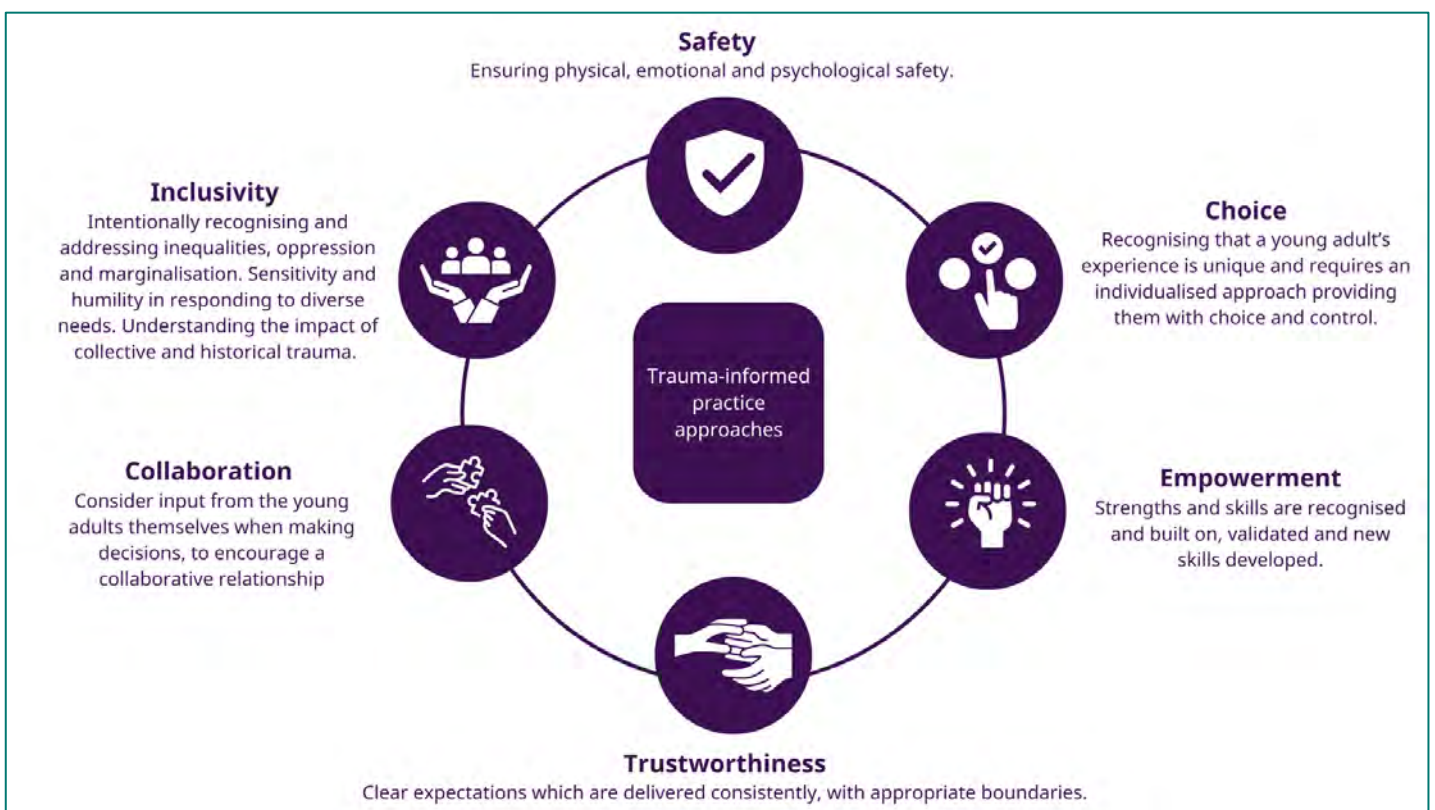


Figure 4. adapted from six key principles (New South Wales Government, 2019)



Click on the image to read more about adversity and trauma at the HM Inspectorate of Probation research pages.



This video, produced by the UK Trauma Council, provides a general introduction to the impact on the brain after children face traumatic experiences in childhood. [Video \(YouTube, 5:10\): Childhood Trauma and the Brain | UK Trauma Council \(Anna Freud\)](#)

Example of effectiveness: Bespoke and individualised approach acknowledging past trauma

In the following case, we saw comprehensive assessment activity that considered a variety of sources to enable the probation practitioner to analyse Diane's past experiences of trauma and domestic abuse and to understand her reasons for offending. There was also good recognition of Diane's vulnerabilities due to her age.

Case illustration

Diane was a 21-year-old female who received an 18-month community order with RAR days for a violent offence. Diane was a victim of domestic abuse (DA) and had experienced significant trauma in her childhood. She was pregnant at the point of sentence.

Inspectors noted the below strengths:

- *The probation practitioner obtained information from existing services involved with Diane and recognised how her offending was linked to her previous experiences as a victim of DA.*
- *There was good analysis of her use of violence and how this linked to her past experiences as a child and difficulties in her relationship with her mother.*
- *A comprehensive assessment was completed, which recognised trauma and assessed the potential risks to her unborn child, the wider risks associated with her ex-partner and the impact on Diane's decision-making.*
- *Engagement was supported through consideration of the location of appointments to enable access but also feelings of safety.*
- *Conversations with her included her lifestyle, triggers for substance misuse and protective factors, such as the support services involved.*
- *There was effective multi-agency planning, with the practitioner actively involved in decision-making around keeping Diane's child and her own safety as a victim of DA and a vulnerable young adult.*
- *Planning focused on available support through women's services to avoid duplication.*
- *When the risk to Diane increased from an ex-partner, a swift multi-agency response was actioned, including a referral to multi-agency risk assessment conference (MARAC).*

Outcome:

Due to the responsive approach and support from the Probation Service and children's social care (CSC), Diane was kept safe and could prioritise her new baby, leading to CSC preparing to close the case. She engaged well with professionals, and trust and safety was built through responsive approaches. Existing professionals such as DA services and women's services were continuing to support her, and the Probation Service had prepared a report for court to request an early revocation of Diane's order in recognition of her progress.

Early trauma can severely affect a child's neurological, social, emotional, physiological, sensory, and cognitive development (Perry, 2009). The absence of secure early experiences often leads to developmental or relational trauma, insecure attachments, causing mistrust, fear, and resistance in young adults.

Practitioners should recognise these underlying challenges, which may manifest as resistance to intervention in young adults. The probation practitioner should demonstrate safety and trustworthiness as a starting point, recognising that young adults may not be able to respond or make sense of that safety, as they do not have the experience of safe and available relationships in childhood as a relational template.

Using creative engagement methods can lay the groundwork for direct offence-related interventions, which can be transformational for young adults under probation supervision. Benefits include:

- increase in problem-solving, interacting with others and negotiation, and emotional regulation
- understanding social situations, discovering interests, increase in creativity, flexibility, and adaptability
- using the relationship with the young adult, and appointments, to demonstrate trustworthiness and a secure base through being consistent, predictable and reliable
- time to talk
- risk assessments are more effective if there is a secure base relationship.



The *Academic Insights* paper [Using attachment theory in probation practice](https://www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/academic-insights/using-attachment-theory-in-probation-practice/) (justiceinspectorates.gov.uk) by Dr Maria Ansbro, published in September 2022, examines the application of attachment theory within probation practice. It explores the historical development of attachment theory, key themes, and practical case examples, emphasising the importance of understanding attachment patterns to improve offender rehabilitation and the effectiveness of probation services.



The *Academic Insight*: [Sport and physical activity as an intervention for reintegration and resettlement: key mechanisms for policy and practice](https://www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/academic-insight/sport-and-physical-activity-as-an-intervention-for-reintegration-and-resettlement-key-mechanisms-for-policy-and-practice/) published in March 2024 (justiceinspectorates.gov.uk) sets out six key mechanisms for the effective design and implementation of sport-based criminal justice interventions. These build on the strengths of individuals and potentially lead to longer-term transformational impacts for young people in the CJS through activity.

In the following case, Sam was initially difficult to engage, and the probation practitioner was conscious of the complexities in Sam's life and past trauma that may affect his engagement and desistance. Recognising the necessity for a responsive approach for young adults, she adapted her style creatively to foster better engagement from Sam.

Case illustration

Sam was aged 20 years old and was sentenced to a 12-month community order for a violent offence. He was also made subject to RAR days and a curfew. Sam had been involved in the CJS previously.

Inspectors noted the below strengths:

- Professional curiosity was used to verify Sam's self-report of his upbringing and lifestyle and, through contact with children's services, his difficult background and care experience was uncovered.
- There was good liaison with the leaving care worker and Sam's father. The worker took the time to understand Sam.
- The practitioner held partnership meetings for appropriate information-sharing and verification and to ensure positive outcomes were achieved for Sam.
- The practitioner adopted a person-centred approach, which Sam responded well to. Alternative engagement methods were used, such as walking around the local park, having a coffee, or buying Sam some lunch to build a rapport, making him feel more at ease while having discussions.
- Consistent recording of the reasoning behind activities and how this strengthened engagement and work towards desistance.

Outcome:

Initially, Sam struggled with trust and engagement. Holding appointments away from the office helped Sam to improve his social interaction and emotional regulation skills which he had previously struggled to manage.

Neurodiversity in young adults

Neurodiversity is used to describe a group of neurodevelopmental disorders, including attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD and ADD), learning difficulties and disabilities (LDDs), autism spectrum conditions, and acquired brain injuries.

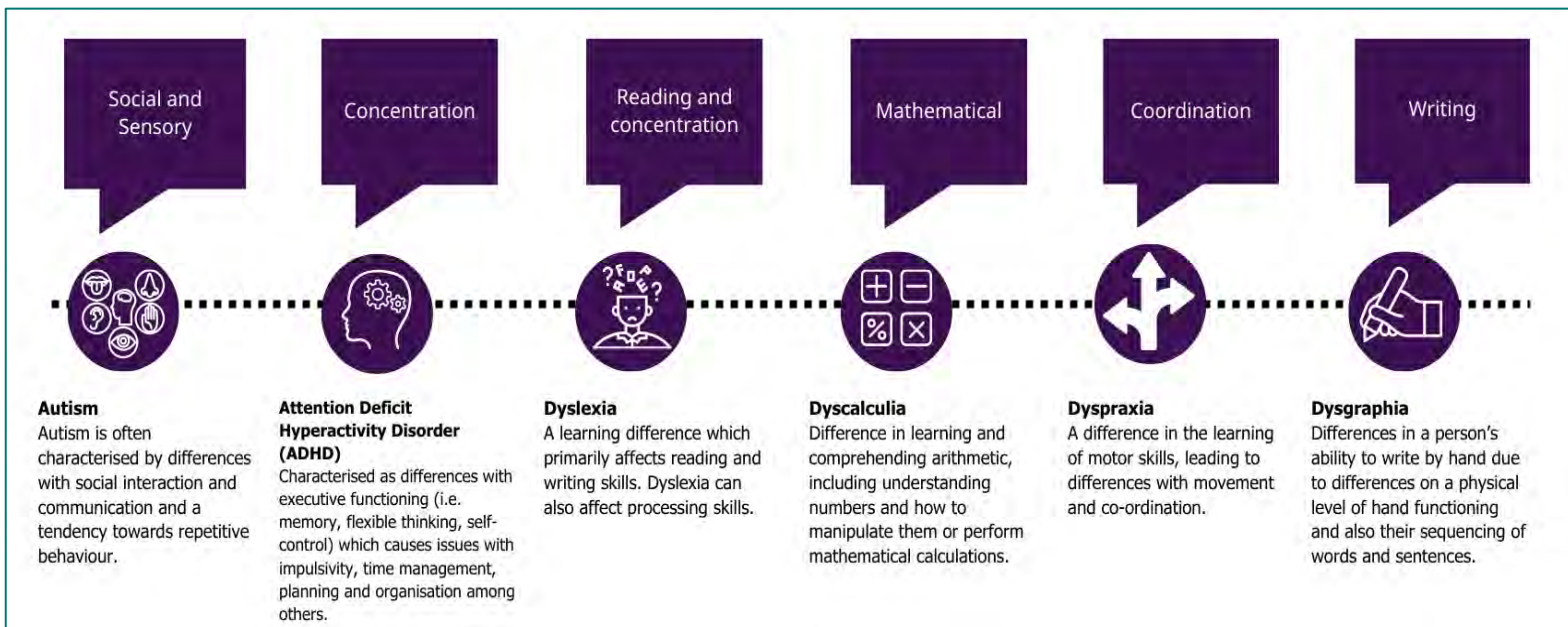


Figure 5. The term 'neurodiversity' covers many different conditions some of which are illustrated here.

At least one in three people moving through the CJS are thought to be neurodivergent, and there is extensive evidence of co-occurrence between conditions, as well as interlinking with adversity and childhood traumas.

The impact of neurodiversity varies greatly, requiring a personalised approach based on everyone's strengths and challenges. Practitioners do not need to be neurodiversity experts but should understand various conditions, their effects, and appropriate adjustments, along with referral options for further support.

Using 'soft skills', such as listening and empathy, is essential, as young adults often have unmet needs and may not understand their issues (HM Inspectorate of Prisons, HM Inspectorate of Probation, and HM Courts and Tribunals Service, 2021). Practitioners' professional curiosity and compassion help to address immediate needs and facilitate access to further assistance.

Tailoring communication and interventions to individual needs improves the chances of completing probation successfully.



There are further resources to develop knowledge and understanding of neurodiversity available to HMPPS staff on myLearning on the [Young Adult myLearning page](#).



Click the image here to read more research and a review of evidence around neurodiversity at the HM Inspectorate of Probation website.

In this case example, the PSR author ensured that the court was made aware of Steve's neurodiversity and low maturity and the impact of these on his risks and needs.

Case illustration

Steve appeared in court for offences of a sexual nature and burglary. Steve had no previous convictions and had not been known to YJS. He had a diagnosis of autism, with traits including social and communication difficulties and extreme anxiety, and was prone to 'shutdowns' when under stress.

Inspectors noted the below strengths:

- *The PSR considered Steve's neurodiversity and the crossover between his behaviours linked to low maturity, but also autism traits, notably consideration of the sensory nature of the sexual offences.*
- *The PSR explained to the court how these factors affected Steve and how they may have contributed to his offending and risk.*
- *Communication and confidence in social situations, mental health and anxiety and lack of emotional self-regulation were identified as priority areas to address.*
- *The report also explained the potential impact of Steve's lived experiences on his behaviour and view of the world.*

Outcome:

The report led to an appropriate recommendation based on his age, needs and personal circumstances. Sam was sentenced to a lengthy community order with rehabilitation activity requirement days.

The following case example shows that a greater understanding of the young adult's neurodiversity can assist the court when sentencing.

Case illustration

James was a 20-year-old male who, at the time of sentence, was serving a suspended sentence order (SSO), for a similar violent offence. The initial SSO imposed an accredited programme and mental health treatment requirement.

Inspectors noted the below strengths:

- *The practitioner identified the impact of James's autism diagnosis and his difficulties with emotional regulation (particularly anger). The assessment detailed the importance of addressing these needs to support James in sustaining engagement.*
- *Gaps in provision from other agencies were promptly identified and referrals made to local Asperger's and mentoring services.*
- *The practitioner was able to focus on James's safety and wellbeing alongside the risk that he posed to others.*
- *There was a strong focus on protective factors, particularly family support, to encourage desistance.*
- *Activity was planned using a maturity and neurodiversity-informed approach.*
- *When James was due to attend court for a review, the practitioner, being conscious of his neurodivergent and mental health needs, contacted the court to request that the court be emptied to promote engagement.*
- *The court was made aware of James's response to supervision and current requirements.*

Outcome:

It was clear that, by developing a strong rapport with James, the practitioner broke down barriers and built trust. This enabled James to feel comfortable in requesting additional support.

The court responded positively to the requests from the practitioner to empty the court to enable the environment to be more conducive to engagement. The practitioner highlighted the barriers to James completing an accredited programme, leading to the magistrate recommending this being removed from the SSO. Alternative ways to provide intervention were identified and implemented by the Probation Service. James was made subject to a new SSO with RAR days.



Reflection questions

For managers:

- How mindful are you of the maturity of young adults when discussing cases or countersigning assessments and plans?
- Is the analysis you see within assessments sufficient to understand the impact that traumatic events may have had on young adults?

For practitioners:

- How well do you understand the key principles of trauma-informed practice and how to apply them in your work with young adults?
- Have you accessed appropriate training to build your confidence in working with young adults on probation?

Young adults in court

The Sentencing Guidelines Council (2019) expanded its age and maturity guidelines to emphasise that *'the emotional and developmental age of an offender is of at least equal importance to their chronological age (if not greater)'*, recognising maturity as a factor in responsibility and sentencing impact (Emanuel, Mawer, and Janes, 2021).

A maturity and trauma-informed approach by PSR authors ensures thorough assessments and appropriate court proposals for young adults.

In Leicester, court staff demonstrated a clear understanding of the specific needs of young adults. They had an appreciation of how this may manifest in their presentation to professionals and adopted thoughtful and creative ways of engaging them. These included making contact the day before a PSR interview and allowing family to be present. We also saw good evidence of practitioners ensuring that the views of young adults were heard and represented in court.

Example of effectiveness: Effective analysis in pre-sentence reports

The detailed case analysis in the following PSR led to a strong and well thought through proposal for a community order.

Case illustration

David was a 19-year-old male who appeared in court for dangerous driving.

He had previous convictions and was known to the YJS. David had autism spectrum disorder traits, diagnosed attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, depression, and anxiety. He was also care experienced and became a looked after child after becoming a victim of criminal exploitation.

Inspectors noted the below strengths:

- *The level of recognition and understanding of maturity and additional learning and neurodiversity needs was evident within the PSR.*
- *The PSR provided a comprehensive overview of David's needs and circumstances and correctly identified the right level of risk of harm to others while highlighting his vulnerabilities.*
- *The PSR set out the impact of David's neurodiversity on him, including by engaging with professionals. The reasons David struggled to talk about the offence during interview were articulated.*

- *David's early help care plan was provided to the court to read alongside the PSR to provide a full overview of his circumstances.*
- *The assessment of David's level of maturity and how this may explain his behaviour provided the court with a clear assessment of David as a young adult.*

Outcome:

The PSR highlighted David's levels of maturity and vulnerabilities and offered a robust alternative to immediate custody. He was sentenced to a SSO with RAR days to complete the Choices and Changes programme.

Supervision skills with young adults

Research highlights several key practices essential for working with people on probation.

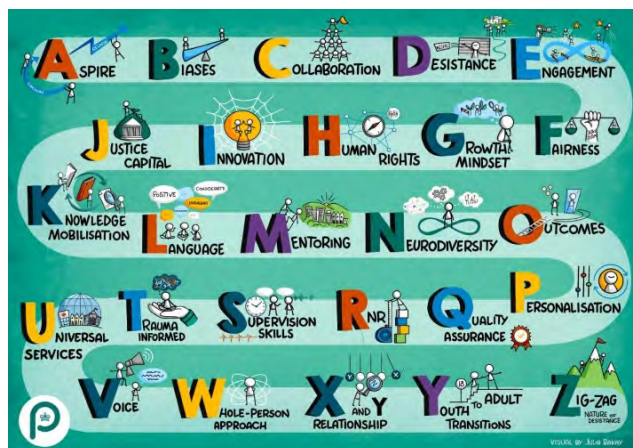
- **developing positive relationships**
- **collaboration** in setting goals and finding solutions, focusing on strengths rather than deficits
- **structured supervision** using approaches like pro-social modelling, effective reinforcement, cognitive restructuring, and problem-solving
- **building and maintaining motivation**, while addressing practical obstacles to desistance
- **forming personal and social bonds**, which strengthens pro-social beliefs and behaviours
- **an individualised approach**, which recognises that each desistance journey is unique.

A whole-person and whole-systems approach is required to engage young adults in activities at an individual, interpersonal, community, and societal level. Approaches should be strengths-based, trauma-informed, and tailored to individual needs.

HM Inspectorate of Probation has published several evidence pages, evaluations, research, and academic insight papers, focusing on desistance, supervision skills and risk needs and responsivity. These aim to support managers and practitioners in their interventions with people on probation.

You can find a A-Z of key research messages on our research page by clicking on the image to the left. Topics include desistance, supervision skills and the Risk-Need-Responsivity model.

Many needs and offending-related factors overlap, which makes holistic and integrated interventions more effective. During our inspection we saw examples of practitioners finding creative ways to engage young adults, using wider support in the community to holistically address needs and support desistance.



Professional curiosity

Professional curiosity involves delving deeper into a person's situation beyond initial assumptions. It requires keen observation, listening, asking direct questions, and managing difficult conversations. For practitioners working with young adults, this approach is crucial for understanding their relationships, family dynamics, friendships, and overall life circumstances. It also includes inter-agency communication and discussions with family members to verify and support information.

While essential for risk assessment, professional curiosity should extend beyond a purely 'risk-focused' model to incorporate therapeutic or educational approaches (Phillips et al. 2022). This helps build rapport, explore vulnerabilities, and inform assessments and decisions about interventions and support.

'a 'good' relationship underpins professional curiosity and without this cornerstone of good probation work becomes difficult to do.' (Burnett and McNeill, 2005, cited in Phillips et al, 2022)

HM Inspectorate of Probation have published effective practice insights guides for practitioners and managers on this topic as well as *Academic Insights* publications. Follow the links below to access these:



HM Inspectorate of Probation effective practice professional curiosity insights guides for [practitioners](#) and [middle managers](#).



Academic Insights by Jake Phillips, Sam Ainslie, Andrew Fowler and Chalen Westaby [Putting professional curiosity into practice](#) (July 2022)

Example of effectiveness: Using professional curiosity

In the example below, the practitioner uses professional curiosity to support effective information-sharing, to develop a thorough understanding of Ryan's trauma and experiences, while keeping others safe.

Case illustration

Ryan was an 18-year-old male who was made subject to eight weeks' custody for driving offences. He was subject to post-sentence supervision at the time of the inspection. He was previously known to the YJS. Ryan experienced trauma as a baby and was removed from his mother's care, then later returned as a teenager.

Inspectors noted the below strengths:

- *The approach to practice was maturity-informed and responsive to Ryan as a young adult.*
- *Ryan was involved in the assessment, and it took into consideration his age, maturity, and strengths, such as his relationship with family members, willingness to comply and motivation to access education, training, and employment support.*
- *Information from the YJS was used to inform the assessment and the practitioner requested further details about trauma.*

- *Appointments included regular home visits to ensure ongoing monitoring, given the risk of abusive behaviours towards his mother. When there was a decline in Ryan's emotional wellbeing, the practitioner increased contact with him to encourage him to access relevant support within the community.*
- *Practice to safeguard Ryan's girlfriend was appropriate. The practitioner consistently demonstrated professional curiosity in contacting children's services and the YJS. There was a good balance of safeguarding and advocating for Ryan that supported the plans to keep her safe.*
- *Domestic abuse enquiries were completed on a routine basis and in response to new information relating to Ryan's risk, both as a perpetrator and a potential victim.*

Outcome:

The practitioner balanced professional curiosity about risk with successfully building rapport and understanding Ryan and his experiences and their impact. Reviews were responsive to any decline in Ryan's emotional wellbeing, such as breakdown in his relationship, and he would ask for support and access services in the community. The practitioner also worked alongside his mother and involved the family as a protective factor. This enabled a swift response to any increased risk to Ryan's safety and wellbeing.

Youth to adult transitions

Transitioning from youth to adult services at age 18 involves significant changes in environment, personnel, supervision, routine, available services, and social circles. This transition can disrupt established relationships with the YJS, replacing them with new probation practitioner relationships. Additionally, transitions may occur during moves from youth to adult custody and from custody back into the community. Young adults who re-enter the CJS without recent YJS involvement also miss the structured transition process.

Despite the challenges a young adult can face at this time, this period can also offer a unique opportunity for young adults to desist from criminal activity. With appropriate support, they can redefine their identities and move toward emotional and psychosocial maturation. Tailored, responsive support can help them forge a new, non-criminal identity.

Successful transition requires a holistic approach, considering:

- the process of changing supervisory authority
- information transfer, assessment, and planning during the transition
- other concurrent transitions the young person may experience
- the individual's maturity level.

By adopting these practices, the Probation Service can better support young adults during this critical transition period, fostering their growth and reducing the likelihood of reoffending.



Click the image to access our key findings and research on youth to adult transitions at our HM Inspectorate of Probation website. Alternatively, you can

read Dez Holmes and Lisa Smith's 2022 *Academic Insights* paper on [transitional safeguarding](#)⁶ here.



Follow these links to access the joint national protocol for [England](#) and [Wales](#)



This is a useful map of the [Youth to Adult Transitions Framework Process](#) for practitioners and managers in the Probation Service and Youth Justice Service.



Clare Wilson, Probation Reform Programme, and Jemma Waterworth, transition lead, explain the improvement work on how young adults transition between youth and adult custody and youth offending and probation services in this Insights article, January 2022: [Transitioning Young Adults in the Criminal Justice System – HMPPS Insights](#)

Example of effectiveness: Mentoring, London Borough of Newham

Phase 4 foundation provide mentoring to young adults aged between 17 and 25 who are on probation in the London Borough of Newham. The service is open to young adults both in the community and those in custody and following release, including 17-year-olds transitioning from the YJS. The mentor will meet young adults at the probation office or in the community.



Mentors aim to remove barriers to help young adults access the services they need and engage with their sentence requirements. Staff are relatable in terms of background and lived experience and have good local knowledge and experience of working with a diverse range of young adults.

As a part of the overall mentoring offer, Spark2life has a worker who is based part time in the YJS for those transitioning to the Probation Service. The focus is on offering ongoing and wraparound support.



[You can learn more about work of Spark2Life here.](#)

Example of effectiveness: Transition from custody to community using a maturity-informed approach.

The following case demonstrated the benefits of a maturity-informed approach and early contact to support transition from custody to the community.

⁶ Transitional safeguarding – ‘*An approach to safeguarding adolescents and young adults fluidly across developmental stages which builds on the best available evidence, learns from both children’s and adult safeguarding practice, and which prepares young people for their adult lives*’ (Holmes and Smale, 2018). Transitional safeguarding considers not only the transition between childhood and adulthood, but also the transition points and gaps between the safeguarding system/s and the justice system/s (Holmes and Smith, 2022).



Case illustration

Alex was a 20-year-old male who received a custodial sentence for an assault against an emergency worker (police) and threatening behaviour. Alex was previously known to the YJS. This was Alex's first period in custody.

Inspectors noted the below strengths:

- *The practitioner contacted Alex while he was in custody and pre-release assessments and planning were of good quality, paying particular attention to the impact of his low maturity on his behaviour.*
- *The practitioner used previous YJS information to understand how best to engage Alex and how to communicate most effectively with him.*
- *The impact of Alex's maturity on his risky behaviour was fully explored and used to determine the best way to engage with him.*
- *Assessments were informed by both pre- and post-release police and children's services enquiries and a pre-release home visit.*
- *The assessment feeds into sentence and risk management planning with the assessor prioritising engagement and promoting maturity through delivery of the Choices and Changes toolkit.*
- *All criminogenic need areas were identified and planned interventions targeted the priority needs, including mental health, substance misuse service and understanding the consequences of offending behaviour.*
- *Consideration was given to the sequencing of interventions to allow for appropriate time to build rapport and manage resettlement back into the community.*
- *Referrals to Commissioned Rehabilitative Services were timely when issues arose such as increase in cocaine use.*

Outcome:

The practitioner was able to start the process of resettlement from custody with Alex through visits before release. Alex struggled with engagement; however, this early contact started the process of relationship and trust building prior to being released. Alex felt that he had a greater understanding of expectations and, while engagement in the community dipped at times, the practitioner was able to swiftly review the original plan and enlist the support of others such as Alex's family to maintain contact and management of the case.

Care experienced young adults

There is good evidence to suggest that people with care experience are more likely to have a criminal record and are overrepresented in the CJS. However, there has been no large-scale research in the United Kingdom or internationally into the needs of young adults with care experience, either in prison or in the community.

The HMPPS guide '[Care Experience Matters](#)' sets out the main ways in which we can support people with care experience in prison and on probation. Some suggestions include:

- Create safe environments for disclosing care experiences.
- Facilitate access to local authority personal advisors.
- Help maintain and develop community support networks.
- Coordinate sentencing with local authority pathway planning.
- Involve personal advisers in sentence and resettlement planning.
- Assist with accessing financial entitlements and managing finances.
- Ensure access to necessary clothing and personal items during incarceration.
- Secure settled, safe accommodation well before release from prison.

We observed some excellent examples of partnership working between probation services and leaving care teams in supporting care-experienced young adults. The case of Scott demonstrates that taking time to understand the young adult and his experiences can lead to positive outcomes.

Case illustration

Scott was a 20-year-old white male who received a 12-month community order with RAR days and a curfew for violent offences. He was previously known to the CJS and had a mistrust of authority. His relationship with his leaving care personal adviser had been the most consistent.

Inspectors noted the below strengths:

- *The practitioner used professional curiosity to verify information disclosures from Scott from the beginning of sentence, liaising with other professionals.*
- *After initially working at pace to gather information for Scott's sentence plan, the practitioner realised that a slower approach would be of benefit to build trust.*
- *There was immediate and ongoing liaison with the leaving care personal adviser, taking the time to understand Scott and his past experiences as a child.*
- *Assessments were reviewed at appropriate times as the practitioner gathered more information and gained a better understanding of Scott's experiences and their impact.*
- *The practitioner held three-way meetings with the leaving care personal adviser and Scott to ensure that communication was transparent and led to positive outcomes, involving other agencies as necessary.*
- *There was good evidence of coordination of sequencing of interventions through engagement and liaison with other providers, involving others in the sentence planning process.*
- *An appropriate referral for NHS neurodiversity support was made and sequenced at a time when Scott was able to engage.*

Outcome:

After some initial difficulties in engaging Scott, the practitioner changed her approach, following information gained through liaison with the leaving care personal adviser. This enabled the practitioner to understand how best to communicate and support Scott, while

presenting as aligned to someone that he trusted. Over time, Scott became more comfortable and able to appreciate the probation service's efforts to build rapport. Engagement with other agencies provided a collaborative approach, resulting in high-quality assessments and planning, a coordinated approach to delivering interventions, and improved access to services.



Dr Eleanor Staples and Dr Jo Staines have authored a *Research & Analysis Bulletin* [The supervision of care-experienced children within the youth justice system](#). The research used a qualitative approach to gather the experiences and views of both professionals and children, with attention being paid to barriers and success factors.



A video was produced alongside this bulletin and is available to watch here. [Video \(YouTube, 10:41\): The supervision of care-experienced children within the youth justice system \(HM Inspectorate of Probation\)](#)

Involving family

Positive and consistent social relationships play a key role in supporting wellbeing and reducing the likelihood of reoffending so that people in contact with the CJS and their families can lead positive lives.



Research suggests that better social bonds can act as a protective factor for those in emerging adulthood and have been linked to lower rates of reoffending and increased prison safety among young adults. The importance of engaging with family to support successful rehabilitation has long been acknowledged by criminal justice and allied professionals. The Farmer Reviews (2017 and 2019) highlighted the important role of intimate and family relationships in the resettlement and rehabilitation of men and women convicted of crime:

"...relationships are fundamentally important if people are to change..."

"Supportive relationships with family members and significant others give meaning and all important motivation to other strands of rehabilitation and resettlement activity".

The value of positive family relationships is also evident within the research literature, with families being powerful allies to those working in probation (HM Inspectorate of Probation, 2021).⁷ Research has demonstrated that families can:

- Provide motivation and emotional support.
- Help individuals to find work and a home.
- Help to widen social networks.
- Believe that change is possible.
- Provide access to community information and resources.
- Assist in keeping to the rules and sticking with treatment.

In the case below, the practitioner engaged with Graham's mother throughout the order.

Case illustration

Graham was a 19-year-old white male who received 12-month community order with RAR days and UPW for motoring offences. Graham had been known to the YJS and had

⁷ [Family relationships \(justiceinspectorates.gov.uk\)](https://www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk)

previously been subject to a referral order for similar offences. Graham had witnessed domestic abuse between his parents.

Inspectors noted the below strengths:

- *There was good evidence of a positive working relationship that was built through regular contact, and support with challenges such as illness and job interviews, allowing flexibility for UPW.*
- *Planning included Graham's mother and age-appropriate interventions were identified. Thought was given to which interventions to use (Choices and Changes or Stepping Stones)*
- *Home visits were completed, which enabled the practitioner to build a good relationship with Graham's mother. This supported engagement.*
- *The practitioner advocated for Graham by writing to an anti-social behaviour coordinator when the family faced eviction. Graham's progress on his order and how he matured and changed his behaviour was used in a character reference.*
- *Praise and encouragement were recognised as something Graham responded well to, and were used throughout the order, including good luck messages for a job interview, and a handmade certificate when he completed a forklift assessment.*
- *The practitioner reviewed the case regularly and included Graham's mother in this, which enabled them all to understand the progress he had made and continued to build on strengths such as employment goals.*

Outcome:

The practitioner in this case provided a person-centred, maturity-informed approach to working with Graham. The practitioner recognised the importance of involving family to ensure that all information could be shared, Graham could be supported, and risks monitored. Due to the positive relationship built with both Graham and his mother, the practitioner was able to assess the suitability of their accommodation and successfully influence the accommodation provider to let the family keep their home.

Exit planning

When a young person is reaching the end of their order or licence, a clear exit strategy is required to enable him/her to continue to make positive progress. Effective exit planning enables people on probation, including young adults, to access services locally to support them once their supervision has ended. Access and referrals to services during a sentence introduces support that will be available in the future. In some cases, signposting may be sufficient, but for others a probation practitioner may need to arrange visits and meetings to support relationship-building.



In the case below, the probation practitioner developed a timely exit plan to ensure that support was in place at the end of supervision.

Case illustration

Claire was a 20-year-old female who received a 12-month community order for breach of an earlier community order made for violent offences. She was also sentenced to RAR

days and UPW hours. Claire had complex needs linked to childhood trauma and abuse, care experience, bereavement, discrimination and possible undiagnosed neurodivergence.

Inspectors commented:

- *There was good assessment of Claire's experiences of trauma linked to childhood experiences, including being a looked after child, potential sexual exploitation and sexual assault.*
- *There was good insight into the impact of Claire's low maturity on her behaviour.*
- *A trauma-informed approach was taken, mainly through delivery of the First Steps to Change toolkit to address both offending-related needs and support for transition to adulthood.*
- *Referral to partner agencies was timely to support factors linked to Claire's safety and wellbeing and experiences of trauma and vulnerability.*
- *In reviewing of the case, the practitioner recognised that Claire would have little or no support in the community when her order ended, so an exit plan was developed with partnership agencies.*
- *Timely referrals and three-way meetings formed part of the exit plan.*
- *As Claire approached the end of her order, more emphasis was placed on appointments with community-based services.*

Outcome:

Claire's probation practitioner recognised that when supervision ended, Claire would have little or no support in the community. The sentence plan was adjusted, and an exit plan put in place with appropriate support from other agencies.



Reflection questions

For managers:

- Are you familiar with local services for young adults, particularly for diverse groups and those with additional needs?

For practitioners:

- Do you gather all sources of relevant background information on young adults to ensure you understand them and any additional needs they may have?
- Are you aware of the services and support that care leavers are entitled to?



Further reading

Policy, legislation, and guidance:

- [The treatment of young adults in the criminal justice system \(parliament.uk\)](#)
- [Young adults in the criminal justice system \(parliament.uk\)](#)
- [Achieving better outcomes for young adult men: evidence-based commissioning principles - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)
- [Achieving better outcomes for women offenders - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)
- [Lammy review: final report - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)
- [MOJ7350_HMPPS_Probation_Reform_Programme_TOM_Accessible_English_LR.pdf \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](#)
- [Probation Service Management of Young Adults Policy Framework - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)
- [The Probation Service National Partnerships Framework for England and Youth Justice Services Joint national protocol for transitions in England - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)
- [Youth to adult transition principles and guidance for Wales - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

Transition to adulthood (T2A) alliance resources:

- [Effective approaches with young adults: a guide for probation services - T2A](#)
- [Evidence on young adults in the justice system and trauma - T2A](#)
- [Young adults from ethnic minorities evidence snapshot - T2A](#)
- [What does research tell us about building positive relationships with young adults? - T2A](#)
- [Fairer justice for all report](#) focussing on young people with learning disabilities and autism in the CJS.

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