



Revolving Doors Agency

The Turnmill

63 Clerkenwell Road

London EC1M 5NP

T 0207 253 4038

F 0207 553 6079

admin@revolving-doors.co.uk

www.revolving-doors.co.uk

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Lost in Translation

Interim findings from the Revolving Doors Agency
Young People's Link Worker schemes



September 2005

Written by Enver Solomon with
the Revolving Doors Agency team

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Foreword

One of our clients produced a list of what he hoped he would achieve on release from custody, which he presented at his pre-release conference. He has kindly agreed to allow us to use it as a foreword because it demonstrates his commitment to change and the extent of the challenges he faces.

stop drinking
stop taking pub and skunk
stop taking gas
stop going down Huttles
stop getting sent to court
stop getting arrested
Don't end up back in Jail
try to stop smoking
Do my tax time
work with yot and Aulin Helen
get a job for the future
go to I.S.P and do it this time
try my best to keep out of trouble
try my best to get on with my man and
Brothers
Do some things to keep me occupied
and get my money sorted out when I get out
get all my stuff at the police station sorted
out just in case I have to do more
time in prison.

My list for
you review

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Summary

Revolving Doors Agency offers practical and emotional support to people with mental health problems who have been arrested or imprisoned. We aim to empower people to escape the revolving door cycle of crisis followed by crime.

Since March 2004 we have been working with young people aged 15 to 22 in two areas, Kent and the London borough of Haringey. This report documents our interim findings based on our work and the views of our clients. It highlights a number of areas of unmet need and suggests how services could be developed and adapted to meet the needs of young people with mental health problems in the criminal justice system.

In summary, we have found that the current efforts of services to engage with and support these young people often get 'lost in translation'. This happens for a number of reasons:

- Although there is an improving picture of service provision for under 18s who offend, both in terms of investment and joint working, the response to their emotional and mental health problems remains underdeveloped. This omission undermines the impact of new initiatives and investment.
- The transition from child/adolescent to adult services is extremely problematic. In many cases,

there is a cliff-edge of provision at 18; even where post-18 provision does exist, there is no means of bridging child and adult services. This can seriously aggravate problems with young people's emotional and mental health. Services need to be reconfigured to provide bridging support across multiple transitions.

- These young people have experienced a variety of extremely traumatic episodes in their lives, which have had a major impact on their mental health and emotional well-being. The effect of this trauma has been far reaching and is often the root cause of their behaviour. It is critically important that this trauma is recognised and understood if the young people's needs are to be met and if they are to stand any chance of engaging effectively with the agencies that are intended to support them.
- To help these young people break out of the cycle of crisis and crime it is vital to provide them with a 'holding space' where they can be given emotional support and learn to develop coping strategies. Services often expect too much of young people and do not start from an understanding of why they have not engaged with services in the past. Consequently, young people kick out against the system and remain stuck in their dysfunctional state. There needs to be a greater focus on

providing young people with coping strategies and recognition of the need for containment in a space that is safe and genuinely supportive.

- Young people with a number of needs and problems are often involved in several different systems and processes at once, each of which can have its own terminologies, rules and requirements. Young people cannot be coerced into understanding these systems. Instead, they need a form of translation service to make sense of it all, matched to navigational support to guide them through. Only then can they make informed choices.

The three central themes that have emerged so far from our work with young people with mental health problems in the criminal justice system are therefore: **trauma, the need for a 'holding space' and the need for navigation around the system.** It is our recommendation that these three themes should be explored further in order to understand how services can work effectively with the most vulnerable young offenders.

Introduction

The context for this report

'Just to have someone who I know will listen to me is the best thing... I need help with money and my house, but it is having someone there to talk to that really counts.'

Two years ago, Revolving Doors Agency carried out research to ask young people with mental health problems who had been in contact with the criminal justice system what would have helped them. Overwhelmingly, they wanted to have somebody who would simply listen to them.

The young people in our survey said that they were looking for someone outside of mainstream services to offer befriending and emotional support. And they wanted help with applying for benefits and finding somewhere to live. Above all, they wanted a person who could listen to their problems and offer long-term, consistent and practical support.¹

In response to this evidence, Revolving Doors Agency developed and established two Young People's Link Worker schemes. They were designed to build on the success of the Adult Link Worker schemes which offer a needs-led service, using assertive engagement methods to work with vulnerable people with mental health problems who encounter the criminal justice system.² The focus of the new schemes was on 15 to 22 year-olds. This particular age range enabled the schemes to work across the conventional age bands, which result in young people being eligible neither for children nor for adult services.

The aim was clear:

'To work with young people with mental health and multiple needs who come into contact with the criminal justice system and who fall through the net of mainstream services, to improve the ways in which the full range of their needs can be understood and met.'

Lost in Translation is the story of the schemes' first 15 months between March 2004 and June 2005.

To date, the schemes have been experimental and evolving. The interim findings set out in this report bring together the learning from this first phase. They are based on in-depth interviews conducted with Link Workers and an examination of the data that they collected. The intention is not to set out a clearly defined model of 'what works' with the client group. Instead, this report is a discussion document which highlights the elements of the approach the Link Worker schemes have adopted which appear to have met effectively the young people's needs. It also provides a deeper insight into the young people's lives, and in particular why so many do not engage with services.

¹Revolving Doors Agency (2003) 'Future Imperfect? Young people, mental health and the criminal justice system'. London: Revolving Doors Agency

²A person may or may not have a diagnosis of mental illness but still have significant needs in this area, e.g. depression, anxiety, behaviour or learning disorders.

The Link Worker schemes

Revolving Doors Agency currently operates two schemes working with young people in Haringey in London and in Kent. At each site there have been two Link Workers offering a range of skills and experience of working with vulnerable young people.

The clients are young people aged 15 to 22 who have been in contact with the criminal justice system. The majority are on the caseload of the Youth Offending Team (Yot), Probation Service or are in a Young Offender Institution (YOI) on remand or sentenced. Others may have a history of offending or be at risk of offending and therefore are in contact with the Yot, Social Services or Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS).

The Haringey scheme has had nearly half of its referrals from the women's prison HMP Holloway, and in Kent just over two-thirds of referrals have been from HMP/YOI Rochester (see Appendix One). Therefore, the Link Workers spent a lot of time working in these prisons, meeting and supporting clients.

The young people have a range of mental health problems and vulnerabilities. They tend to have more than one unmet need. Many have substance misuse problems and many have housing problems.

The schemes work with and on behalf of clients, helping them to gain access to the services they need. Link Workers develop an individual support plan which covers a range of areas, including:

- Advice and support on emotional, mental and physical well-being
- Advice on welfare benefits and managing money
- Looking for work, training, or education opportunities
- Support to find accommodation and help to sustain it, including advice on tenancy rights and responsibilities, and relations with neighbours
- Practical living skills like shopping, cooking and cleaning
- Advice and support on legal matters
- Keeping up contact with family, friends and others
- Gaining access to services in the community, such as substance misuse services
- How the Link Workers will advocate on the young person's behalf

■ Getting moral support and encouragement

Link Workers aim to assist the client to develop positive coping strategies through ongoing consultation following a service pathway (see Appendix Two). The pathway provides a central spine to the work of the schemes setting out the different stages of engagement with clients. The desired outcome is for the client to feel empowered and achieve autonomy.

The teams also provide a consistent attachment figure to help the person move forward. For many of our clients, a Link Worker can be the first constant and continuing relationship that they have experienced for some time. Provision of continuity and reliance are therefore key parts of our approach.

The guiding principles

The schemes are founded on ten principles that direct and shape their work. They are:

Low caseload - The caseload is kept purposefully low to ensure that the quality of relationships with the clients is maintained, to allow Link Workers sufficient time to draw together a multi-agency response and to allow sufficient time to reflect on the emerging learning.

Dedicated multi-agency working across the whole system - Link Workers operate between the gaps in services, crossing the boundaries to form a multi-skilled team. They take a whole system approach, fostering good working relationships with a range of professionals including police, prison officers, housing officers and mental health workers. They ensure that there is a co-ordinated response across agencies and a shared responsibility for meeting the young people's needs.

High-tech skills / low-tech methods - Although the teams are often engaged in highly skilled work, this will often be in very everyday contexts, such as waiting in a benefits office. They adapt their interventions to fit into the lives of the young people.

Assessment alongside support - Assessment takes place alongside the provision of support, rather than as a condition of it. Detailed assessment processes and allocation procedures do not get in the way of young people leaving or joining caseloads when they need help. Those returning to the scheme after a period of disengagement are not required to 'return to Go'.

Young person-led - Interventions are based not only on the Link Worker's assessment, but also on the young person's own assessment of their need. This is often a combination of emotional support and

practical support, such as housing or legal advice.

Engagement based on persistence - The Link Workers go out and find young people, meeting them when and where they are comfortable and persisting when young people do not keep appointments. They provide clients with consistent and reliable contact with known staff. Engagement with the Link Workers is purely voluntary. Young people are not compelled to accept the team's support and are not penalised if they fail to engage. This approach is vital for working with young people who have often had a difficult experience of services.

Continuity - Link Workers stay with the young person on their journey throughout the criminal justice system and back into the community, pulling in mainstream services at every opportunity but never leaving the young person until they have engaged successfully with other services.

Independent team approach - The caseload is shared between the Link Workers in each scheme so that young people work with both team members. As a result, clients benefit from the team's full range of skills and greater continuity of service is managed between different parts of the system. The team also maintains a level of independence from mainstream services, which allows it to remain focused on meeting needs across agency boundaries. Independence is also

crucial to the team's ability to engage those who have a negative view of statutory and voluntary agencies.

Locally owned - The Link Worker team is part of the local service network, working alongside and through other professionals where they can and being prepared to help others to do their job. A local, multi-agency advisory group monitors and advises on the development of the scheme.

Action research - What the team learns from its frontline work is recorded and actively fed back into discussions about the development of services locally.

Chapter One

What the Link Workers found

'It is not that they don't want to conform to what society wants, it is that they don't necessarily know what society wants and expects of them, they don't know how to conform. Nobody has actually sat down and explained the basics that the rest of us assume and take for granted.'

The young people's needs

Our findings are based on work with 76 young people carried out by the Link Workers during the past 15 months. Nearly two-thirds of them were medium or long-term clients, receiving intensive weekly or fortnightly support. The rest received short-term support that was either a one-off intervention or for less than three months (See Appendix One). They are interim findings but have been cross-referenced with existing research.

Abuse and loss

The neglected backgrounds of young people who encounter the criminal justice system are well established.³ Known risk factors include:

- having been in care
- coming from unstable family homes
- having truanted from school or been excluded from school
- having had parents with substance misuse and/or mental health problems, and
- having been subject to physical or sexual abuse.

Among the young people who engaged with our Link Workers, these risk factors were highly prevalent. We found that they came from fractured homes where there was conflict and often violence that they had witnessed or experienced. Most of the young people had been the victim of some form of physical, psychological or emotional abuse. They had also experienced loss or bereavement. This was often due to family breakdown resulting in the loss of contact with a parent, usually the father. In most cases, they had been in care from a young age. It was also common for there to have been a history of substance abuse or mental illness in the family.

Other research reflects these findings. One study found that more than half of respondents had experienced 'significant loss via bereavement or cessation of contact' or both. It noted that this 'constitutes a major source of childhood trauma, which depending on how it is handled, may later contribute to disordered behaviour, including aggression and violence'.⁴

³Numerous reports from the Social Exclusion Unit have examined the research. These include 'Preventing Social Exclusion'; 'Report of Policy Action Team 8: Anti-Social Behaviour'; 'Report by Policy Action Team 12: Young People'; 'Reducing Re-offending by Ex-Prisoners'.

⁴Boswell, G (1995) 'Violent Victims: the Prevalence of Abuse and Loss in the Lives of Section 53 Offenders'.

Trauma

In reflecting on their work, the Link Workers concluded that the young people's experience of abuse and loss had had a severely traumatic impact. They felt that this trauma lay at the heart of the young people's refusal to engage.

Trauma manifested itself in three ways:

Dysfunctional coping mechanisms - Clients had little understanding of the consequences of their actions and were emotionally very immature. In many cases, Link Workers found that they had become highly resilient to very challenging circumstances, but this had been achieved through defence mechanisms and coping strategies such as rejecting before being rejected, complete mistrust of authority, self harm, aggressive behaviour and substance misuse.

'They respond with anger, kicking out, rejection, pushing services and people away. 'Fuck you' in every sense of the term is their response and attitude.'

The coping mechanisms had led to them feeling trapped, lonely, isolated and unable to see a way out of the cycle of crisis and crime. The result was very low self-esteem and self-worth and few positive expectations of themselves and others.

Inability to engage with services - Clients were extremely disengaged and often highly withdrawn from wider society. They did not trust people and were reluctant to engage in any meaningful relationships, particularly with criminal justice or social care professionals. Critically, the Link Workers found that this was not simply because they were hostile but because they did not have the ability to engage with services.

The skills needed to engage were completely at odds with the survival strategies that they had learned during their traumatic childhoods. Far from being able to 'work the system', Link Workers found that the young people could not grasp what was expected of them. Although they had developed some new strategies for coping with services, overall they tripped up more times than they coped.

'It is not that they don't want to conform to what society wants, it is that they don't necessarily know what society wants and expects of them, they don't know how to conform. Nobody has actually sat down and explained the basics that the rest of us assume and take for granted.'

Rejection of responsibility - Either being in care or living in a fractured family home had meant that many of the young people had to take on significant responsibilities at a young age. Once they reached

Paul's story

Paul grew up with two older brothers in a home where violence was a regular occurrence. His father often beat up his mother. He would just lose his temper and fly into a rage. He most probably suffered from psychological problems that were never treated. One day he walked out and never came back. But Paul's trauma did not end then. He already had a fractured relationship with his mother and brothers. His mother re-married and he did not get on with his step-father. The family started taking out their frustrations on him and he became the target of their anger. For the whole of his childhood he was the victim of regular verbal and physical aggression. Paul felt that there was nobody in the world who cared about him or who was concerned about what he did. He said that if he died he thought that everybody would be happy about it.

their late teens or became young adults they no longer wanted to be responsible either for themselves or others.

'They don't want to take responsibility because it has been dumped on their shoulders from a very young age. If they have been in care they have been under pressure to make it work and if they have had to deal with parents who can't cope they have had to parent themselves and take on an adult role.'

Complex needs

The symptoms of trauma were heavily interrelated with a number of problems, including poor mental health, drug taking, homelessness, social isolation, inability to cope, lack of peer support and financial problems. Our research to date has focused on three of these:

Emotional and mental health problems - The young people had a wide variety of mental health problems. Each young person had an average of two, ranging from depression, anxiety and paranoia to mania and psychosis.

- In Kent, anxiety was the most commonly observed

cause of distress, with nine out of ten young people saying that they suffered from it. Six out of ten experienced depression and four out of ten described their mental condition as chaotic.

- There was a very similar breakdown of mental health problems in Haringey. The most common problem was also anxiety with eight out of ten suffering from it. Two-thirds of young people experienced depression. Other common problems included paranoia (just over half), being chaotic (four out of ten), being manic (a third), and being psychotic (one in ten).
- The young people were also assessed by the Link Workers as suffering from a range of emotional, conduct, behavioural, attention, and learning disorders. A recent review of literature on mental health and young offenders by the Mental Health Foundation confirms that these disorders are widespread among this group.⁵

Drug misuse - A heavy reliance on drugs by young offenders has been well documented. A survey by the Office for National Statistics of 16 to 20 year-olds found that over half reported dependence on a drug in the year prior to imprisonment, of which one in four sentenced females and one in seven males

⁵Hagell, A (2002) 'The Mental Health of Young Offenders', London: Mental Health Foundation.

John's story

John was 16 years old and under the care of the local authority. He was injured in a road traffic accident when he was much younger, which resulted in a brain injury and physical problems. The local authority placed him in a bed and breakfast which he refused to stay in. There was no clear diagnosis available or accessible to him, therefore many of the relevant services he required were off-limits. This included, in particular, specialist appropriate housing provision which would be able to cater for his needs. The local authority was reluctant to have him diagnosed, for fear of him being labelled in later life and the local Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service had deemed his problems to be behavioural and did not give him a formal diagnosis. He is now on remand in prison.

were dependent on opiates such as heroin.⁶

Drug misuse was common among clients in both of the schemes.

- Of the 66 referrals to Link Workers in Kent, two out of five had a known substance misuse problem. Of those, more than half were assessed by the Link Workers as having a severe problem, regularly using drugs other than cannabis.
- There was a similar level of drug misuse in Haringey, with a particular prevalence of crack use. Out of 22 young people who were on the team's long-term caseload, more than half had a known substance misuse problem. The most common drug was cannabis but half said that they were also using crack.

This drug misuse should not be seen in isolation from young offenders' mental health or emotional well-being. A study by the Youth Justice Board looking at the prevalence and nature of substance misuse among young offenders in custody found

that just under a third had used a drug not to get high but 'to feel normal' and just over a third had taken drugs 'to forget everything'.⁷ Link Workers felt that in many cases clients used drugs as a form of escapism or self-medication in response to their mental health problems.

Homelessness - Research by the Youth Justice Board has found that young people who offend are experiencing 'considerable difficulties accessing sufficient, suitable accommodation' and the Audit Commission has revealed that each year 9,000 young offenders are placed in unsuitable accommodation, such as bed and breakfast or unsupervised tenancies.⁸ For those young offenders who are sentenced to custody, many will lose their housing while in prison and will return to the community homeless. Recent research by the Howard League for Penal Reform looking at 18 to 20 year-old men in custody found that one in five was homeless. The Social Exclusion Unit has reported that around a third of prisoners leave custody with no accommodation and as many as a third lose their housing on imprisonment.⁹

⁶D Lader, N Singleton and H Meltzer (2000) 'Psychiatric Morbidity among Young Offenders in England and Wales', London: Office for National Statistics.

⁷Youth Justice Board (2004) 'Substance misuse and the juvenile secure estate'.

⁸Audit Commission (2004) 'Youth justice 2004: A review of the reformed youth justice system'; Youth Justice Board (2005) 'Sustainable Accommodation: A strategy for the provision of suitable and sustainable accommodation for young offenders and young people at risk of offending'.

⁹Farrant, F (2005) 'Young, neglected and back: young men in prison', London: Howard League for Penal Reform; Social Exclusion Unit (2004) 'Reducing Re-offending by ex-prisoners'.

Not surprisingly, a significant proportion of the young people referred to the Link Worker schemes had housing problems.

- In Kent more than half of the young people were assessed by the Link Workers as having moderate or severe housing problems. This frequently related to staying with parents when this was counter-productive to the young person's well-being, as it put an already poor relationship with the family under intolerable strain, further damaging the relationship. Other clients resorted to sleeping on friends' sofas or in squats, an unstable arrangement that undermined the young person's welfare and the ability of services to engage with and keep track of them.
- Out of 26 clients in Kent who went on to engage with the scheme long-term, just over half (54 per cent) had no accommodation, just over a quarter (27 per cent) were living with a friend or relative and 15 per cent were in unsupported bed and breakfast accommodation.
- In Haringey the housing problems were less pronounced but were nevertheless significant. Of 22 young people who were on the team's long-term caseload, just over half were living with a friend or relative. Only four had their own tenancy.

Systemic problems

The pressure on young people to respond

There are a range of services available for young people who offend or are at risk of offending. These include, Youth Offending Teams for under-18s, the Probation Service for 18 to 21 year-olds, Social Services and Connexions. But Link Workers found that young people do not always find services that are sensitive to their needs and situation. One young person who had experienced difficulties with various agencies told the Link Workers:

'They say they are here to help you but when you talk to them they don't show understanding. They just say it's happened to other people. You shouldn't say it's happened to other people because, to be truthful it's not that you don't care about other people, you have got so much on your mind and you just need someone to help you get through your problems.'

When clients were not engaged with services, the reasons behind this were rarely explored by those services. The focus instead was on trying to ensure that the young people conformed and engaged in the future. According to the Link Workers this only caused further problems.

'Services are awash with helping young people into college, finding them jobs and training, but I think we are missing the point. We are pressurising traumatised young people into situations they can't cope with and don't have the support to be able to cope with. This is simply further excluding them.'

In custody, it was particularly noticeable that young people were attending various courses or programmes, such as basic skills, long before they were ready. The emotional trauma that the young people had experienced was not understood or recognised, nor the way in which it impacted on their behaviour. In effect, far too much was being expected of the young person, at the cost of potentially more effective approaches.

This was also the case with other services, such as supported housing, where the young people were expected to follow strict rules of behaviour that did not match in any way their ability to adapt or conform. When young people did not, or could not conform, the response was sometimes disproportionately punitive, reinforcing the young person's sense of failure or inadequacy.

A lack of services to help people develop positive coping strategies

Some clients had been referred in the past to counselling services. However, they had often failed to attend after more than one session. The young people told the Link Workers that they had felt that they were 'being interrogated' and that the counselling had 'not really helped'.

It became clear to the Link Workers that many of the young people were not yet ready for counselling. Instead they needed services to help them develop positive coping techniques, for example, anger management, assertiveness training, relaxation and problem solving skills.

Diagnosis - The catch 22

Many of the young people did not have a formal diagnosis. In Haringey, for example, out of 21 young people who became long-term cases, only six had a diagnosis. Link Workers found that in some cases mental health teams had been reluctant to push for a young person to be diagnosed as they did not want him/her to be labelled as mentally ill. At the same time, the young person may have been reluctant to be labelled.

Jane's story

Jane had considerable anger management problems and found it difficult to behave in the manner that Prison Officers expected of her. She would keep up her 'good behaviour' for a number of days then she would 'kick off'. Sometimes she asked if she could have 'time out' in her cell. She said that this helped her not to get angry and start fighting. Jane explained to the Link Workers that she gets 'wound up' and doesn't know what to do with herself. The Link Workers felt Jane was trying to take some responsibility for her behaviour in a way that made sense to her. But this was dismissed. It was said that she was trying to get what she wanted and that they could not 'just give her what she wants, whenever she wants' and that she 'had to learn'. Jane's anger escalated and she was sent to another prison. The Link Workers have been told that her behavioural problems are continuing. Jane does not have the emotional maturity or resources to manage her behaviour and there isn't the appropriate support available to help her.

However, many of the support services that our client group need to help resolve their problems are triggered by a diagnosis of mental illness. Without a diagnosed need, priority for housing, support from CAMHS and other health interventions are much more difficult to access. The result is that the young person can be left isolated.

'It is a real catch 22 because unless you do push for an assessment and get a diagnosis then they won't get access to proper mental health services and appropriate support.'

Co-ordinating services in custody

A range of different services offer help with substance misuse, housing advice, anger management and counselling courses in the YOIs where our teams have been working. However, these services are not always resourced so that they can co-ordinate as effectively as they need to. Furthermore, the young people have often been unclear about the role of each service and how they relate to each other. This has often been because pressurised staff have struggled to act as Personal Officers, supporting the young people with their sentence plans.

Even where the Personal Officer system has worked well, the young people have lacked an explanation of

the mechanics of the prison's system and information on who offers what support, why and how. Without this information, they were left feeling confused and frustrated. They wanted to be consulted more so that they could have a greater say in what services they could access. Those who attempted to take control tended to become aggressive and accusatory, while others responded by being defensive.

A lack of throughcare

The transition from custody to the community is critically important for young offenders if they are to stand any chance of not re-offending. Resettlement provision is improving but, as the Chief Inspector of Prisons has highlighted recently, it remains patchy.¹⁰ Young people with the levels of vulnerability discovered by the Link Workers require a much more intensive level of support than is currently found in the system. The Link Workers found that services in prison were not linked up with services in the community. For example, for those on remand, the Probation Service or Yot workers were not in contact with their solicitors. Housing was also a problem. Young people who were going to be homeless on release were unable to make applications for accommodation before leaving custody.

¹⁰HM Chief Inspector of Prisons (2004) 'Annual Report of HM Chief Inspector for Prisons England and Wales', London:TSO.

Gavin's story

Gavin was in prison for the eighth time. Much of his life had been about drugs. His parents were drug addicts and they also drank a lot. His life was very chaotic and he didn't always attend school. A couple of years ago his mother died of a drug overdose. It turned everything upside down for him and he decided that he wanted to stop taking drugs. But he had been unable to escape his problems and had continued taking heroin. He was very alone in prison and was scared that there was no one to help. His Social Worker knew that he was in prison but did not know which prison or when he was due to be released. Gavin also had two Probation Officers, in two different parts of Kent. They were both expecting him to return to their areas. The Probation Service, Prison Service and Social Services had not been liaising with each other and there had been a complete breakdown in communication.

In response to this, the Youth Justice Board has recently launched a new pilot initiative, the Resettlement and Aftercare Programme (RAP), which offers a new opportunity for improved throughcare. It aims to engage young people while in custody, to provide a high level of support in the community and to provide support for up to six months after the sentence ends. Revolving Doors Agency has recently begun a partnership with the RAP programme run by the Haringey Yot, as part of the Haringey Link Worker scheme.

Transitions

The schemes have worked with clients aged between 15 and 22 who were going through a critical transition from childhood to adulthood. Young people's lives change rapidly and dramatically between these ages.¹¹ For those who are vulnerable it is particularly important for them to move seamlessly into adult services that provide the support and care that they need. Revolving Doors Agency's earlier report on young people highlighted that the transitional period is neither consistent nor predictable.¹² The point at which some services end and others take over appears to be arbitrary and is inconsistent between services. This continues to be a significant problem.

Within the criminal justice system there is little or no bridge when young offenders transfer from a Yot to the Probation Service at the age of 18. In the community, the transition between Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) and Adult and Community Mental Health Services continues to be confusing. A gap remains between CAMHS services, some of which deal exclusively with under 16 year-olds, and adult services, some of which deal only with 18 year-olds and over.

Link Workers have also found that there is a particular issue for looked after children in Social Services. Children will be supported by the Children and Families team but at 16 will be transferred to the Leaving Care team. This transition is not always carefully thought through or prepared for.

'We see young people that in effect are being dropped from one system straight into the deep end in another system. Not surprisingly it is unsettling and creates additional problems for them.'

Across all these services, the overwhelming impression that the Link Workers had was of a lack of preparatory work to enable the young people to link smoothly into adult services. There could even be professional rivalry between the services.

¹¹Social Exclusion Unit (2005) 'Transitions- a Social Exclusion Unit interim report on young adults'. London: ODPM.

¹²Revolving Doors Agency (2002) 'Future Imperfect? Young people, mental health and the criminal justice system'.

Finally, the disparity in provision between children and young adults aged 18 to 21 years old in the criminal justice system was particularly noticeable. Whereas under 18 year-olds have benefited from extra investment and strategic planning by the Youth Justice Board, young adults struggle to access the most basic of services. This is most evident in the prison estate, where, according to the Chief Inspector of Prisons, young adults 'remain some of the most overlooked and under-resourced prisoners'.¹³ Many of the Link Workers' clients who were moving from the youth to the adult system could not understand why so much support was being taken away from them. This proved to be a considerable source of anxiety to them, in some cases exacerbating their mental and emotional problems.

Communication breakdown

In many cases, Link Workers found that agencies were simply not talking to each other. Link Workers had clients who had been supported by Social Services but had then committed an offence and been remanded or sentenced to custody, but Social Services had been kept in the dark, ignorant of what had happened to the young person. In other cases housing agencies had not been contacted in advance of

young people leaving custody without suitable accommodation.

Recent research by the Youth Justice Board has recognised the lack of communication between agencies. It found that:

'Major barriers to achieving high quality communication between professionals and agencies was related to lack of understanding about roles and responsibilities, different statutory requirements, and interfaces dominated by written rather than verbal communication.'¹⁴

¹³HM Chief Inspector of Prisons (2004) 'Annual Report of HM Chief Inspector for Prisons England and Wales', London: TSO.

¹⁴Harrington, R and Bailey, S (2005) 'Mental Health Needs and Effectiveness of Provision for Young Offenders in Custody and the Community', London: Youth Justice Board.

Chapter Two

What the Link Workers did and the approach they are developing

'Services don't start from the point that the young people can't engage, so we have had to provide them with a space to explore what has happened to them, to talk and be themselves, to be angry and vent their frustrations... We are like a harbour where we can hold them until they are ready to engage.'

Engaging with clients

Our Link Worker schemes set out to work with people who were not engaging with existing services. This was both to offer a service to people currently falling through the net of provision, and also to develop ways of engaging hard to reach groups. This chapter documents the process of developing our approach.

Given the traumatic and dysfunctional backgrounds of the young people, the Link Workers found that most of their clients were mentally in a very different place from where services needed them to be:

'We are working with young people who have experienced so much trauma that they find it very hard to engage. This needs to be accepted before they can move on. We have learned that this is fundamental. If we acknowledge where the young person is at, we can begin from their starting point and make progress.'

The young people had been in and out of contact with statutory and non-statutory agencies for a large part of their lives. They had been assessed on many occasions and often had had difficult relationships with services. By the time they came into contact with Revolving Doors Agency, they had developed an entrenched reluctance to work with any agency.

'They have been assessed and processed to death from a very early age, so they don't want to step back into the arena of services again because they have had enough of that. What they want to be doing is packing their bag and running. The problem is that not many agencies really recognise this.'

Providing a holding space

One young person told the Link Workers:

'I don't need your help, I just need someone to understand me, everyone treats everyone the same, but that's wrong because everyone is not the same.'

The Link Workers have offered the young people an opportunity to be listened to. They are able to express their anger or frustrations about their current problems, which if they are in prison may be particularly acute, or about their past experiences without the Link Worker service being withdrawn from them.

'The space that we seem to provide for young people is a space where they can build a relationship, they can express their anger or they can fail to show for appointments but then call two months later and ask for help. Within that

space we are beginning to develop a service where we can equip the young people with coping skills, which in the future should help them get back into education or hold down a job.'

The aim of this approach has been to offer a space in which the young people can begin to shed some of the armour that they have built around themselves and then develop a more positive form of resilience.

Building positive resilience

The young people have not been able to develop effective relationships with professionals such as Social Workers, Probation Officers and Yot workers. Recent research by the Youth Justice Board highlighted the problems that Yot workers have had engaging with young offenders. It noted that:

'Most young people labelled the well-meaning attempts by Yot workers as lecturing, nagging or preaching.'¹⁵

A critical part of the work to build positive resilience, therefore, has been developing a trusting relationship with clients. The Link Workers have met the young people on their own territory, such as in a park or café. Link Workers have focused on giving the young

people the opportunity to be heard and listened to. They have discussed with them what their needs are and helped them to identify the best way of meeting them. The intention has been to help clients understand what they want to achieve.

'Nobody has ever said to them, 'what do you think?', 'what do you want to do?', 'how do you feel?'. They have always been told what to do and ordered about. This means that they are not used to trusting people. It takes them a while to realise that you don't want anything back in return for what you are doing and that you are going to be there for them.'

Engagement without coercion

Many services set down specific conditions for engagement with young people. However, the Link Workers have taken a very different, more flexible approach. The non-coercive nature of the service has been stressed to clients; they have had the choice whether or not to engage. This has been extremely important for the young people, who in the past have been compelled to engage with services and then fallen foul of the demands and conditions of these services, thereby getting into more trouble.

¹⁵Youth Justice Board (2004) 'Substance misuse and the Juvenile Secure Estate'.

If a client missed an appointment, the Link Workers have repeatedly attempted to contact them. Even when the young person has been abusive or difficult the Link Workers have not rejected them.

'There have been occasions when I have rung them and they have been aggressive and hung up. We have given it a bit of time and contacted them again because we have recognised that they may not yet be ready to fully engage. It is the kind of consistency they have not had before and it makes a big difference to them.'

Translation and advocacy

A major part of the Link Workers' role has been to act as a translator, explaining to the young people what is happening to them and what it means for them. At the same time, Link Workers have had to advocate on behalf of the young people to explain to different agencies their situation and background and what they need.

'We end up having to speak on their behalf to the system and then speak back from the system to the young person. We are translating because the young person can't necessarily understand what the system wants and how they want it, so you end up explaining it to them and then you have to explain to the system what the

young person wants to do.'

Playing the role of a 'translator' has involved accompanying young people to court for their hearings. When a young person goes to court there is an assumption that they understand the process and know what is expected of them. But in reality they know very little.

The Link Workers have had to 'interpret' the young person's issues so that they can be understood by the court. This has involved addressing the court on behalf of the young person in support of applications for community sentences and bail conditions. They have then had to explain to the young person what is happening and what is meant by what the court has decided. They have also explained how they should behave and even what clothes to wear. The client has felt supported at a difficult time. It has also enabled the Link Workers to develop their relationship with the young person and show that they are able to be both consistent and reliable in their support.

Another part of the translation process has been using language that the young people can relate to. Link Workers have stressed the importance of this:

'If the young people are going to engage with a service and make sense of that service then it has to be relevant to them and relate to them.'

A big part of that is language.'

Role-modelling

Clients have not been left unchallenged if they have been offensive or abusive. The Link Workers have worked with them to question their attitudes and behaviour. This has involved encouraging them to reconsider their perceptions of the criminal justice system. Link Workers have also used the opportunity of accompanying young people to court or a housing appointment to role model appropriate behaviour and successful approaches to dealing with others and solving problems.

Engaging with services

The Link Workers have helped clients to connect with the agencies that can address their multiple needs. In turn they have assisted the various agencies in working together to provide a co-ordinated response. There have been four main elements to this approach:

Navigation

The complexities of the different agencies that stretch across housing, benefits, mental health, primary care, criminal justice, education and training can be bewildering for any young person to cope with. For

the Link Workers' clients who have difficulties just beginning to engage, the challenge is enormous. They will often have become disillusioned with the services on offer, or frustrated trying to find their way around the system. As already highlighted, navigating the various agencies can be equally as challenging in prison as it is in the community. With many clients Link Workers have had to explain the basics about the different agencies and what they do.

'When you are dealing with a young person who doesn't know what to do and there are all these services available, it becomes a bit like dealing with a pin ball: you put them in the machine, pull the trigger, and they fire off, and by chance they end up somewhere on the pin ball board. It might be their own choosing, fate, or circumstances. This will have been their past experience and, understandably, they will be frustrated, angry and disillusioned. We have had to go back to the basics and tell them there are these people here who might be able to help and this is what they do and how they can help you.'

An important part of the navigation has been setting out how agencies operate differently. For example, it has been important to explain to young people who are 18 years old that the Probation Service will not operate or support them in the same way as the Yot. Link Workers have also had to explain how an adult

Sarah's story

Sarah was pregnant while awaiting sentence on remand. She was extremely anxious and vulnerable and had been assessed by the prison authorities to be at risk of serious self-harm or suicide. Social Services were unaware of her circumstances so the Link Workers made contact with them and a pre-birth conference was arranged. The Probation Service was also unaware of her situation so the Link Workers informed them that she was pregnant and at serious risk of self-harm or suicide. They also made contact with her solicitor who was put in contact with the Probation Service and Social Services. Sarah was then given more support coping with her pregnancy and was kept up-to-date with information concerning her court case. The Link Workers helped her to understand what was happening with her case as she was confused by the technical detail. As a result, her mental well-being improved, she became much less anxious and was no longer considered to be at risk of suicide.

prison is different from a Young Offender Institution.

Co-ordination

Due to the fact that the Link Workers' clients have multiple needs, one successful intervention is likely to have limited impact on their life simply because the other issues are not being addressed at the same time. For example, a young person could be supported in finding somewhere to live, but if they are not given help to address their substance misuse, their continued drug problem could result in their eviction and subsequent homelessness. The Link Workers have therefore concentrated on providing a comprehensive package of support.

As many clients have been serving periods in custody, the Link Workers have focused on making sure that the various agencies working in the prison are co-ordinated in order to meet the young person's needs. They also ensure that the agencies on the outside are talking to those in the prison. A main focus of the schemes' work has been re-connecting services with clients of whom they have lost track. Link Workers describe it as 'services reunited'.

'Young people we have met in prison have in the past been in contact with agencies, but the services have lost track of them. So we say to the young person are you interested in them being

in contact with you because they can help with your housing or drug problems. When we go to the agencies they may have no idea what has happened and that the client is in prison.'

A 'through the gate' service

Another key part of co-ordinating services has been providing a 'through the gate' service for young people to prepare them for release and ensure they are not left without any support when they walk out of the prison gate. Link Workers have started to address with the young person how they will spend their time back in the community. Contacts are made with training and education courses or substance misuse programmes.

In Kent there has been a major focus on meeting the housing needs of those leaving HMP/YOI Rochester. The Link Workers have made a very simple but critical change in the way housing applications are processed for those young people who are expecting to be homeless on release. To overcome delays in the system, they have designed a basic 'application to register as homeless' form that is completed by the Link Worker with the client prior to release. The form is then sent to Medway Council's Homeless Persons Unit in order to enable the Unit to open a file on the young person and begin processing the basic information. The intention is to ensure that the

homelessness application is begun prior to the young person's release from prison so that when he presents at the Council some form of temporary accommodation will be in place (assuming the application has been successful and the young person has been assessed as unintentionally homeless).

A further simple step taken by both schemes has been to meet the young person at the prison gate on the day of their release from custody. Link Workers have taken them to their appointments and addressed any immediate needs, thereby supporting them at the critical stage of transition from custody to the community.

Multi-agency meetings

Once a young person is referred to services, such as housing, counselling or Connexions, Link Workers have made sure that the services know what each other is doing and informed them all about the whole support package. Without this linking together, the different agencies would not be aware of the client's involvement with other services because invariably the young person chooses not to tell them. The Link Workers have therefore promoted more effective inter-agency working. They have brought agencies together to have case conferences that address the specific needs of individual clients.

'It is about building relationships not just with the client but inter-agency relationships. Sharing knowledge and information with agencies and getting people round the table means that professionals learn about other agencies they did not know much about.'

Each Young People's scheme organises a regular Local Advisory Group in its area. This brings together health, criminal justice, substance misuse and social care agencies, both statutory and voluntary, to review the performance of the schemes locally and to discuss practical ways of improving inter-agency working in the area. This has not always overcome differences of opinion and some agencies have not felt able to commit the time, but it has raised awareness and acted as a point of information exchange.

Outcomes to date

This section details some of the findings from our Link Workers schemes and the outcomes for the young people with whom they have worked. Their clinical practice means that their caseload is small, and this limits the statistical significance of their results. However, this summary provides a snapshot of the effectiveness of their approach.

Mental health

The Young People's schemes have attempted to establish the extent to which the approach of providing a 'holding space' has made a difference to clients. The mental health of the clients was assessed when they were first referred to the schemes and was then monitored by the Link Workers over the time that they worked with them. This permitted a 'before and after' comparison to be made of the effect of the Link Workers' interventions on the clients' mental health.

- In Kent, from a sample of 26 clients who were worked with in the longer term, more than two-thirds (68 per cent) showed an improvement in their mental health.
- In Haringey, from a sample of 22 clients who engaged over a longer period, more than half (55 per cent) showed an improvement. A third of the sample remained stable showing neither an improvement nor deterioration in their mental health.

It is not possible to know if other developments in the young people's lives also contributed to an improvement in their mental health. However, the data suggests that the Link Worker schemes have had a beneficial effect. They have helped to improve

the emotional and mental well-being of clients on a day-to-day basis. However, this does not mean that all of their mental health problems have been solved. It is important to recognise that their overall mental health still requires more specialist interventions.

Housing and drug misuse

Assessments carried out by the Link Workers of how clients' needs changed following longer term engagement with the schemes show that the practical support given to address housing and drug issues has had a positive impact.

- In Kent notable improvements were made to the housing needs of young people. Table one shows that among 26 clients who engaged long term with the scheme the proportion that was homeless decreased and there was a corresponding increase in the proportion of clients staying with relatives and in supported housing.

Danny's story

Danny had a long history of offending and had been evicted from many of the local hostels and accommodation providers. He is the only member of his family with an offending history and was unable to live at home due to a breakdown in family relationships. Housing was his big concern and the Link Workers contacted the local foyer (which Danny had previously been banned from) to discuss the possibility of them providing accommodation. The foyer was contacted because they can offer support within the accommodation and address any education, training and employment issues clients have. The foyer is also located a reasonable distance from Danny's family, which would allow him to maintain and build on his relationship with them. Danny was accepted at the foyer on release from prison and allocated a key worker alongside the support offered by the Link Workers. He had been anxious about being homeless and his hopes of a fresh start were raised. At his post-release meeting, Danny displayed very positive behaviour and appeared to have a more mature outlook. He talked about having reduced his drinking to weekends and that he had not taken any drugs since his release. Danny had found it beneficial to have the accommodation at the foyer, as it had enabled him to improve his relationship with his mother and had given him the opportunity to look at training in bricklaying.

Table One: Housing outcomes for the Kent scheme

Status	First meeting	After engagement
No Fixed Abode ¹⁶	54%	42%
Friend/relative	27%	35%
Supported housing	4%	12%
B&B	15%	8%
Tenancy	0%	4%

- Overall, after engaging with the Link Worker scheme, the housing situation of just over half (56%) of clients had improved.
- In Haringey, there was less focus on finding accommodation for clients. Nearly half were referred by the Yot, compared to 15 per cent in Kent, which meant that the Yot would already have provided them with a dedicated housing worker. Furthermore, where clients had housing problems, these tended to relate to housing in which they were already accommodated, rather than to homelessness. Therefore, the Link Workers focussed on helping them to manage their tenancies, and in supporting them in moving

towards readiness for a new flat or new living arrangements. As this report focuses on interim findings, it is too early to provide data on outcomes relating to move-on accommodation.

- More work was done around drug misuse than housing in Haringey. Data was available on 12 clients with whom the Link Workers worked to address their drug problems. Seven were stable in their drug misuse, four improved and only one deteriorated.
- In Kent data was available on 16 clients whom the Link Workers supported with drug misuse issues. One in three of these clients improved in their drug misuse after engagement with the team. Just over a third were stable and one in three deteriorated. Therefore, for more than two-thirds (68%) of clients, their drug misuse problems improved or did not worsen.

Further statistics are being gathered over the course of the schemes' development. As caseloads increase and referrals rise, we will continue to analyse both need and our response to it.

¹⁶Includes both those who were sleeping rough and some who were remanded or sentenced to custody without accommodation.

Conclusion

This report details exploratory work carried out by Revolving Doors Agency with young people who have been arrested or imprisoned and experienced mental health and emotional problems. At present there are a range of services available to meet their needs and continuing reforms to the youth justice system and the creation of the National Offender Management Service are intended to provide further improvements. However, our research and clinical work has shown that the young people's needs continue to be unmet due to key systemic failures and gaps.

Assumptions within services about vulnerable young people are not grounded in the reality of the young people's lives. Services frequently expect too much of the young people too quickly and they are unable to respond positively. We have found that the high level of childhood trauma experienced by the young people has a far-reaching impact and is often the root cause of their behaviour. It is critically important that this trauma is recognised and understood if the young people are to stand any chance of engaging effectively with the services that are intended to support them.

The Link Worker schemes have shown that as a result of their deep emotional trauma and interrelated mental health problems, the young people require a 'holding space' where they can learn coping strategies and recover from their experiences. To this end, Link

Workers have developed an approach grounded in a non-coercive relationship with the young people so that they can build the positive resilience needed to address the many challenges in their lives and engage with mainstream support.

Equally significant is the complexity of the web of services and systems within which the young people are required to operate. There is a lack of co-ordination within the criminal justice system and also between systems, for example, Social Services and youth justice agencies. As a result, there is a failure to offer holistic care to young people. Services need additional support to improve co-ordination and to ensure that information about mental health and vulnerability is shared appropriately. At the same time, Link Workers have found that young people need help to navigate the system effectively, as well as support in understanding the different rules, interventions and language used by each agency.

The three themes of **trauma**, **'holding space'** and **navigation** are consequently the focus of Revolving Doors Agency's ongoing clinical, research and policy work with young people. They provide important insights into how services need to be modified to support young people with mental health needs and multiple problems. Without reform to the system, vulnerable young people will continue to fall through

the net of services and remain locked in a cycle of crisis, crime and mental illness into their adult lives.

Appendix One

Client profile

A total of 115 young people aged 15 to 22 were referred to the Link Worker schemes between March 2004 and June 2005.

- In Haringey, of the 49 referrals, 55 per cent were male and 45 per cent were female. The majority (60 per cent) were aged 18 to 22 years old. The ethnic profile of the young people was diverse including just under half (48 per cent) White British or White European, 14 per cent Black British, 10 per cent mixed race and six per cent Black African.
- In Kent, of the 66 referrals to the scheme, 95 per cent were male and 70 per cent were aged 18 to 22 years old. Three-quarters of the young people were White British. Eight per cent were White European and two per cent were White Irish. Five per cent were mixed race and only 10 per cent were Black or Asian.

The client profiles reflect the referral sources of the schemes and do not necessarily reflect the demographics of the local areas in which the schemes are based. The majority of the 115 referrals were from Young Offender Institutions (YOIs) or from Youth Offending Teams (Yots):

- In Haringey nearly half (45 per cent) of the 49 referrals were from YOIs, all except one, coming from Holloway women's prison. More than a third

(39 per cent) was from the local Yot. Six referrals were from the Adolescent Outreach Team and one was from the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service.

- In Kent more than two-thirds (68 per cent) of the 66 referrals were from HMP/YOI Rochester. Just under one in five (17 per cent) were from either the Probation Service or Social Services and 15 per cent were from a Yot officer.

Of the 115 referrals:

- 45 became medium or long-term clients receiving intensive weekly or fortnightly support from the Link Workers
- 31 received short-term support that was either a one-off intervention or for a period of less than three months
- 39 were not worked with either because the client did not meet the referral criteria, lived outside the area covered by the scheme or refused to engage with the scheme.

Appendix Two

Service pathway

Service pathway for Young People's Link Worker schemes



